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The impact of the Covid-19 on small and medium enterprises in Congo-Brazzaville

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Abstract

This research examines the impacts of Covid-19 on SMEs in Congo using data from the business survey conducted by the National Institute of Statistics in 2020. SMEs in this country were severely affected by this shock, one year after the adoption of the containment measures. The survey found

that all SMEs have been affected in some way by the Covid-19 pandemic. SMEs in the Congo reduced hiring, working hours, and sales. A small proportion of SMEs had reduced workers' wages. In addition, none of the SMEs received the assistance promised by the government.

Keywords: Covid-19, SMEs, Wages, Workers

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 epidemic that started in China in December 2019 seemed to be the sole concern of this country. However, it gradually spread out of China, thus affecting people in several countries. Its expansion and dreadful consequences worldwide forced the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare on March 11th 2020 that this disease was to be considered as a world pandemic.

As a matter of fact, it has affected political, social, religious, economic, and financials systems worldwide. Early in July 2020 more than 11 million Covid-19 cases were recorded in the world, and more than 500,000 deaths resulting from this new virus (WHO, 2020). It is within this context that the world economies have been negatively hit by the effects of this sanitary crisis. The virus expansion pace has shown the extent to which the nations of the world have become more and more integrated.

This crisis represents a negative impact on all the world economy. The harsh drop in consumption and investment, the necessary confinement then the progressive deconfinement represented both markets and production constraints (Guerini *et al.*, 2020)^[7]. These authors also point out that this crisis has resulted in the weakening of the productive fabric that is illustrated by the deterioration of the different indicators, such as the proportion of the enterprises that have to face liquid assets and solvency problems, the closing and bankruptcy of enterprises, etc. The sharp drop of incomes resulting from confinement measures meant to curb the pandemic, the presence of contentions on the market of the production and fixed costs factors that do not adjust to the production level, weigh down on the liquid resources of the enterprises. All countries have adopted measures to curb the contagion of this pandemic, namely social detachment, the wearing of facial masks, confinement, restriction of people movement. Unfortunately, these measures have accentuated the slowdown of the economic activity in several countries.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020)^[9], the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in unprecedented crises on the labour market. The lowest drops in employment have notably been recorded since the end of World War 2. Small and medium enterprises are the economic entities that have been mostly disrupted by this sanitary catastrophe. The small and medium-sized businesses constitute an undeniable vector for economic dynamism. They play a crucial role in most world economies. They equally contribute, significantly, to the implementation of a great number of economic and social policies that even big enterprises are unable to carry out in developing countries especially (Anairi, Radi, 2017)^[1].

Flexibility and adaptability to changing circumstances, as well as creativity and innovation are the major characteristics of small and medium enterprises (Antony *et al.* 2005)^[2]. However, they do not have enough resources, mainly financial and management ones compared with big enterprises. Besides, they are not well equipped to face these disruptions that last longer than expected. Both national and transnational data also suggest that compared with big companies, small and medium enterprises exhibit lower productivity and salary levels, as they are more vulnerable to the offer and demand crises (OECD, 2020)^[17].

Although strict government policies and solutions were adopted in several countries to abate this sanitary crisis, unfortunately, most small and medium enterprises are exposed to short- or long-term negative effects deriving from the restrictive economic measures owing to the Covid-19 in several countries. These effects account for the cashflow problems, the closing of activities,

redundancies, and difficulties related to enterprises future growth ability (Craven *et al.*, 2020) ^[5]. The changes of commercial strategies, operations as well as pressures to look for new sources of financing are also acknowledged as survival crucial challenges regarding most small and medium enterprises during the Covid-19 crisis (Syed, 2019) ^[21].

Congo, like most countries worldwide, has been hit by the Covid-19 crisis. Since the first case was recorded on 14th March 2020, 830 confirmed Covid-19 cases were altogether in the country (Congolese Government, 2020) out of a population of five million inhabitants in 2019. Small and medium enterprises in this country especially have been severely hit by this crisis. It should be pointed out that they are predominant in the national economy.

On the other hand, big firms are mostly concerned with oil and timber exploitation, beer, cigarettes production, etc. Being very capitalist, they generate less jobs, and do not have enough links with small and medium enterprises that operate in non-oil sectors. However, Small and medium enterprises are present in several branches; they provide a vast range of products and services, and offer several jobs in the country. They take an active part in the struggle against poverty in Congo. But the negative impacts of the Covid-19 on these businesses have increased the survival and precariousness difficulties of thousands of people who work in those enterprises.

In this prospect, the government took some measures to curb the spreading of this pandemic in the country, and initiated some strategies that aimed to lessen the impact of this crisis at the economical level mainly to back up the activities of enterprises as a whole. The fear of the spread of the Covid-19 in the country equally justifies the commitment for the struggle against this pandemic that the government undertook.

This article seeks to examine the Covid-19 impacts on the small and medium enterprises in Congo. It is structured into four sections. The first one deals with the Covid-19 theoretical foundations; the second section focusses on the review of related literature while section three concentrates on methodological issues. Finally, section four centres on the analysis of the results of the investigation.

2. Theoretical review

From a theoretical viewpoint, the analysis of the Covid-19 impact on small and medium-sized businesses may be based on resources dependency, the structural inertia theory, and the real options theory (Kaberia et Muathe, 2021) ^[10]. According to managerial innovation observatory (2020), the resources dependency theory postulates that organisations try to reduce uncertainties linked to their environment. Pfeffer et Salancik (1978) ^[20] who are the initiators of the theory, point to the ignorance of the interdependencies that exist between an enterprise and certain groups of participants. They suggest namely that organisations usually underestimate the demands of external groups, and the complex relationships that are formed with other organisations.

According to these authors, acknowledging the fact that the environment constrains or affects the organisations is crucial. These organisations are not autonomous, but they are rather governed by a network of links with other organisations to obtain the resources that are necessary for their survival. The enterprise seems to depend on decision

spheres that are beyond its legal bounds, and that are able to control it. The resources dependency theory underlines the search for an optimisation of power in the management of mutual dependency relationships. To manage the dependency and external control, they are thus obliged to shape their own context.

As far as the structural inertia theory is concerned, Lehmann-Ortega and Roy (2009) ^[12] define structural inertia as internal factors to an organisation that reduce its ability to adjust to environmental changes. According to Hannan and Freeman (1984) ^[8] the characteristics of the environment suffice to account for organisational phenomena and their evolution. Organisations are prone to a number of important pressures that maintain them in a kind of structural inertia state.

Competing organisations regarding access to limited resources, and subject to a natural selection process are worth studying. For the proponents of this trend, organisations do not adjust to their environment; rather it is the environment that will select the structures that may carry on surviving. The population ecology applies Darwinian ideas about the natural selection of species on organisations, highlighting their difficulty to hold against the constraints of the environment.

Therefore, as regards variation, enterprises are not expected to develop by their members' sole will in a significant manner. Practices evolve accidentally and not through learning with the environment. They come up against a series of both internal (lack of information, political and cultural, etc) and external (legal and fiscal, limited access to information, etc.) constraints. In this respect, the organisations structural inertia makes it difficult for them to adjust to environmental changes. Even though choices were possible, results would be uncertain owing to the turbulences and complexity of the environment.

Finally, the real options theory (Myers, 1977) suggests that enterprises managers can take better decisions faced with uncertainty, by creating true opportunities options for their enterprises. A pandemic such as the Covid-19 has generated a high level of uncertainty, by creating precarious situations in the world of enterprises. Some managers have exploited some current opportunities quickly, by modifying their management methods to adjust to the new difficult situation. Having analysed these theories, one may pinpoint some important elements such as uncertainty linked to the environment, the inertia and the ability for a structure to take judicious decisions face with an unforeseeable situation such as the one resulting from the Covid-19. These elements might be considered as concepts, among other things, that account for the situation of the small and medium enterprises that now dwell in a restrictive environment resulting from the Covid-19 contextual effects.

3. Literature review

Among other things, the Covid-19 has led to difficulties in terms of demand and offer on the economic plan. According to Martin *et al.* (2020) ^[13], an offer crisis reduces the economy ability to produce goods and services at given prices. The measures that have prevented employees to go to work, or that have resulted in supply shortage, may be considered as an offer impact. On the other hand, a demand impact reduces the consumers' ability or will to buy goods and services. The decrease of restaurants – going for fear of the contagion, or the drop of services demand by enterprises

in reduced activity, constitute examples of demand impact. In other respects, these authors note that the dominant nature of the crisis may be measured by price dynamics. If the offer impact prevails in a given sector, prices increase. The opposite happens when the negative demand impact is dominant.

As a matter of fact, a dreadful and sudden loss of goods and services demand, and incomes of the small and medium enterprises has been observed during this Covid-19 period in several countries. This has led to severe liquid assets shortages. In addition, consumers have suffered loss of income. The fear for contagion and the increased uncertainty have reduced households' expenses and consumption., thus lowering the demand meant for enterprises. According to Meyer et Trinquecoste (2020) ^[15], during the Covid-19 period, the consumers' behaviour has changed.

The fact is that the isolation and uncertainty resulting from this sanitary crisis have made people cautious regarding their expenses. Raflis *et al.* (2020) ^[22] have realized that in Malaysia, even though a strict government policy and responses have been implemented to arrest the Covid-19, most enterprises were exposed to short- or long-term negative effects. These effects have led to treasury problems, redundancies. These authors have also noted that most small and medium enterprises have a very limited cashflow, and should not have important liquid assets for several months on account of different obligations such as payment of staff salaries, rent and other expenses.

Bartik *et al.* (2020) ^[3] state that small and medium enterprises have been more hit by the under use of human resources and capital, and depend more on world and national supply chains that have been disrupted by the Covid-19 crisis. These authors point out also that everywhere in the world, the crisis led to important impacts on workers, redundancies have been important even though figures on unemployment do not always provide an accurate idea about job losses since many employees have simply stopped looking for a job, and they have become part of the non-working population.

Dealing with the Covid-19 in Somalia, Warsame (2020) ^[25] has found that the offer has decreased by 38% while the demand has decreased by 83%. The incomes decreased by 89%, and 60% of the small and medium enterprises have reduced their working hours. On the other hand, 75% of the respondents have confirmed the redundancy. Most small and medium enterprises have experienced a decrease of cashflow, cash receipt from sales has decreased by 72%, accounts in debt have equally decreased by 61%. This has resulted in 64% of the small and medium enterprises inability to cope with operating costs. The author also underlines the fact that these businesses have been confronted with financial difficulties or insolvency, which has led to massive job losses and closing down of enterprises.

Bartik *et al.* (2020) ^[3] have investigated how the pandemic has affected the small and medium enterprises in the light of a survey involving 5800 small and medium enterprises in the United States of America. The results of the survey have revealed three major ones: Firstly, 43% of the businesses have been temporary closed. Secondly, they have realized that they have had to face financial difficulties. Thirdly, most of them had planned to look for funds, but they were confronted with many obstacles to have access to funding.

Dealing with the situation in Ghana, Korankye (2020) ^[11]

has found that the small and medium enterprises have been struggling for survival during the Covid-19 period with income, employees, and demand reductions, organisational restructuring, etc. In his point of view, these businesses must, therefore, take some measures that could enable them to survive during this period.

Having considered the situation in Kenya, Kaberia and Muathe (2020) ^[9] conclude that small and medium-sized businesses were more severely hit owing to their limited resources, and they have been unable to cope with prolonged uncertainty and the multifaceted restrictions during the Covid-19 period. Moreover, they observe that businesses that belong to women have met with more difficulties. Robinson (2020) ^[23], having examined the situation in Shri-Lanka, observes that the strategies and relief conventions to fight against the Covid-19 have had a high economic and human cost, and have had a devastating impact on the small and medium enterprises. They also have had to face material shortage, and the decline of world and national demand regarding their products and services, difficulties to pay back loans and interests, order cancellation, cashflow deficit, etc.

In an empirical investigation on Rwanda, Rwigema (2020) ^[24] notes that most enterprises were severely hit by the effects of the Covid-19, and they had to face several problems such as financial ones, disruptions of the foodstuff chain, decrease of demand, sales and profit reduction. The study has also revealed a high increase in the rate of setback concerning small and medium- enterprises without the government support. Accommodation, catering, art, entertainment and leisure, education and the other services, are among the sectors that have been most affected by this sanitary crisis.

On the strength of this literature review, it may be suggested that the confinement measures that have been taken to arrest the Covid-19 pandemic have had negative effects on small and medium enterprises.

4. Data sources

This article has made use of data from the 2020 survey involving enterprises on the socioeconomic effects of the Covid-19 in Congo. The survey, that was carried out by the National Statistics Institute, concentrated on the whole country, namely, 38% of the enterprises located in Brazzaville, and 40.3% in Pointe-Noire. These are the two biggest cities in the country where almost all small and medium enterprises are located.

The survey targeted a sample of 1143 enterprises that were stratified according to their size (small and medium-sized businesses), and their sector of activity (primary, secondary, and tertiary). The number of relevant enterprises in each stratum has prioritize, firstly, the weight of the stratum of the activity sector in terms of sales figure, and secondly, the distribution regarding the equal probability between the different types of enterprises.

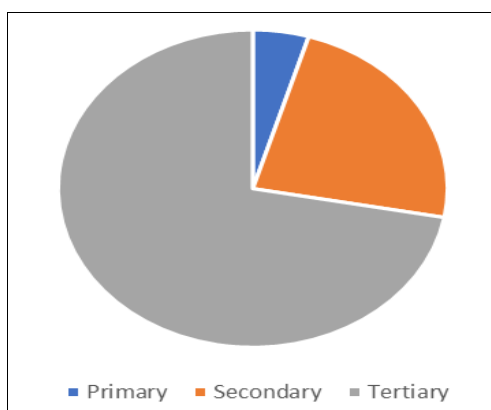
Besides, the survey basis consists of all the incorporated enterprises with the Ministry of Plan in 2019 in Congo. The drawing of enterprises was carried out on an independent manner in each stratum in proportion with the sales figure. However, this first survey on the Covid-19 in Congo came up against some difficulties such as some employers' unwillingness to answer questions, the lack of information about some survey forms, etc.

5. Analysis of the survey results

The approach chosen for the sake of this study is the descriptive analysis one using proportions and crossed charts.

5.1 Enterprises profile

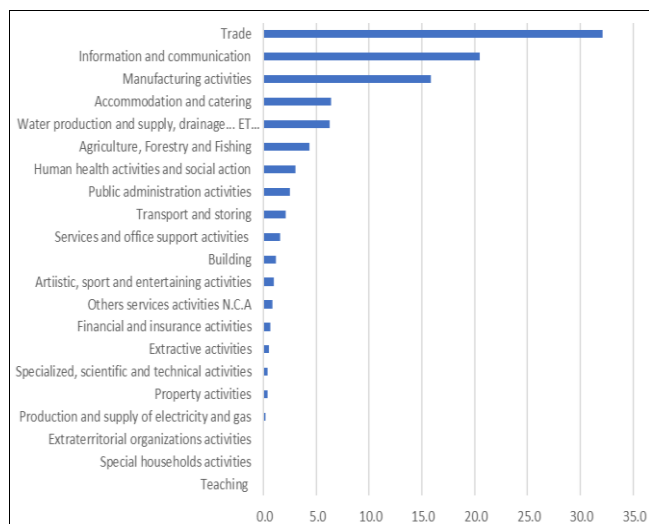
This survey on enterprises aimed at investigating the effects resulting from the Covid-19 context. The chosen sample for the sake of this survey reveals that enterprises that belong to the tertiary sector represent 72.1%, while those from the secondary sector represent a proportion of 23.2%, and those from the primary sector represent 4.7%. This result conveys well the economic reality in Congo in which tertiary activities are expanding. The Congolese population is highly urbanized. This situation leads to more and more high services demand, thus giving rise to the creation of small and medium enterprises in the tertiary sector.



Source: Designed by the author

Fig 1: Distribution of enterprises according to the sector of activity

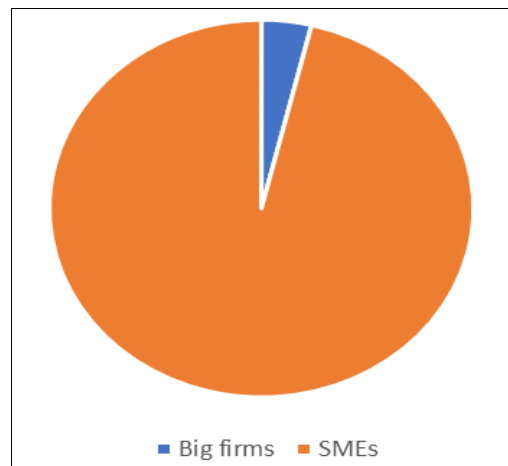
Trade, information, and communication, manufacturing activities, accommodation and catering, constitute the sectors to which these selected economic entities belong to.



Source: Designed by the author

Fig 2: Distribution of enterprises according to sector of activity

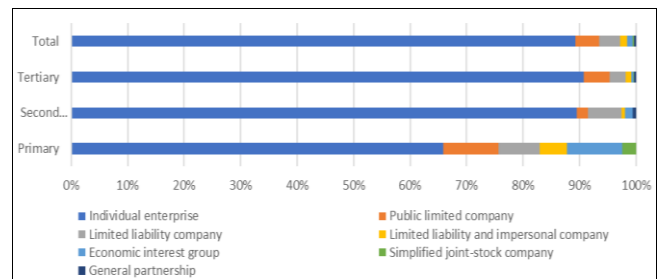
Dealing with the size, the small and medium enterprises represent 96.2% against 3.8% for the big ones. The weak start-up capital might be the reason that would favour the creation of small and medium enterprises in the country.



Source: Designed by the author

Fig 3: Distribution of enterprises according to size

As far as the distribution of the enterprises according to size is concerned, it may be observed that there are more individual ones, corporations, and limited liability companies.



Source: Designed by the author

Fig 4: Distribution of enterprises according to legal status and sector of activity

The analysis of the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the small and medium enterprises has been carried out on two points, namely, firstly, the impact of the Covid-19 on some economic variables linked to small and medium enterprises (salaries, working hours, employment, etc), and secondly, government measures for the benefit of these businesses in the Covid-19 context.

5.2 Impact of Covid-19 on some economic variables linked to the SMEs

Measures related to the struggle against this disease of a planetary character have had negative effects on the Congolese economy. As a matter of fact, in March 2020, the government adopted several measures to arrest the spreading of the Covid-19 in the country. These measures were as follows (Government of the Republic of Congo, 2020):

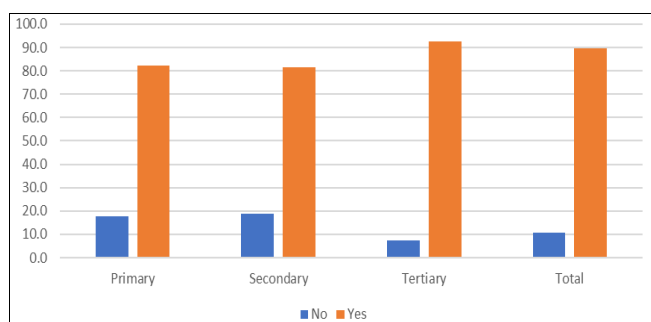
- Sanitary state of emergency. It was to be extended for twenty days from June 21st 2020.
- Curfew in the whole national territory from 10pm to 5 am.
- Closing of all borders except for ships, cargo flights and other goods transport towards Congo or from it.
- Prohibition of all public gathering involving more than fifty persons in public and private places.
- Closing of day nurseries, kindergartens, primary schools, literacy centres, public and private secondary

schools, high schools and universities, apart from final examinations classes.

- closing of student halls and boarding schools.
- closing of night clubs and closed dance establishments.
- closing of worship places.
- banning of team sports events and shows.
- limitation at fifty persons maximum taking part in any collective activity, on condition that all barrier measures are strictly respected.
- Intimate celebration of all familial events, with all due respect for the prevention measures.
- The exercise of sanitary and the forces of law-and-order controls for people going out of or into Brazzaville, Pointe-Noire, and other border towns.
- The maintenance of sanitary and the forces of law-and-order controls for people moving out of or into other towns.

On the other hand, these measures have been lightened, and have been applied until 2021.

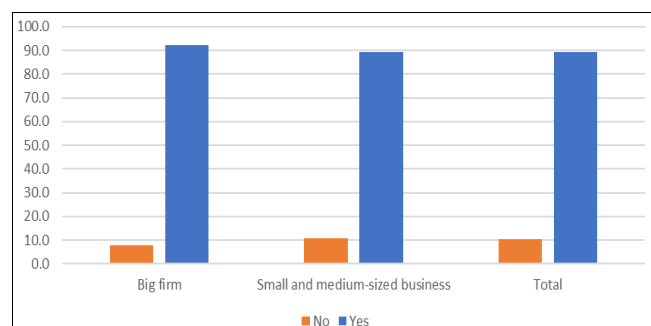
However, this struggle system against the Covid-19 conceived by the Congolese government has undoubtedly disrupted the economic environment in which the SMEs evolve. Most of them have been under the negative external impacts of this pandemic. As a matter of fact, the survey reveals that almost all SMEs have been affected one way or another by the Covid-19 pandemic taking into account the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors that represent 83.3%, 81.4% and 82% respectively.



Source: Designed by the author

Fig 5: SMEs that have been affected by the covid-19

Taking into account the size of the PME, it appears that 92.1% of big firms, and 89.4% of small and medium enterprises have been affected by the Covid-19.

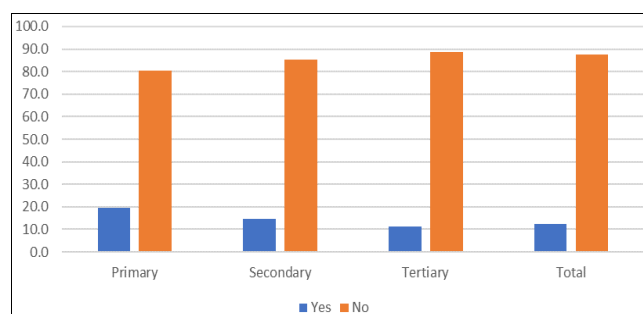


Source: Designed by the author

Fig 6: Enterprises that have affected by the COVID-19 according to size

Manpower

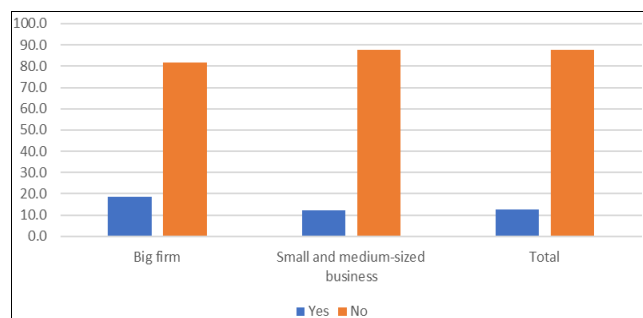
The primary data that were collected for the sake of the survey show that on the whole more than 80% of the SMEs had not reduced the number of their staff between the last two months before the beginning of the survey, one year after the outbreak of the Covid-19 in Congo.



Source: Designed by the author

Fig 7: Proportion of enterprises that have changed the number of their staff

In this respect, the enterprises that had reduced the number of their employees two months before the beginning of the survey do not exceed 13% taking into account the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors. It seems obvious that after months during which the confinement and other measures related to the struggle against the Covid-19 were implemented, the SMEs have had to face financial difficulties and other constraints that have led to dysfunctions. This new business atmosphere has generated some uncertainty regarding the functioning of the SMEs. They have sometimes taken cautious decisions. This uncertain environment demands new abilities for the SMEs to adjust to this new Covid-19 situation as the theoretical review has pointed out.

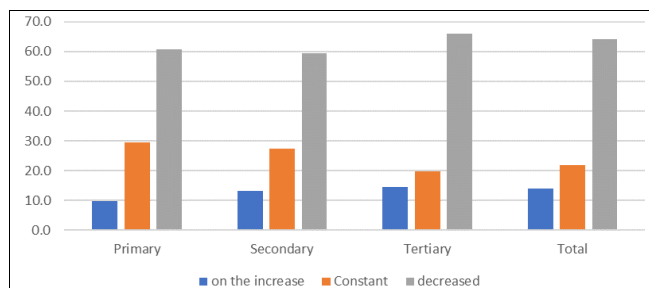


Source: Designed by the author

Fig 8: Proportion of the enterprises whose manpower has changed according to size

Turnover

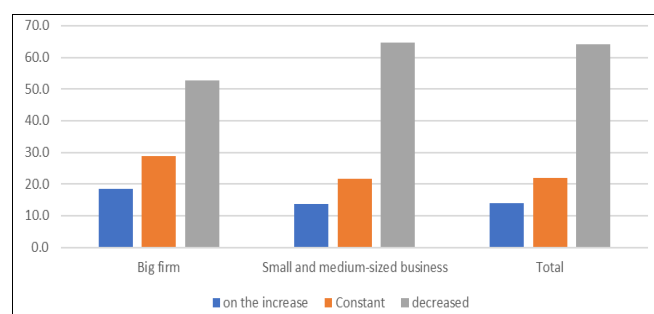
As far as the turnover is concerned, more than half of SMEs have experienced its decrease in all the sectors, that is, 65.9% in the tertiary sector, 59.6% in the secondary sector, and 60.8% in the primary sector. This result, that was mentioned in the literature review, has been observed in several countries in the Covid-19 context. The reduction of the demand and offer of goods and services has reduced the financial resources of several small and medium enterprises, therefore, of their turnover.



Source: Designed by the author

Fig 9: Distribution of the enterprises as regards the evolution of the turnover according to sector of activity

The same downward trend of the turnover may be observed when one considers the size (small, medium-sized, and big enterprises).



Source: Designed by the author

Fig 10: Distribution of the enterprises as regards the evolution of the turnover according to size

Financial plan

The Covid-19 has equally had negative impacts on the financial plan. Financial constraints have constituted one of the major problems that the SMEs have had to face during this sanitary crisis. The payment of bills, with a proportion of 62.2%, the rent with a percentage of 59.9%, and the staff salary which represents 45.4%, can be regarded as the most important financial aspects that have created enormous difficulties for the enterprises during this hard period during which the Covid-19 has been prevailing.

Table 1: Financial difficulties that the enterprises have had to face according to size

Financial difficulties		Big firm		Small and medium-size businesses		Total	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Staff salary and social expenses	No	9	21,1	614	55,8	624	54,6
	Yes	34	78,9	486	44,2	519	45,4
	Total	43	100,0	1100	100,0	1143	100,0
Rent	No	25	57,9	436	39,7	461	40,3
	Yes	18	42,1	664	60,3	682	59,7
	Total	43	100,0	1100	100,0	1143	100,0
Payment of loans	No	29	68,4	948	86,2	978	85,6
	Yes	14	31,6	152	13,8	165	14,4
	Total	43	100,0	1100	100,0	1143	100,0
Payment of bills	No	11	26,3	414	37,6	425	37,2
	Yes	32	73,7	686	62,4	718	62,8
	Total	43	100,0	1100	100,0	1143	100,0
Other expenses	No	36	84,2	790	71,9	826	72,3
	Yes	7	15,8	310	28,1	317	27,7
	Total	43	100,0	1100	100,0	1143	100,0
No specific problems	No	40	92,1	1031	93,7	1070	93,6
	Yes	3	7,9	69	6,3	73	6,4

	Total	43	100,0	1100	100,0	1143	100,0
Other	No	42	97,4	1042	94,7	1083	94,8
	Yes	1	2,6	58	5,3	60	5,2
	Total	43	100,0	1100	100,0	1143	100,0

Source: Designed by the author

Working time

The economic context that resulted from the coronavirus pandemic has led to modifications in the functioning of the enterprises. In this connection, about 69.2% of the surveyed SMEs have had to reduce their working time. The enterprises that have been affected by this situation represent about 70% in the tertiary sector, 67.7% in the secondary sector, and 55.6% in the primary one.

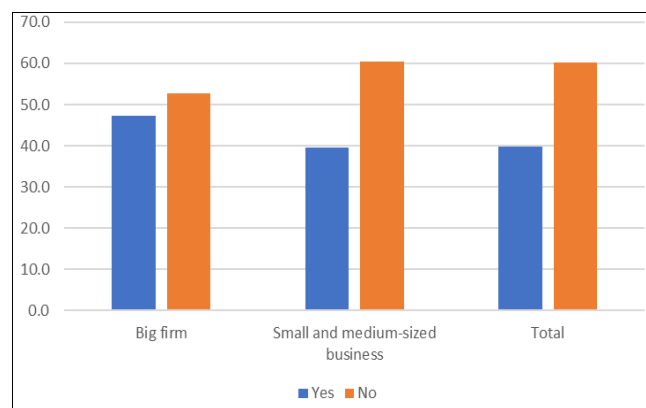
Table 2: Distribution of the enterprises as regards working time

	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Total
Drop	55,6	67,7	70,3	69,2
Stable	44,4	27,2	25,7	26,7
Increase	-	1,6	1,5	1,4
Do not know	-	3,5	2,5	2,6
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Designed by the author

Purchases of fixed goods

Dealing with the enterprises that had decided to cancel or postpone the purchase of new fixed goods or second-hand ones because of the Covid-19, such as machines, vehicles, land or building materials, including the extension and the renovation of existing structures, one may realize that they represent 40% of all the small and medium enterprises.

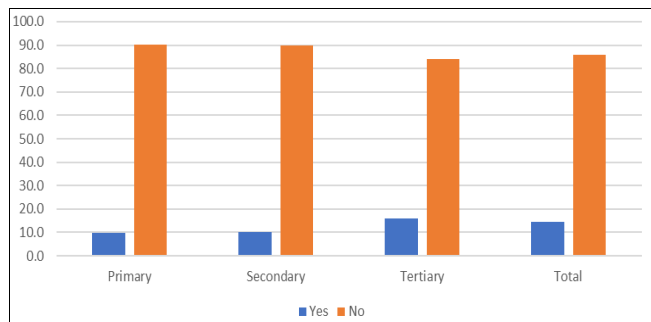


Source: Designed by the author

Fig 11: Impact of the COVID-19 on the purchase of fixed goods according to the size of the enterprise

Salaries

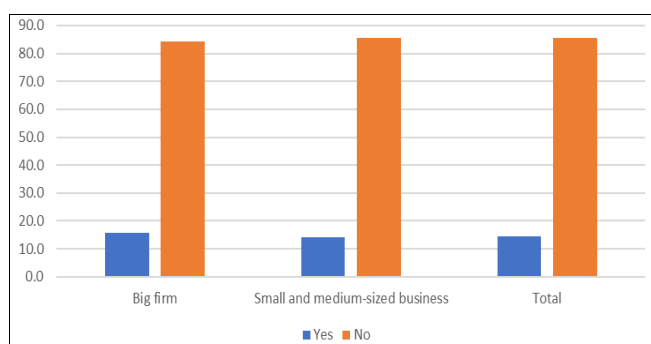
As far as salaries are concerned, it may be observed that a weak proportion of SMEs had reduced the salaries of at least one of their employees during the first year of the Covid-19. The survey reveals 8.8% in the primary sector, 10.2% in the secondary sector, and 15.9% in the tertiary one. These low rates can be accounted for by the anxiety to prevent employees from being demotivated in the SMEs, a year since the decision of the implementation of the confinement measures in Congo.



Source: Designed by the author

Fig 12: Proportion of the enterprises that have reduced the salaries according to the sector of activity

The same observation applies when it comes to the sector of activity. The percentage of the enterprises that reduced salaries according to size show that big firms represent 15.8%, and small and medium-sized ones represent 14.3%.



Source: Designed by the author

Fig 13: Proportion of the enterprises that have reduced the salaries according to sized

Jobs

4.8% of big firms claim having recruited as opposed to 1.1% regarding the small and medium enterprises. The new Covid-19 environment no longer enables employers to have a positive view on the future. This has resulted in a decrease in terms of both human and materials investment at short and medium term in the SMEs.

Table 3: Number of enterprises having intended to recruit according to type

Intention to recruit	Big enterprises		Small and medium-sized enterprises		Total	
	Number	(%)	Number	(%)	Number	(%)
No	41	95,2	1088	98,9	1129	98,8
Yes	2	4,8	12	1,1	14	1,2
Total	43	100,0	1100	100,0	1143	100,0

Source: Designed by the author

5.3 Government measures for the benefit of the SMEs in the Covid-19 context

The Congolese government took some support measures for the benefit of enterprises during the Covid-19 crisis. They are as follows (Government of the Republic of Congo):

- Offering guarantees (at 80%, 90% or 100%) for the loans that the banks granted to the enterprises;
- lending money to the enterprises, through one or several public banks;
- granting non-refundable aids to the enterprises;
- subsidizing the investments of some enterprises;

- temporary shareholding in some enterprises to prevent them from bankruptcy;
- granting social aids to households and/or increasing the existing social aids.

Yet, one year after the announcement of these measures, the government have not met their commitments. As a matter of fact, the table below shows that 96.6% of the enterprises maintain that they have not received any support from the government in connection with the Covid-19 situation. The economic crisis that Congo is going through, with a negative growth rate, might explain why the government have failed to honour their commitments for the benefit of the SME. In this context that is characterized by a lack of support for the SMEs, it becomes very hard for them to carry out their economic activities successfully.

Table 6: Distribution of the enterprises that have benefited from a state support linked to the pandemic according to size

Recipient of State support	Big enterprise		Small and medium-sized enterprises		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
No	43	100,0	1096	99,6	1139	99,6
Yes	0	0,0	4	0,4	4	0,4
Total	43	100,0	1100	100,0	1143	100,0

Source: Designed by the author

On the other hand, facing the growing concern of the Covid-19 pandemic, the enterprises have wished for several measures that the public authorities could implement to reduce the negative effects of the Covid-19 on them. The most desired measures are access to the capital thanks to the financial subsidy with 42.6%, the reduction of the electricity, gas, logistic costs with a proportion of 38.8%, and the renunciation of the payment of taxes (income tax, VAT, private pension regarding the enterprises, and ACCISE tax), that is, 21.7%.

Table 7: Enterprises wish about the measures that the public authorities might implement facing the Covid-19

Desirable measures	Number	%
Grant access to the capital thanks to financial subsidies	513	42,6
Reduction of the costs of electricity, gas, logistics	468	38,8
Renunciation of the payment of taxes (income tax, VAT, private pension regarding the enterprises and excise tax)	261	21,7
Cover, reduction or freezing of operational costs such as costs of warehouses and working spaces	216	17,9
Grant access to the capital thanks to access to zero interest rate loans	103	8,5
Reduction or postponement of social expenses or granting of salary subsidies	86	7,1
Reduction of banks interest rates	84	7,0
Provide technical advice about commercial operations linked to crises	55	4,6
Freezing of payment of loans, extension of loan conditions or partial reduction of the debt	43	3,6
Relax of labour regulation (for example, making easier workers' redundancy)	27	2,2
Additional redundancy payment for workers made redundant	24	2,0
Reduction or extension of employer's contribution	16	1,3
Improvement of refund services of export tax	10	0,8
Offer of foreign currencies	10	0,8
Other	247	20,5

Source: Designed by the author

Moreover, several enterprises have taken some initiatives to secure their working places against the spread of the Covid-19. The most important measures have been adopted. These are, the placement of alcohol and/or disinfectant on the

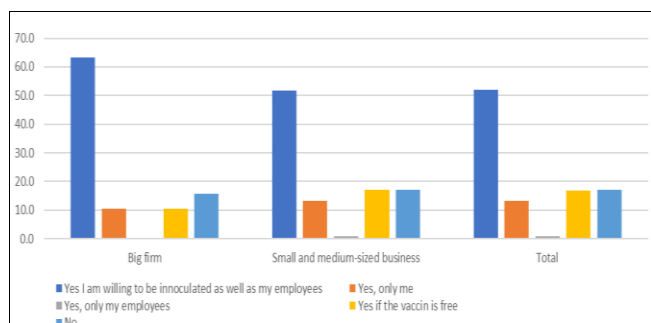
working place, the strict social detachment requirements on the working place, and the provision of protective garments, such as masks and gloves to the workers.

Table 8: Main measures taken by the enterprises as regards the workers' safety according to size

Main supports		Big enterprise		Small and medium-sized enterprises		Total	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
No measure taken (the enterprise is not operational)	No	43	100,0	1090	99,1	1133	99,1
	Yes	0	0,0	10	0,9	10	0,9
	Total	43	100,0	1100	100,0	1143	100,0
No measure taken (the firm is operational)	No	42	97,4	1050	95,5	1092	95,5
	Yes/Leti	1	2,6	50	4,5	51	4,5
	Total	43	100,0	1100	100,0	1143	100,0
Let workers work at home	No	42	97,4	1097	99,7	1139	99,6
	Yes	1	2,6	3	0,3	4	0,4
	Total	43	100,0	1100	100,0	1143	100,0
Grant paid holiday to workers	Non	40	92,1	1090	99,1	1130	98,9
	Oui	3	7,9	10	0,9	13	1,1
	Total	43	100,0	1100	100,0	1143	100,0
Place strict social detachment requirements on the working place	Non	3	7,9	475	43,2	479	41,9
	Oui	40	92,1	625	56,8	664	58,1
	Total	43	100,0	1100	100,0	1143	100,0
Place alcohol and / or some disinfectant on the working place	Non	2	5,3	122	11,1	125	10,9
	Oui	41	94,7	978	88,9	1018	89,1
	Total	43	100,0	1100	100,0	1143	100,0
Provide workers with protective garments such as masks and gloves	Non	10	23,7	578	52,6	589	51,5
	Oui	33	76,3	522	47,4	554	48,5
	Total	43	100,0	1100	100,0	1143	100,0
Other	Non	43	100,0	1086	98,7	1129	98,8
	Oui	0	0,0	14	1,3	14	1,2
	Total	43	100,0	1100	100,0	1143	100,0

Source: Designed by the author

Besides, the results of the survey show that 52% among the surveyed managers are willing to receive the Covid-19 vaccine, and let their employees be inoculated against the virus when the vaccine will be available. On the other hand, 17% of the enterprises on the whole are against the vaccination. Yet, it may be noticed that in 2021, the national vaccination rate against the Covid-19 is very weak. Many people are unwilling to accept the vaccine against the Covid-19 in Congo. The debates about the vaccines against the Covid-19 that are spread on the social networks seem to make people doubt the efficiency of these vaccines.



Source: Designed by the author

Fig 14: Enterprises' opinions about the vaccine according to size

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the impacts of the Covid-19 on the SMEs in Congo. Congo, like other countries worldwide, has been hit by the Covid-19 crisis. The enterprises, SMEs mainly, have been severely hit by this crisis in the country.

These enterprises, that are dominant in the national economic environment, take an active part in the struggle against poverty. But the negative impacts of the Covid-19 on them have increased the employees' survival difficulties and precariousness, and those of thousands of people who work in these enterprises.

This article has made use of the data of the National Institute of statistics survey involving enterprises on the socio-economic effects of the Covid-19 in Congo in 2020. It results from this survey that, first, the chosen sample reveals that the enterprises that belong to the tertiary sector represent 72.1%, those from the secondary sector represent 23.2%, and those from the primary one represents 4.7%. Second, the small and medium enterprises represent 96.2% as opposed to 3.8% for the big firms. Third, all the SMEs have been affected in one way or another by this pandemic, that is, 83.3% from the primary sector, 81.4% from the secondary sector, and 82.6% from the tertiary one.

Fourth, taking into account the size, it appears that 92.1% of big firms, and 89.4% of small and medium enterprises have been affected by the Covid-19. Fifth, 4% of the managers have claimed that they have recruited during the Covid-19 crisis. Sixth, dealing with the turnover, it may be pointed out that it has dropped regarding half the SMEs on the whole sectors. Seventh, the payment of bills, rent and staff salaries represent the most important financial difficulties that have posed enormous problems for the SMEs during this difficult period of the Covid-19. Eighth, about 69.2% of the surveyed enterprises have reduced their working time. Ninth, it may be observed that a low proportion of SMEs have reduced at least one of their

employees' salaries. Tenth, 99.6% of the managers claim that they have not benefited from any government aid during the Covid-19 period.

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