

Management of the COVID-19 Crisis in Chad

Following the announcement of the first case of COVID-19 on 19th March, 2020 in Chad, the country had as of March 28 recorded 715 cases with 359 recoveries and 64 deaths. The competent authorities have taken a series of measures to limit the spread of the virus. At a time when some countries are gradually lifting the lockdown, Chad has decided to isolate its capital and a number of towns.

Restrictive measures

Faced with the magnitude of the situation, the Chadian authorities announced on 24th March, 2020, the establishment of a Health Surveillance and Security Committee as well as a 15 billion CFAF (approx. USD 25 million) contingency plan for the fight against the coronavirus.

Among the measures taken by the Committee were the establishment of a coordination platform and a care facility for suspected or confirmed cases, quarantine measures for persons from countries at risk, the suspension of flights to N'Djamena beginning from 18th March, and the establishment of an emergency response team.

In addition, further measures were taken to introduce restrictions on gatherings, on the number of passengers on public transport, on the opening of non-essential shops and to impose a curfew from 8pm to 5am.

It was forbidden to organize a funeral or to go in or out of the city of N'Djamena, with an exemption for vehicles transporting goods and foodstuffs.

Since 7th May, 2020, places of worship remain closed and everybody must wear a mask or face a fine.

A state of health emergency was declared on 25th April for a period of 21 days. It was extended on 15th May by the National Assembly for a period of two months, from 16th May to 16th July, 2020. Again, on 15th May, a Presidential Decree established a new Health Crisis Management Committee (CGCS) to replace the Health Surveillance and Security Committee. The new CGCS was placed under the authority and direct supervision of the President of the Republic, Idris Deby, and was composed essentially of members of the government and the civil cabinet director of the President of the Republic. Its mission is to define and implement the national management strategy of the COVID-19 pandemic and to direct, coordinate, monitor and evaluate all the interventions of the actors involved in the management of the health crisis. Generally speaking, the Committee will have oversight over all measures for addressing the COVID-19 crisis and its consequences throughout the national territory.

Health Measures

- ✓ Setting up of a National Coordination of Health Response led by scientists and dedicated to the operational fight against COVID-19 (CNRS-COVID-19)
- ✓ Inclusion of deep Chad in the health response strategy with the establishment of the Provincial Health Response Coordination (CPRS), led by eminent specialists in each province.
- ✓ Creation of five (5) specialized inclusive sub-committees dedicated respectively to sensitization, assistance to the poor, defence and security.
- ✓ Urgent launch of additional orders for essential medical equipment, including Covid-Organics, which should be available throughout the country.
- ✓ Acquisition of at least five (5) Mobile Laboratories in order to increase screening capacity and the increase in the capacity of the Renaissance and Farcha hospitals.

- ✓ Making available of all public structures in the provinces (hotels, schools) for the care of patients, if necessary.

The CGCS has announced special measures for health workers. These include the granting of special compensation for health care workers infected with the coronavirus in the performance of their duties. It should also be noted that the salaries of health care workers who die from COVID-19 will be maintained for their dependents (until the children reach the age of majority).

Social and economic measures

Faced with the heavy economic losses caused by this crisis, the Government Spokesperson announced on Wednesday 20th May, 2020, the introduction of new measures to reconcile the fight against COVID-19 with economic and social needs. These measures included:

- ✓ The reopening of restaurants (including grilling areas) for take-away food.
- ✓ The reopening of shops, stores and markets, in compliance with health regulations.
- ✓ The authorization of urban transport with a number of passengers limited to four for taxis and ten for minibuses.

Failure to comply with the conditions attached to such relief measures exposed offenders to the sanctions provided for that purpose, and could lead to the reinstatement of total prohibition measures.

A National Solidarity and Support Fund for vulnerable sections of the population with a budget of 100 billion FCAF (approx. USD 169 million) has been established in addition to the special fund. This is to expand and strengthen social safety nets throughout the country to cover other provinces not covered by current projects and programmes.

Other measures include:

- ✓ Paying of electricity and water bills related to domestic use at the level of the lowest social brackets for a period of 3 months and 6 months.
- ✓ Reduction of 50% on general tax on income and patent for the benefit of taxpayers throughout the national territory, for the year 2020.
- ✓ Completion of Youth Entrepreneurship Fund in agreement with Chadian banks for an amount of 30 billion
- ✓ Measures to support economic actors that entail significant costs amounting to CFAF 943 billion, of which more than CFAF 200 billion is to be immediately mobilized as part of the restructuring of the State budget.
- ✓ Launching of the operation aimed at distributing food to the most destitute to start on Wednesday 20 May, pending the delivery of food ordered from abroad.
- ✓ Implementation of a reinforced action plan to make a success of the 2020 crop season.
- ✓ Distribution of free masks
- ✓ Continued repatriation of Chadians stranded abroad.

Involvement of trade unions

Several health workers were infected due to lack of protective equipment.

The Health Workers' Union complained about the deaths of health workers and has been pressurising the Minister of Health to get the government to pay special attention to health workers on the front lines of the response. The union has been essentially calling on the government to train and protect

workers engaged in the fight against coronavirus so that they are safe to provide quality care to patients.

The Chadian trade unions also regret the fact that the measures taken by the authorities have not taken informal workers into due consideration. Women workers are mobilizing for an outreach campaign.

Conclusion

In its assessment, the Health Crisis Management Committee has expressed concern that the restrictive measures and social distancing protocols are not adequately respected by some citizens and that this contributes to the accelerated spread of the virus.

The weakness of trust between the authorities and the population partly accounts for the lack of respect for some of the measures put in place to fight the pandemic. This can be helped if the authorities make special effort to reach out to the population, including trade unions, who do not readily benefit from means of social dialogue. More space for trade union involvement in the response to COVID-19 will help in the popular messaging that is needed for citizens to also take up individual responsibility in the fight against the coronavirus.

On their part, the unions must see it as a duty to their members and their families to continue raising the issues of personnel protective equipment. In addition, unions must work hard to highlight the impacts of the crisis on workers and to demand and seek measures that help workers to meet the challenges posed by the current crisis.