

Q1: Respondent details:

Name: KOUAME Kouakou Narcisse
Organization: Ministry of Trade
Email: narcisse.kouame@gmail.com
Tel.: +22548436198

Q2: Country or customs territory: CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Q3: Organization: Public sector

Q4: Title of case story:

Readiness of Côte d'Ivoire for e-commerce

Q5: Case story focus:

E-commerce development and efforts to bridge the "digital divide".

Q6: Case story abstract:

This case story focuses on Côte d'Ivoire's readiness for e-commerce as defined by the WTO, namely "the production, advertising, sale and distribution of products via telecommunications networks".

Since e-commerce is a new area, most countries, and in particular the developing countries, need to fulfil certain conditions in order to participate on a better footing. Certain experts have called this "readiness for e-commerce".

The fact is that e-trade is increasingly discussed and appears more and more often on the agenda of major international forums such as the WTO, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). Although Members have not yet been given a mandate to begin negotiating as such, they agreed, at the Nairobi Ministerial Conference, to pursue their discussions on the subject. For the moment, those discussions have hinted at differences of views among Members. Meanwhile, UNCTAD has seriously stepped up its activities and publications with a view to preparing and improving countries' participation in e-commerce.

Q7: Who provided funding? Bilateral donor, multilateral organization, South-South partner, private sector, NGO

Q8: Project/programme type: Single country

Q9: Your text case story:

I – GENERAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Before a country can participate in e-commerce in general, the population needs to be familiarized with the overall digital environment.

To that end, the Ivorian Government introduced several reforms in the sector that affect not only governance, but also the rural economy as a whole.

For several years now, the Government has been testing several paperless solutions in a number of areas in order to enhance its ability to handle electronic transactions. These include:

- online registration and payment for pupils attending government educational institutions;
- online tax returns;
- paperless import/export formalities through the Single Window for Foreign Trade;
- electronic and remote payment of public electricity and water bills;
- granting of e-commerce authorization at the national level to private sector operators;
- remote teaching;
- migration from analogue to digital terrestrial television (DTT).

All of these reforms are progressively steering the country towards full participation in global electronic commerce. However, without clear and effective legislation, users and e-retailers will feel insecure in their activities. This is why Côte d'Ivoire has adopted a number of laws and rules to regulate the sector.

II – REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Security and confidence are essential to the creation of an environment conducive to e-commerce.

Ideally, this implies, among other things, legal and regulatory frameworks that facilitate paperless trading of goods and services, consumer protection, data protection, measures to fight cybercrime, and market access. These frameworks need to strike a balance between facilitating trade and compliance, and to seek coherence among the relevant international, regional and national legal frameworks. Côte d'Ivoire has adopted a number of texts to that end. The Ministry of Trade website (<http://commerce.gouv.ci/e-reglementation.php>) provides a list of the texts regulating the digital economy environment. By creating a Ministry of Posts and the Digital Economy, Côte d'Ivoire sent a strong signal. The laws and regulations governing electronic transactions in Côte d'Ivoire are as follows:

- Law No. 2013-546 of 30 July 2013 on electronic transactions;
- Law No. 2013-450 on personal data protection;
- Law No. 2013-451 on combating cybercrime;
- Law on consumer protection adopted by the Ivorian Parliament on 6 June 2016 as well as Order No. 2012-293 of 21 March 2012 on Telecommunications and ICT containing a number of consumer protection provisions.

The institutions responsible for regulating the sector include not only the Ministry in charge of the digital economy, but also the following specialized agencies:

- ARTCI: Agency for the Regulation of Telecommunications in Côte d'Ivoire;
- ANSUT: National Agency for the Telecommunications Universal Service;
- AIGF: Ivorian Agency for Radio Frequency Management.

III – CURRENT STATUS OF E-COMMERCE IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

With the development of start-ups, e-commerce has become part of the daily life of Ivorians. These start-ups seek to provide everyday consumer goods and services to Ivorian consumers using a variety of devices to facilitate payment and supply. They include:

1 – Jumia

Jumia is part of the African Internet Holding Group. Founded in 2012 by German start-up incubator Rocket Internet, Jumia uses its platform to market thousands of products ranging from household appliances to fashion articles, cosmetics and electronics. It is a genuine online shop, often referred to as the Amazon of Africa. Thanks to Jumia, local retailers are able to increase their online visibility by offering their products on the platform.

Jumia has its own warehouse, with a high storage capacity and the necessary technology and facilities for optimum application of a multi-channel logistics strategy.

In May 2015, the site averaged 500,000 unique visitors per month. It offered an array of more than 50,000 references divided into 20 categories, and successfully processed 1,000 orders per day. In 2014, Jumia's sales grew at a monthly rate of 14% in the fashion category alone.

Jumia Côte d'Ivoire signs numerous partnership agreements (with craftsmen and local sales people as well as supermarkets) and/or launches new products. Infinix, Innjoo, refurbished Apple products are all products that were introduced to Côte d'Ivoire for the first time by Jumia; in addition to which a special service was set up to respond rapidly to the particular needs of businesses.

To sustain this growth and meet its promise to deliver any article ordered on its website in any town in the country within five days, Jumia has built a single warehouse commensurate with the logistical challenges it faces.

Jumia has acquired or merged with other platforms in the sector in Côte d'Ivoire: kaynu.ci, vendito.ci, jovago.ci, hellofood.ci, carmundi.ci, etc.

2 – Afrimarket.ci

This e-commerce website is special in that it enables the diaspora to make purchases for their families that have remained in Africa: for those who live in Europe, for instance, and want to send a bag of rice, a sheep for the Tabaski festival, or cement to build a house, Afrimarket.ci has made it possible by building a platform that enables users living abroad who wish to help out their relatives in Africa to select the products directly from an online catalogue and have them delivered. At the same time, the local site provides for direct payment of purchases with mobile money. To a certain extent, this solves the problem of the high money transfer fees faced by the African diaspora.

3 – Pdastore

This platform specializes in the distribution of electronic communication devices such as mobile phones, smartphones, tablets, notebooks, accessories and any other latest-generation information technology devices as well as online antiviruses.

4 – Kenneur.net

This web platform is in fact an online business social network. It operates on the free advertising website model, and can be used to buy and sell goods or employment services.

5 – myspeedmarket

This subsidiary of the Ivorian group Agronomix is the first e-commerce platform dedicated entirely to the sale of local agricultural products and their derivatives. It sells staple food crops, locally produced fresh and/or smoked meat, honey produced by the group, and finished products processed in Côte d'Ivoire.

6 – SODECI/CIE

SODECI is the water distribution company of Côte d'Ivoire, and CIE is the Ivorian Electricity Company. Since 2015, subscribers to these public services can use e-banking or electronic money (Orange Money, MTN Mobile Money and Flooz) to settle their bills.

7 – Abidjan.net

In operation since 1998, Abidjan.net is the first African French-speaking online media portal. It broadcasts general information of a political, economic, social and cultural nature in Côte d'Ivoire, as well as internationally through its partner newspapers and certain news agencies (AIP, APA, AFP, Reuters, Xhinua). Because of the credibility of the information provided and the diversity and quality of its content, it has become an essential part of life in Côte d'Ivoire. Abidjan.net enables users to buy newspapers online.

These are only some of the companies involved in e-commerce in Côte d'Ivoire, and though they are trying hard to develop this way of doing business in the country, it is not easy, and much remains to be done.

IV – OBSTACLES ON THE ROAD TO FULL EXPLOITATION OF THE POTENTIAL FOR E-COMMERCE IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

One of the most important steps towards completing the regulatory framework in this sector is the promulgation of the Consumer Law, which takes account of some of the aspects of electronic transactions. The legal void in many areas of e-commerce in Côte d'Ivoire helps to explain why the big e-commerce companies such as Amazon, PayPal and eBay, for instance, are reticent. The other

difficulty encountered by e-commerce professionals is the lack of any real logistics chain for the rapid delivery of goods to customers. Postal services, which should play a leading role in this respect, play virtually no role at all. As a result, the companies that are involved in e-commerce are burdened with further investments in order to be able to deliver their goods. The payment aspect is still being developed. Unlike companies in the developed countries, which offer secure payment via PayPal, in Côte d'Ivoire the customer pays on delivery and mostly in cash, so that the seller has to wait until the process has been completed before receiving any settlement. However, an alternative has been found in the mobile payment services offered by the mobile phone companies (Orange Money, MTN Mobile Money, and MOOV's Flooz). Finally, the Internet penetration rate is low and the cost of access to broadband and electricity is still too high.

V – OPPORTUNITIES AND PROSPECTS

E-commerce represents an excellent opportunity for Côte d'Ivoire, in that it could help to bring the country's postal services out of the lethargy they have been plunged in for years, and enable them to modernize and take over the parcel delivery logistics chain.

Thanks to companies like Jumia and Kaymu, small retailers and SMEs are able to make their products more visible to the Ivorian consumer and thus boost their sales.

Some of the companies involved have had to subcontract the delivery of the goods to young Ivorians, helping to create a new home delivery sector that was not very developed. As regards prospects, the Government is continuing its efforts to improve the e-commerce environment in Côte d'Ivoire. The infrastructure for affordable broadband is being developed, and the Government plans to reduce Internet costs accordingly. Last April the Ivorian Government, through its Ministry of Trade, confirmed the country's support for the future Aid for e-Trade initiative that should enable developing countries like Côte d'Ivoire to express their needs in that area. There is a genuine political will for the development of ICT in Côte d'Ivoire. Hence the creation of a ministry entirely dedicated to postal services and the digital economy.

In addition to the fight against cybercrime and the different reforms to the legal framework, the Ivorian Government has introduced a wide-ranging ICT development plan focusing primarily on: infrastructure, accessibility of services, the development of national expertise, and the establishment of the free zone for information technology and biotechnology (VITIB) at Grand-Bassam. Also worth noting is the opening of a graduate institute entirely dedicated to new technologies, the Ecole Supérieure Africaine des TIC (ESATIC).

Q10: Lessons learnt:

An e-commerce ecosystem is emerging in Côte d'Ivoire. The population is gradually getting used to electronic transactions, and the demand is growing. There remain, however, a number of limiting factors that need to be addressed: for example, there is a lack of modern infrastructure, Internet broadband is still too expensive, and parcel delivery services are inefficient.

Much hope has been placed in the Aid for e-Trade initiative launched by UNCTAD last April as a means of creating a reference framework to support low-income countries and help them to participate in this new and rapidly growing type of trade.
