The Impact of the New Stamp Duty Scale on SMEs in the Wholesale Agri-Food Trade Sector in Algeria

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Abstract:
The reform of stamp duty on cash payments in Algeria aims to reduce the informal economy and increase fiscal transparency. Implemented since January 2025, it particularly affects SMEs in the wholesale agri-food sector. The study analyzes its economic effects, business reactions, and obstacles to abandoning cash in a sector that is still largely informal.

Keywords :(SMEs**;** stamp duty tax, wholesale agri-food sector)
Jel classification code : H32/ H71/L25/ L81

Introduction

The transformation of the informal economy into a structured and taxed economy remains a key challenge for emerging countries. In Algeria, this dynamic is part of a process of successive reforms aimed at improving the traceability of financial flows, strengthening fiscal transparency, and encouraging banking penetration. Among the instruments mobilized for this purpose is the reform of the stamp duty on cash payments, which came into force in January 2025. This tax, previously set at 1% of the total amount of invoices including tax, with a ceiling of 10,000 DA, is now applied according to a progressive scale ranging from 1% to 2% with no ceiling, depending on the amount of the invoice. This revision is clearly aimed at discouraging cash payments by increasing their tax cost in proportion to the volume of transactions.

This reform comes at a time when cash payments are still very common, especially in the wholesale food industry, which is a big part of Algeria's economy. Indeed, agri-food accounts for more than 40% of non-hydrocarbon industry turnover and employs a quarter of the national workforce. This sector plays a strategic role not only in food security, but also in price stabilization, job creation, and reducing dependence on imports.

However, in a sector where informal business practices remain widespread, the implementation of a dissuasive tax on cash payments raises several questions about its real economic impact on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). These businesses, which are often ill-equipped to adopt electronic payment solutions, may find themselves penalized by an increase in their tax burden, a potential decline in their competitiveness, or difficulties in quickly adapting their practices. This could result in tension between the formalization objectives sought by the government and the operational reality of businesses on the ground.

An empirical analysis is therefore needed to assess the differentiated effects of this reform on SMEs in the sector. In particular, it is relevant to examine their perceptions of the reform, the changes made to their sales and purchasing practices, the impact on their profit margins, and the adaptation measures they have been forced or encouraged to implement. Furthermore, understanding the structural barriers to abandoning cash payments, such as lack of access to banking

services, lack of suitable equipment, or entrenched commercial habits, would help inform thinking on the conditions for a more effective rollout of the reform.

With this in mind, this article aims to analyze the impact of the new stamp duty on Algerian SMEs specializing in the wholesale trade of agri-food products. Based on a structured questionnaire sent to a sample of companies, the study explores the repercussions of the reform on their commercial and financial practices, while identifying the adaptation strategies adopted and the recommendations made by actors in the field. This contribution is part of a broader effort to evaluate fiscal policies in emerging contexts, taking into account sector-specific characteristics and informal dynamics.

1- Literature review

In emerging economies, informality is a key issue for both public authorities and economic actors. The scale of the informal sector, often perceived as a source of flexibility but also of vulnerability, compromises the mobilization of fiscal resources, the regulation of economic activities, and the implementation of coherent development policies. The fight against this phenomenon involves several levers, among which taxation plays a key role. Taxation is no longer limited to its traditional function of collecting resources, but has become an incentive tool designed to steer economic behavior toward greater transparency and formality.

In this context, cash payments are a major obstacle to formalization. They maintain opacity in transactions, bypass banking channels, and contribute to the continuation of informal practices, particularly in business-to-business exchanges. Despite the rise of financial technologies and digital infrastructure, cash remains predominant in many sectors, particularly in the Global South. The persistence of these practices can be explained by a combination of factors: economic culture, inadequate infrastructure, low confidence in banking institutions, and transaction costs that are considered prohibitive. In Algeria, these obstacles are particularly significant, given the structure of the economic fabric and the geography of the territory.

SMEs in the agri-food sector are at the heart of this issue. They have several structural characteristics that make them particularly sensitive to reforms affecting taxation and payment methods: low capitalization, informal management, dependence on cash flow, limited access to financing, and exposure to unstable

markets. These businesses, although vital for food security and employment, operate in an ecosystem where informal norms prevail. Any attempt at change—whether fiscal, digital, or regulatory—must therefore take into account their operational reality.

Finally, public policies on digitization cannot have a lasting effect without consideration of their acceptability. The introduction of tax reforms or requirements for paperless payments may encounter resistance or circumvention if not accompanied by support measures, education, and clear incentives. The social, economic, and technical acceptability of reforms thus becomes a determining factor in their effectiveness. The issue is not simply to "modernize" economic channels, but to do so in an inclusive and gradual manner, taking into account sectoral and territorial disparities.

1-1. Taxation as a lever for formalizing the economy

In emerging economies, where the informal sector sometimes accounts for more than 40% of GDP and total employment, taxation appears to be an essential lever for promoting the transition to the formal economy. According to Loayza (2016), the persistence of informality is largely the result of a combination of a restrictive regulatory framework and poorly designed tax pressure. In this context, tax reform aims not only to increase public revenue, but also to change economic behavior. The objective is to encourage informal actors to enter the formal economy by making this transition more advantageous than remaining in the informal sector.

Innovative approaches have been implemented in several countries, notably through incentive-based tax reforms. These reforms do not simply increase penalties for informal practices, but seek to reduce the costs of entering the formal economy, simplify reporting requirements, and introduce targeted measures, such as simplified tax regimes for micro-enterprises. In addition, more recent initiatives have targeted payment methods, including the introduction of taxes on cash payments and the granting of temporary exemptions for electronic payments. These measures aim to reduce the appeal of cash, which is often preferred for its discretion and flexibility, while promoting the traceability of transactions.

Torgler & Schneider (2007) emphasize that the effectiveness of these policies depends largely on their institutional consistency and how they are perceived by economic actors. If taxation is perceived as unfair, arbitrary, or ineffective, it tends to reinforce tax avoidance and adherence to the informal economy. Conversely, taxation designed as a service—rather than a mere constraint—can play a

structuring role. However, this requires administrative support, appropriate communication mechanisms, and a genuine effort to modernize tax administrations.

In this context, taxation is not only a means of collecting revenue, but also a vehicle for economic transformation. By creating positive incentives, adapting to the realities of small businesses, and addressing payment-related issues, it can actively contribute to economic inclusion and the gradual formalization of informal activities.

1-2. Cash payments: uses, risks, and inertia

Despite technological advances in digital payments and the rise of digitization policies, cash payments remain widely dominant in business-to-business (B2B) transactions in developing countries. According to Beck et al. (2018), this prevalence of cash is not limited to small everyday purchases, but also applies to commercial exchanges between professionals, particularly in informal or underbanked sectors. This widespread use of cash is the result of a combination of economic, social, and institutional factors.

Firstly, low confidence in financial institutions is a major barrier to the adoption of electronic payment methods. In many contexts, businesses—particularly micro and small enterprises—perceive the banking system as costly, slow, or unreliable (Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2022). Added to this is the fear of tax audits, often associated with the traceability of digital payments. In this case, cash allows for a certain degree of opacity in financial flows, facilitating tax avoidance or the parallel management of undeclared cash.

Secondly, equipment costs (purchasing terminals, subscriptions, maintenance) and infrastructure gaps (poor network coverage, frequent outages, lack of reliable Internet connection) limit the accessibility of digital solutions, particularly in rural or peripheral areas. In Algeria, these difficulties are exacerbated by a vast and sometimes rugged geography, making the deployment of technical infrastructure uneven. According to a report by the Bank of Algeria (2023), vast territories remain under-equipped with electronic payment terminals (EPOS), which hinders the widespread acceptance of cards and mobile wallets.

Finally, ingrained habits play a significant role. Many merchants and suppliers prefer cash payments, which are considered simpler, more immediate, and free of intermediaries. This preference is often passed down from generation to generation or within sectors, reinforced by a commercial culture that is largely informal. In such a context, the introduction of electronic payment methods, without support or strong incentives, encounters deep resistance.

In short, the continued use of cash as the predominant method of payment is an obstacle to formalization, but also a symptom of the structural dysfunctions of the economic system. For digitization policies to succeed, it is imperative to address these inertias at their root, combining technical efforts, financial incentives, and the gradual transformation of commercial practices.

1-3 SMEs in the agri-food wholesale sector: structural specificities and constraints

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in the agri-food wholesale sector play a central role in the food supply chains of developing countries. In Algeria, these companies are an essential link between agricultural producers, importers, and retailers. However, their operations are based on structural characteristics that make them particularly vulnerable to tax reforms or changes in payment methods.

These SMEs operate in an environment characterized by low profit margins. This is due, among other things, to the high volatility of agricultural and food prices, caused by climatic factors, logistical disruptions, and unstable regulatory policies (FAO, 2021). This volatility undermines their ability to plan their finances and often forces them to favor quick, liquid transactions in order to limit the risk of depreciation or losses.

Another dominant feature is their dependence on high cash flows, linked to the perishable nature of products and the speed of inventory turnover. Cash payments are therefore widely preferred for their immediacy, simplicity, and ability to circumvent banking delays. This practice is part of a largely informal management style, where supplier/customer relationships are often based on interpersonal trust, verbal agreements, and rudimentary accounting practices (Benhabib 2023). In this context, any initiative to impose systematic transaction traceability is perceived as an obstacle, or even a threat to the survival of the business.

In Algeria, the structural constraints faced by these SMEs are exacerbated by several contextual factors. On the one hand, access to bank financing remains limited: according to the World Bank (2020), only 11% of Algerian SMEs report having obtained a loan or line of credit, compared to an average of 30% in the MENA region. This situation pushes companies to self-finance and rely on cash as their main source of liquidity. On the other hand, the tax environment is perceived as complex, unstable, and unsuited to the realities of small businesses. The administrative burden, combined with a lack of targeted support, fuels a climate of mistrust toward the state and its reforms (OECD, 2022).

Furthermore, agri-food distribution channels in Algeria are fragmented and poorly regulated. Wholesale trade often operates in parallel or semi-formal markets, where tax obligations are poorly enforced. This informality is reinforced by the absence of clear incentives to move into the formal sector and by unevenly distributed digital infrastructure, which limits the adoption of modern payment solutions, particularly in the interior wilayas.

Ultimately, small and medium-sized wholesale food businesses in Algeria are extremely sensitive to tax reforms or attempts to digitize payments. Without specific support, simplified procedures, or measures tailored to their economic reality, these measures risk being perceived as coercive and reinforcing their retreat into informality. To facilitate their transition, it is essential to adopt a differentiated approach that takes into account their structural constraints, their dependence on cash, and the logic of their commercial ecosystem.

1-4. Public policy, digitization, and acceptability

The success of tax reforms and payment digitization policies depends largely on their acceptability to economic actors. The experience of many developing countries shows that initiatives imposed without consultation or support often have counterproductive effects, reinforcing mistrust and encouraging circumvention (Bird & Zolt, 2005). In Algeria, this challenge is particularly acute in a context where the relationship between the tax administration and small businesses is marked by mutual mistrust and a lack of communication.

In recent years, the Algerian authorities have launched several initiatives aimed at reducing the use of cash and improving the traceability of financial flows, notably through the gradual prohibition of cash payments above a certain threshold and

the widespread use of electronic payment terminals (EPTs). However, these measures are facing significant resistance due to cultural, economic, and technical factors (Bank of Algeria, 2023). In the absence of concrete incentives—such as equipment subsidies, tax breaks for companies that adopt digital payments, or training programs—the transition to digital is still perceived as an additional cost rather than a benefit.

Gordon and Li (2009) emphasize that the digitization of payments cannot succeed without careful adaptation to sectoral and territorial specificities. In Algeria, this differentiated approach is all the more crucial given the marked inequalities in access to banking services and digital infrastructure, particularly in remote areas. The success of public policies therefore depends on their ability to combine a regulatory framework, targeted incentives, and dialogue with the relevant stakeholders, particularly SMEs in the informal sector.

2- Research methodology

This research aims to analyze the impact of the new stamp duty scale on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in the wholesale trade of agri-food products. To address this issue, a rigorous methodological approach was adopted, combining a precise definition of the target population, the development of a structured data collection tool, and the application of a quantitative analysis of the results.

2-1. Methodological objective

The main objective of the methodology is to empirically identify the economic, organizational, and strategic effects of the stamp duty reform on the commercial and financial practices of the SMEs concerned. The research also focuses on how the managers of these companies perceive the new legislation and the strategies they are implementing to deal with it.

2-2. Definition of the target population

The target population for this study consists exclusively of Algerian SMEs engaged in wholesale trade in the agri-food sector. To ensure the relevance of the sample, the selected companies had to meet the criteria defined by Law 17-02, which provides the legal framework for the status of SMEs in Algeria. According to this law, a company is classified as an SME if it meets the following conditions:

- Workforce: the company must employ between 1 and 250 people.

- Annual turnover: it must not exceed 2 billion Algerian dinars.
- Total annual balance sheet: it must not exceed 500 million Algerian dinars.
- Legal and financial independence: the company must not be majority-owned by another entity, whether public or private.

These criteria have made it possible to accurately target the companies actually affected by the new stamp duty rules, particularly those whose cash transactions are frequent and significant.

2-3. Sampling and data collection

The sample selected for this study initially consisted of 100 companies identified through professional databases, local business networks, and contacts made at trade shows and industry events. Of the 100 companies contacted, 53 responded to the questionnaire, representing a response rate of 53%. This rate is considered acceptable for an exploratory study of this type, especially since the respondents provided complete and usable answers.

Data collection took place over a six-week period, during which companies were contacted by email, telephone, and via digital forms (Google Forms). Personalized support was offered to some respondents to help them complete the questionnaire, particularly if they had difficulty understanding the questions.

2-4. Development of the questionnaire

The main tool used in this research is a structured questionnaire, designed specifically to assess the effects of the new stamp duty on the activities of SMEs in the sector. The questionnaire was divided into five thematic sections, each corresponding to a specific dimension of the analysis:

• Section 1: General information

This section aims to collect contextual data on the companies surveyed: length of time in the sector, annual turnover, and share of transactions carried out in cash. These elements make it possible to situate the companies in their economic environment and measure their level of exposure to the reform.

• Section 2: Understanding and perception of the new stamp duty

This section explores how well informed managers are about the reform, their understanding of the new obligations, and their perception of the potential impact on their business.

• Section 3: Impact on sales

This section seeks to measure the impact of the new scale on customer behavior, cash sales volumes, and any changes in commercial policies adopted to offset the decline in demand.

• Section 4: Impact on purchasing and financial management

This section looks at the impact on supplier relationships, cash payments, profit margins, and adjustments to billing thresholds.

• Section 5: Adaptation and strategy

Finally, this section discusses the concrete measures taken or planned by companies to adapt to the new context: digitization of payments, use of banking tools, difficulties encountered in the transition process, etc.

The questions in the questionnaire are both closed (multiple choice or Likert scale) and semi-open, allowing respondents to elaborate on their answers where relevant.

2-5. Data processing and analysis

The data collected was processed anonymously to ensure the confidentiality of respondents. The analysis was carried out using descriptive statistical tools, such as calculating frequencies and percentages, and correlating variables using cross-tabulation. This approach makes it possible to identify general trends, compare behaviors between different subcategories of companies (according to their size, age, or turnover), and highlight points of convergence or divergence.

The analysis also identified correlations between companies' level of information and their ability to implement adaptation strategies, particularly with regard to the transition to electronic payment methods.

2-6. Methodological limitations

Although rigorous, this methodology has certain limitations. On the one hand, the sample of 53 companies does not allow for complete generalization of the results to the entire sector, but it nevertheless provides a representative overview. On the other hand, the declarative nature of the questionnaire may introduce a subjective bias, as respondents may be tempted to minimize or exaggerate certain effects. Finally, the speed with which the reform was implemented did not allow for the observation of long-term effects, which limits the analysis to perceived short- and medium-term impacts.

3- Presentation of results

The results of the first section of the survey provide a relevant overview of the profile of the companies surveyed in the agri-food wholesale sector, providing a better understanding of the context in which they operate in the face of changes in stamp duty on cash payments.

First, in terms of seniority, nearly three-quarters of companies (73.58%) have been in business for less than five years, with a relative majority (45.28%) operating for two to five years. This indicates a young, potentially dynamic sector, but also one that is more sensitive to regulatory changes, particularly in the area of taxation. New companies may have less leeway to adapt to new costs.

In financial terms, the majority of respondents (66.04%) report annual revenues of between 10 and 50 million Algerian dinars, while 26.42% report revenues of more than 50 million DA. This profile suggests that most companies are medium-sized, which could imply moderate exposure to tax impacts, but also a need to optimize their cash flow.

Finally, data on cash transactions are particularly significant: 84.9% of businesses conduct more than half of their transactions in cash. More specifically, one-third (33.96%) report using cash for more than 75% of their transactions. This shows a

strong dependence on this method of payment in the sector, making businesses particularly vulnerable to any increase in stamp duty on cash transactions.

In short, the profile of the businesses—young, with moderate turnover and highly dependent on cash payments—highlights the significant potential economic impact of the new tax measures being considered.

The results of the second section of the survey, conducted in Algeria to assess the impact of the new stamp duties introduced by the 2025 Finance Act, reveal that businesses are highly aware of the new tax measures, but also have a generally negative perception of their relevance and suitability for the wholesale agri-food sector.

On the one hand, a large majority of respondents (96.23%) say they are aware of the new stamp duty rules applicable to cash payments. This high level of awareness reflects the relatively effective dissemination of information, probably via official channels or professional bodies. It also indicates that businesses are aware of the tax issues and legal obligations involved.

However, the assessment of the impact on business reveals mixed perceptions. Only 17.65% consider the effect to be “significant,” while 21.57% consider it ‘moderate’ and 47.06% consider it “low.” It should also be noted that 11.76% of respondents are uncertain about the real impact (“I don't know”), which may reflect a lack of perspective or difficulty in quantifying the concrete short-term effects.

As for the assessment of the new stamp duty scale, the results show a high level of dissatisfaction: 54.90% of companies consider it “excessive” and 33.33% consider it “inappropriate” for their sector of activity. This reflects a perceived mismatch between the economic reality of the agri-food trade, which is largely based on cash payments, and the new tax system. Barely 3.92% consider the reform to be “justified,” highlighting a near-universal rejection of the current arrangements.

In summary, although well informed, companies express strong skepticism about the relevance and impact of the new stamp duties, highlighting a need for adaptation or sector-specific support.

The results of Section 3 reveal that, despite the entry into force of the new stamp duty scale on cash payments in Algeria, the immediate impact on reported sales appears to be very limited. However, a closer reading of these data, in light of the sectoral context—notably the strong presence of the informal economy and tax evasion—allows us to qualify this apparent stability.

First, 82.35% of respondents say they have not seen a decline in their cash sales, and 11.76% say they have not yet measured the impact. No company reports a "clear" decline, and only 5.88% report a "slight" decline. This finding could suggest that the sector is resilient to the reform. However, it is more likely that a significant portion of transactions, particularly those that are not invoiced, continue outside the legal framework and thus escape the application of stamp duty, making it difficult to transparently assess the real impact.

This hypothesis is reinforced by the fact that 98.04% of companies have not changed their commercial policies (e.g., by encouraging electronic payments or offering discounts to offset the cost of stamp duty). This indicates significant inertia, possibly due to the persistence of informal practices that allow the measure to be circumvented without directly suffering the economic consequences.

Furthermore, the virtual absence of negative feedback from customers (98.04% say that customers have "never" expressed reluctance) confirms that the new stamp duty has, for the time being, had no visible effect on buyer behavior, probably because many transactions are not subject to this duty in practice.

In summary, this section highlights an apparent low impact, but this seems to reflect the importance of the informal sector and tax avoidance practices rather than the actual neutrality of the reform.

The results of Section 4, which examines the impact of the new stamp duty on purchasing and financial management, reveal partial but significant adjustments in business behavior, particularly with regard to payments to suppliers. These results must be analyzed in the specific context of the agri-food wholesale trade in Algeria, where part of the supply chain—particularly imports and subsidized products—is subject to strict regulation.

First, nearly half of the companies surveyed (49.02%) report having reduced their cash payments to suppliers because of the new stamp duty. This change is particularly significant given the high proportion of cash payments mentioned in the previous sections. It can be explained by the strict controls on importers, who are required to ensure strict traceability of financial flows. These suppliers, unable to escape their tax obligations, require payments to comply with the new rules, thus encouraging distributors to adopt more formal means of payment (bank transfer,

check). This trend is reinforced for subsidized products (semolina, flour, sugar), whose supply chain is also closely monitored by the state.

On the other hand, 94.12% of companies say they have not seen any impact on their profit margins. This can be explained by the fact that, in most cases, companies do not actually apply stamp duty in their informal transactions, or that the additional cost is passed on to sales prices without significantly affecting their profitability.

Finally, no company reports having changed its billing thresholds to avoid the higher stamp duty brackets, which suggests either a lack of knowledge of tax optimization strategies or a desire not to attract the attention of the tax authorities.

In summary, while the direct financial impact appears to be limited, the reform is already prompting some companies to change their payment practices, particularly in regulated transactions.

The results of Section 5 highlight the still tentative but growing efforts of the wholesale agri-food sector to adapt to new tax requirements, while revealing the deep structural limitations that are hindering the transition to electronic payments.

Firstly, it is encouraging to note that nearly 29.41% of companies have already adopted or are in the process of implementing digital or banking solutions (POS terminals, apps, etc.) to promote electronic payments. In addition, a large majority (68.63%) say they intend to do so in the future. This reflects a growing awareness of the challenges associated with modernizing transactions and tax compliance. However, only a minority have actually taken the plunge to date, a sign that the transition remains slow.

The obstacles to this transition are particularly revealing. The low level of banking penetration among customers (98.04%) stands out as the main obstacle, reflecting a largely informal ecosystem where retailers—the main customers of wholesalers—operate primarily in cash. This reality is exacerbated by deeply ingrained habits (92.16%) and the refusal of many retailers to accept invoices (68.63%) in order to avoid paying taxes. This creates a cycle of informality where financial traceability is deliberately avoided.

Added to this are significant technical constraints (68.63%), particularly the lack of access to electronic payment tools and, to a lesser extent, bank fees (9.80%), which can discourage small businesses.

In short, although the new tax rules have initiated a process of modernization, the structurally informal environment, low banking penetration, and resistance to change are major obstacles to rapid adaptation. Any public policy aimed at strengthening the use of electronic payment will need to be accompanied by incentives, technical support, and a broader strategy to combat informality.

4- Discussion of results:

The introduction of the new stamp duty on cash payments, provided for in Algeria's 2025 Finance Act, represents a clear attempt by the State to improve the traceability of financial flows, combat the informal economy, and promote the use of bank payment methods. Although still recent, the impact of this reform deserves to be examined through the actual behavior of economic operators.

In the context of this study, the wholesale agri-food trade was targeted because of its strategic importance in the national economy and its deep roots in largely informal commercial practices. Analysis of the data collected on various topics (company profiles, perception of the law, effects on sales, purchases, and adaptation strategies) provides a nuanced picture of the transformations underway and the resistance observed.

4-1 A well-understood reform but poorly integrated into practice

One of the first lessons to be learned from this survey is that the reform is well known among professionals in the sector. Unlike other tax measures, which can sometimes go unnoticed or be misinterpreted, the new stamp duty scale has attracted a great deal of attention and prompted a rapid response, at least in terms of awareness.

However, this good understanding has not yet translated into concrete integration into daily practices. The majority of operators have not reviewed their commercial strategy, let alone made significant changes to their billing processes or payment systems. This inertia is not due to ignorance or opposition to the reform on principle, but rather to deep-rooted structural constraints that make the transition to a more transparent model particularly difficult.

4-2 Structural barriers rooted in the reality of the sector

The agri-food wholesale trade operates in a specific ecosystem, characterized by fragmented value chains, high turnover, low banking penetration, and a commercial culture strongly attached to cash payments. In this environment, digital and banking tools are not absent by default, but are often perceived as obstacles rather than opportunities.

Resistance to change is fueled by several factors. The first, and undoubtedly the most decisive, is the nature of the relationships between wholesalers and their retail customers. The latter operate in a largely informal environment, where invoicing is often deliberately avoided in order to circumvent tax obligations. In the absence of customer demand for greater traceability, there is very little incentive to change payment methods.

In addition, the indirect costs associated with digital transformation, whether for the acquisition of equipment (payment terminals, management systems), bank charges, or the time required for training, constitute an additional obstacle, particularly for small businesses. Even when there is a willingness to comply with the law, the objective conditions for doing so are not in place.

4-3 A two-speed sector : formal constraints, informal freedom

Analysis of the data reveals a form of duality within the sector. On the one hand, some companies are forced to adjust their practices, particularly when dealing with suppliers who are themselves subject to strict controls, such as importers or distributors of subsidized products. In such cases, payment traceability becomes essential, and the use of banking facilities is gradually becoming the norm, even if reluctantly.

On the other hand, the majority of transactions still escape the scrutiny of the tax authorities. As long as end customers do not demand invoices and cash payments are accepted without verification, there is still considerable scope for evasion. This two-tier system prevents the standardization of practices and limits the real scope of the reform.

This imbalance also creates a sense of tax injustice: companies subject to the rules are penalized financially and administratively, while those operating on the margins of the system continue to prosper without bearing the same burdens. This reinforces reluctance to formalize and undermines the reform's goal of tax fairness.

4-4 Indirect effects more visible than direct impacts

One of the paradoxes highlighted in this study is that, although the reform was perceived as restrictive, it did not have a major direct impact on sales. Transaction volumes appear to have been little affected, and profit margins remained relatively stable. This observation might suggest that the reform is economically neutral, but this apparent stability masks another reality.

In fact, the indirect effects, although more subtle, may be more structural in the long term. Some companies are beginning to consider transitioning to electronic payment methods, formalizing their relationships with suppliers, and rethinking their financial management mechanisms. These developments, still in their infancy, indicate a paradigm shift that is underway but will take time to become firmly established.

The reform is therefore less of an immediate upheaval than a gradual lever for transformation. Its success will depend on the government's ability to accompany it with complementary initiatives aimed at supporting companies in this transition.

4-5 The need for targeted and progressive support

Faced with the observed limitations, it becomes clear that fiscal constraint alone is not enough to transform a sector where informality is the norm. If the law sends a strong signal, it cannot, on its own, change deeply ingrained behaviors. The transition to banking and formalization requires appropriate support, both technical, financial, and educational.

It becomes imperative to strengthen banking infrastructure, facilitate access to digital management tools, and above all, act upstream by encouraging retailers to adopt more transparent practices. Without the final customer's buy-in, any reform will remain partial.

Similarly, a more incentive-based approach rather than a punitive one could be considered, particularly by offering tax benefits to companies that adopt traceable payment methods, or by subsidizing the acquisition of payment terminals for small businesses. It is about creating an environment where compliance becomes more attractive than avoidance.

General conclusion

The reform of stamp duty on cash payments is part of a broader strategy to modernize the Algerian tax system. In a sector as strategic as agri-food wholesale, it has highlighted the tensions between the State's objectives and the economic realities on the ground.

The companies surveyed show a clear awareness of the challenges and a sometimes latent desire to evolve. But they are confronted with a structurally unsuitable environment, where informality remains dominant, banking penetration is low, and modernization tools are largely inaccessible.

The results of this survey thus reveal a reform with ambivalent effects: little visible in the short term on economic and commercial levels, but potentially structuring if it is part of a comprehensive transformation policy. It is not just about taxing cash payments, but about building a true strategy of progressive, inclusive, and realistic formalization.

Ultimately, the issue goes far beyond the question of stamp duty: it is the very place of the informal economy in the national productive fabric that is being questioned. Successfully navigating this transition requires a long-term vision, collaboration between the public and private sectors, and above all, a reform designed not against economic actors, but with them.

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