

**FILM SCRIPT "HANDSOME ONION NEEDN'T WORRY ABOUT THE MARKET SLUMP"
BURKINA FASO**

Presentation of the film	
Title:	Handsome onion needn't worry about the market slump
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In Mogtédó, the farmers know this: to convince buyers, Handsome Onion has to show its best face, peeled down close to the flesh and free of its unsightly skins. But when the market is down, it takes more than charm to make a sale. This is the challenge that producers are successfully meeting in Mogtédó, a rice and market-gardening co-operative in the centre of Burkina Faso.

Narrator 1:

National Route number 4 cuts across Burkina from East to West over a distance of nearly 400 kilometres, headed to Togo, Niger and Benin.

Narrator 2:

The national highway, the plain and the market. These are the heart and lungs of Mogtédó, the village of businessmen farmers, the only ones who regulate onion sales from here to Togo.

Narrator 3:

How do these market gardeners operate? Producers from a co-operative called Sogecam have come all the way from the Sourou region to learn about this market. The secretary general Zou Zon and six other farmers have made the 400-km journey to see for themselves, to listen and understand.

Zou Zon 1:

"We heard there were other producers in neighbouring regions. Like us, they grow crops, but they don't have any trouble marketing their produce. We had to come and see how they do it. We say that an informed person is a well-trained person. We want to learn the strategy that they employed to pull themselves out of the mess of commercialisation."

Narrator 4:

This year in Mogtédó, a 120-kilogram bag of onions costs only 10 000 CFA francs. Surprising? Not really. With the amount of land available, Burkina could double its onion production from 50,000 to 100,000 tonnes. This is still relatively little compared to the 400,000 tonnes produced in neighbouring Niger.

But from December to April, the harvest season in Burkina, the market is flooded and prices plunge. Six months later scarcity sets in and prices increase by a factor of ten. Onions must be imported from the Netherlands, Niger or Benin. The farmers dread these price fluctuations that they cannot control.

Zou Zou 2:

“The problem is the drop in prices. There is no price stability; it is something that is determined by the customer. He has the luxury of setting whatever price he wants. The producer is obliged to sell his harvest to the buyer, because he is in a position of need.

If we take the example of previous years, we were able to sell bags at 25,000 francs early in the season. But this year, we couldn't even think about getting that much. The price started out at 15,000 francs not even a week ago. Today we are at around 4,500, 4,000, 3,500 and even 3,000 the bag.”

Narrator 5:

Five years ago, the farmers of Mogtedo experienced what Zou calls “the market drama”. Their main customers, Togolese traders, would come with enormous sacks and load up on onions directly from the fields. The market gardeners were speechless. They were selling mountains of onions, but their pockets remained empty.

Narrator 6:

One man refused to submit to this fate. Moumouni Ouédraogo is the president of the Mogtedo co-operative. This rice farmer is also a major onion producer, with 60 sacs already sold this season.

Moumouni Ouédraogo 1

This organisation was put in place after 2003. It is our way of dealing with the dishonesty of buyers. They were bringing their own larger bags, so we had to set up an organisation to control the size of the sacks. If you bring a big bag, it will be rejected. That is how we started. Afterwards, we began to set the prices ourselves.

Moumouni Ouédraogo 2

What's more, the buyers understood that people were waking up, and as we continued, they had to accept it and work together with us .

Narrator 6

The informal mechanism set up by the Mogtedo farmers to manage the supply of onions is impressively simple and efficient. It is largely inspired by a similar system used by the co-operative for marketing rice. It is important to note, however, that the co-operative is not directly involved in onion sales.

In the onion business, there are two kinds of markets: the free market and the regulated market. The free market is found in the village.

Narrator 15

Sétou lives in Mogtedo and sells her products at the roadside to passing travellers. She buys her onions at the village market, alongside merchants from Ouaga, Koupéla, Pouytenga and other parts of Burkina. The prices fluctuate freely. But foreign traders are not allowed to shop here.

The regulated market, the larger of the two, is intended to control the price of onions bound for export. It serves primarily Togolese businessmen – numbering about 100 – as well as Burkinan exporters and resellers, called “Bisa”. By mail, messenger, and by telephone, customers indicate the quantities they need. The buyers come with their bags and pay the price that is fixed ahead of time by the sellers but which is negotiable. Two farmers, whose homes serve as sales points, offer the buyers lodgings.

Narrator 7

Da Moussira is a trader. She comes from Togo. She sleeps at selling point number 1, where she has the use of a room for herself and her two employees. This woman has no less than 3 million CFA francs in cash on her person at any given time.

Unlike other places where farmers will sell on credit, here everything is paid in cash. The “hosts” therefore ensure the security of their guests and their belongings. But these services are not the only reason Da Moussira is in Mogtedo. She is here for the local onions, which she judges to be of higher quality than those of Niger and Malanville in Benin.

Da Moussira 1

These onions, one can keep them for up to a month in a shop and sell little by little. It is harder to conserve onions from Malanville and from Niger.

Onions from Malanville cost only 4,000 francs per bag, but the quality is lower. Those onions don't keep for more than three weeks. It's true that the price here is higher, but the quality is superior. That is why we prefer to come here.

Narrator 8

Other workers in the regulated market include those responsible for distributing bags. Missiri Zagré is one of them.

Missiri Zagré 1

I am the supervisor for the onion market. I hand out the bags. Sometimes it happens that certain producers do not respect the decisions that we have reached together, and take bags to sell directly to the traders. For example, a producer could offer to sell a bag of onions at 8,500 francs, instead of the 10,000 francs agreed upon by the group. If I collect the bags, it avoids this kind of negotiation. The merchant is thus obliged to pay the agreed price for onions.

Missiri Zagré 1

If the trader does not follow this rule, and goes to see a producer directly to buy their onions, both parties are fined. That is why, once the traders arrive, they come to me directly to give me their bags.

Narrator 9

The trader can come to the fields accompanied by the distributor of bags to check on the quality of the onions, which he can accept or reject. When a deal is struck, the producer delivers his onions. The bag distributor keeps a sum of 100 francs per bag sold. This money pays for the costs of communication, transportation of traders to the production site, and the transportation of produce from the field to the market. The money also helps to pay the wages of handlers and clerks.

Narrator 10

Alongside the traders and the bag handlers there is another group of workers, the clerks. They negotiate transportation to ship the merchandise, oversee the shipping and keep track of statistics. As of April, 10,027 bags of onions had been exported, or about 1,200 tonnes.

Narrator 11

Another important component of regulation in the marketplace is the onion police. They enforce the informal rules that are agreed upon by all, but not formally written down.

Moumouni Ouédraogo 3

If someone does not respect the rules and tries to buy directly, if they show up, we show them off.

Narrator 12

This rigour is denounced by the Togolese trader who accuses the farmers of not playing fair. A few weeks ago, the price of onions was set at 15,000 francs per bag.

Da Moussira 2

When we first arrived, we were given the price of 15,000 francs, which we accepted. But day after day, the price rose and led to speculation by some farmers. They were holding onions in storage and not selling for less than 18,000 francs, when we had agreed on 15,000 francs.

Moumouni Ouédraogo 4

We fix a price below which it is forbidden to sell, but if the price is higher there is no problem. If the buyer sees onions for sale at 10,000 francs and sees your onions at 11,000 francs and agrees to take them, that's fine. If the buyer doesn't want to pay that much, he will not buy them. Below the fixed price, we are opposed, but above the fixed price we are not opposed.

Narrator 13

In Mogtedo, despite the generally low prices this year, onions are paying well.

Yacouba Ouédraogo 1

This is our version of coffee-cocoa crops..

Narrator 13

Here, many fortunes have been built on the sale of onions.

Ladji Boureima Kaboré 1

The fact that our buyers come from far away is very beneficial to us. If you find yourself after the harvest with 100 bags of onions, that you have to sell bag by bag at the village market, it's not profitable. But thanks to the Togolese merchants, we can move onions in bulk quantities. This allows us to make a lot more money and carry out our projects.

Narrator 14

With about thirty children and grandchildren, Ladji is thankful to onions for allowing him to keep his family together.

Ladji Boureima Kaboré 2

The onion business is profitable. Since we have been growing onions our children have been able to stay in the village. They don't have to go away. We are able to satisfy their needs. Young people can look after themselves. Some have built homes and married thanks to the sale of onions.

Missiri Zagré 3

I built this house with the proceeds of the onion business. I bought materials and built it little by little, until it was completed.

Narrator 16

If the onions from Mogtedo are of high quality and keep well, it is due to the technical mastery of the producers. Seydou Gorou, a producer from Sogecam, explains the difference in practices here.

Seydou Gorou 1

Here they use three bags: two of NPK and one of urea. Where I come from, some use up to five bags of fertiliser, four bags of NPK and one of urea. Sometimes others use three bags of NPK. During planting we also use bad seed. All of this has the result that when we try to store onions, they rot.

Narrator 17

The purchase of good, high-priced seeds at 25,000 francs per kilogram, choosing the right growing periods, proper application of fertilisers and pesticides supplemented by organic manure, proven conservation techniques... The effective marketing of onions starts before the seeds are even placed in the ground. Other

factors that contribute to success include African-style marketing which mingles hospitality and business. Constant communication plays an important role: one must not hesitate to contact customers when necessary. And that's not all: there also has to be fairness and transparency to maintain group discipline and avoid disintegration.

Missiri Zagré 4

Once you are organised in a group, and one member is unhappy for some reason or another, if you do not look after their complaints, that person will ruin everything. Because frustration starts with one person, and then two, and it continues until it poisons the whole group. The dissolution of the association is then inevitable.

Narrator 18

Another strength: National Route number 4

Narrator 19

Here, negotiating with empty trucks that are headed back to Togo, instead of renting them ahead of time is a tremendous advantage. The low cost of transportation allows buyers to absorb the relatively high cost of onions in Mogtedo.

Narrator 20

What could endanger this carefully-built structure? The silting up of the dam and the isolation of Mogtedo. To sell, one first has to produce. Unfortunately, production conditions are worsening. And the cost of dredging the waterway which is gradually filling with sand amounts to tens of millions of CFA francs, a sum that only the State or another large institution can afford.

Narrator 21

The second danger is isolation, which makes Mogtedo vulnerable.

Moumouni Ouédraogo 5

If only Mogtedo applies this system, it will not work for very long. This year we already feel threatened. Because there are other villages that sell cheaper than we do. The buyers are aware of that.

Narrator 22

And if all of the onion producers in Burkina got together to form a sort of onion OPEC? Easier said than done. But Zou believes in it firmly. He unveils his battle plan when he arrives back in Sourou.

Zou Zon 3

"We cannot simply tell the others to change overnight. If we are going to get to work, it is necessity that will motivate us to go to work, to make use of our experience and show others what we have seen in Mogtedo, and that is what we need to do here in order to face these difficulties... this dramatic situation. This is what gives us hope that we can pass on this message and that others will follow us and respect the idea and change the situation."

Narrator 23

His host, the president Moumouni Ouédraogo, dreams of specialised agro-ecological areas at the national scale, in order to improve sales .

Moumouni Ouédraogo 6

If we all set out to produce the same thing, there will be overproduction that won't help anybody. We are working hard to feed others who don't have to work to feed themselves, while we tire ourselves out and do not eat well.

Narrator 23

A trade-unionist's vision which must be placed in the context of the rising cost of living and the stagnating incomes of consumers.

End