



## Market gardening in Bagré and Loumbila

# The cries of distress from producers

**COVID-19 has hit market gardeners in Bagré, in the Centre-East region, and in Loumbila, in the Central Plateau, hard. In the absence of appropriate storage facilities, they have lost everything and no longer know where to turn. Testimonies!**



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**Boukaré Kéré, onion producer:** "Here, there are no positive cases of the coronavirus, but we are suffering the consequences of the disease."



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**The producer, Pascal Dakissaga:** "We are not taken into account in the social measures against the pandemic".



Onions rotting on the ground after the rain.

A stretch of water as far as the eye can see, an expanse of developed plains, rice crops, market gardens, bananas plants, etc. We are on the perimeter of the Bagré dam, one of the largest hydraulic structures in Burkina Faso, located in the Centre-East region, 240 km from Ouagadougou. Here, a growth pole project called "Bagré Pole" for agri-food production is implemented.

Producers in this locality have been hard hit by the adverse effects of the pandemic. "We have not yet recorded a positive case of the coronavirus, but we are suffering the consequences of the disease », laments Boukaré Kéré, a market gardener who has been producing vegetables for over a decade. He has never suffered so many losses as this year. With an investment of 650,000 CFA francs, he harvested 60 bags of onions (200kg), and expected to earn 1.8 million CFA francs. However, this was without counting on the COVID 19 health crisis and its consequences on the economy, which led to the closure of markets and borders.

"Out of my 60 bags, I was able to sell 25 to 15 thousand francs each against 30 thousand francs in

normal times. Imagine what I have lost," he says. A little mental calculation gives a loss of more than one million CFA francs, a serious setback for this producer. With great detail, his lips dried by Lent on 7 May 2020, Mr Kéré recounts the events of his bankruptcy. One morning, he called his buyer, based in Lomé, Togo, to collect his production. The two agree on a date that will not be respected because of the closure of the borders due to COVID-19.

### When the rain comes

After realising that the measure does not apply to freight vehicles, the two agree on a new date. Unfortunately, the day before, unexpectedly, the rain opened its floodgates on Bagré in the middle of April. The new date was postponed until the wet onions dried out.

"But when the rain beats the onions, there is no solution," reveals Mr Kéré, his face pale. At the third meeting, after sorting, only 25 bags of onions could be sold, he confides, shaking his head, as if to deny the evidence. Ousséni Zabsonré,

another market gardener in Bagré, at the age of 50, has also suffered the collateral effects of the coronavirus disease. Dressed in a grey boubou, the slender man with the thick white beard leads us to the storage site for his onions. Under a leafy mango tree, rotting onions on the ground constitute the sad scene. This loss is due to the long wait for Togolese buyers, the sun and the rain.

"This is where I had stored my production. If you had come earlier, you could have seen the extent of my losses," he says, his eyes riveted on the pile of rotting onions. Out of 30 bags of produce, 15 were sold, after sorting, at 15,000 CFA francs per bag, a price below the usual 30,000 CFA francs. The rest, more or less consumable, was shared with neighbours. "In the absence of cash, it is better to benefit from the blessings of the neighbours," he consoles himself. Some producers were able to sell a bag for more than 15,000 CFA francs. This is the case of Edmond Sinaré, another farmer installed on the Bagré plain since 1996. But he will not soon

forget the COVID-19. He has lost 500,000 CFA francs on his 50 bags of onions sold to Ghanaian buyers at 20,000 each.

### Falling prices

As in Bagré, off-season farmers in Loumbila, in the Central Plateau region, have not been spared the shockwave of COVID-19. The restrictive measures taken by the government to curb the spread of the disease have led to almost the same results alarming.

Losses in quantities produced, falling market prices. "With the closure of markets and borders, and the quarantine of towns, we were no longer able to sell our produce, and buyers were no longer coming," recalls producer Rosalie Sawadogo, while breastfeeding her baby. As a result, producers have been forced to sell a 50kg bag at between 4,000 and 7,500 CFA francs, whereas it used to sell for at least 10,000 CFA francs before the pandemic, says the president of the National Union of Onion Producers of Burkina Faso (UNAPOB),

### What about post-harvest losses

The consultant agronomist, Justin Savadogo, defines post-harvest losses (PHL) as "any plant, animal or fish production initially intended for human consumption that could not be consumed due to various causes during operations of harvesting, drying, threshing/graining, winnowing and storage. According to him, PPRs significantly reduce the income and food resilience of producers, and hence of the whole country. "They also reduce the nutritional and market value of food products," he adds. In order to better orientate interventions, Sawadogo lets know that the state should carry out a systematic evaluation of the level of post-harvest losses throughout the country and in all sectors. "In any case, the magnitude of the phenomenon of post-harvest food losses is such that strong actions are needed to reduce Burkina Faso's food dependency," he pleads.

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The market gardener, Rosalie Sawadogo: "We are asking for help from the Ministry of Agriculture to build good conservation infrastructures".



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For the president of the CPF, Bassiaka Dao, the State must facilitate the realization of conservation infrastructures and agro-food processing units.



According to the DG of the rural economy promotion, Dr Abdelaziz Ouédraogo, the problem of post-harvest losses and agricultural infrastructures is taken seriously by the Ministry of Agriculture.

to the diktat of traders. "Market garden products are highly perishable, and buyers, especially foreign ones, are "price-makers" and blackmail producers. The situation has worsened with COVID-19, as we export most of our vegetable productions to neighbouring countries," denounces the director of the promotion of the rural economy, Dr Abdelaziz Ouédraogo.

**"The state must fulfil its regalian mission..."**

René Soalla. Faced with these unexpected and "unprecedented" dry losses, the producers are all looking to the political authorities. They want their share of social measures against COVID.19. "We are not taken into account in the social measures to help people cope with the pandemic. We are bankrupt but the prices of inputs remain unchanged. We also have to pay back the loans we took out for the campaign," explains Pascal Dakissaga, a producer. As for Mr Zabsonré, he had to negotiate the postponement of the payment of his employees to next year, hoping for better results. Distraught, the producers expect a lot from the state. "We don't know how to tackle the upcoming wet season. If the government does not come to our aid with working capital and inputs, it is not obvious that we will be able to grow vegetables next season," says Mr Kéré.

#### Post-harvest losses, a recurrent phenomenon

If in 2020, the coronavirus disease has accentuated the loss of production, the problem does not seem new. "Post-harvest losses are a recurring phenomenon," lets know Bassiaka Dao, president of the Confédération Paysanne du Faso (CPF). According to the Ministry of Agriculture,

12% to 30% of agricultural production is lost each year in Burkina Faso. For farmers, the lack of appropriate storage infrastructures is the main cause. Daniel Tapsoba has been a market gardener in Loumbila, in the Central Plateau, for three decades. Tomatoes, onions, aubergines and chillies are among the crops he grows on a two-hectare plot. While most of these products are sold as soon as they reach maturity, his onions are stored under trees, in granaries and in houses, while waiting for remunerative prices. Mr. Tapsoba knows that this is an inconvenient way to store his onions, given the losses he experiences every year. "Onion production is very profitable. But the lack of adequate conservation infrastructure

is a real concern for us," he recognizes. The desire to acquire storage and conservation equipment is hampered by the lack of financial resources. According to President Soalla, producers are aware of the issue, but conservation infrastructures are expensive. For a quality conservation warehouse that meets standards and can hold 10 to 12 tons of onions, a minimum of 5 million CFA francs is needed. An amount that he finds out of reach of the market gardeners. "We see that in the areas of Koudougou and Banzon, onion storage sheds that can hold 20 tons are built. But we do not have the means to build these infrastructures, cold rooms and others that cost millions," argues Kéré

Boukaré. For Pascal Dakissaga, the inaccessibility to effective means of storage and conservation, in addition to causing crop losses and revenue, forces farmers to produce at a minimum. "The lack of infrastructure limits our production capacities. Because if you can't sell quickly, you make losses. So, we can't engage in large-scale production," he says. As a result, the country is forced to resort to imports to meet the national demand for certain market garden products.

"We produce at a time when, due to the lack of conservation infrastructures, we are forced to sell off our productions, only to run after other countries to import the same products more expensive," laments the president of onion producers. Worse, the market gardeners are subject

Tired of living in this situation, Rosalie Sawadogo and her fellow farmers are calling on the state to help. "We are asking the Ministry of Agriculture to help us build good conservation infrastructures and fight against plant infections. This will allow us to increase our productions," she implores. They are supported by the CPF, which calls on the authorities to fully fulfill their regalian mission in supporting production. "The construction of infrastructure for storage and conservation of agricultural products is primarily the responsibility of the state. What prevents the state to build a large store in each commune?", asks its president. But the role of the State, he continues, should not be limited to the realization, it must get involved in



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For lack of appropriate infrastructure, Daniel Tapsoba ...



...resorted to system D.



management to ensure that the private sector can effectively take over before handing over the infrastructures to cooperatives or groups. To do this, Mr. Dao invites the State to learn from the failure of the management of the UCOBAM cold rooms. The farmers' organizations' umbrella organization also calls on the government to facilitate the establishment of agri-food processing units, beyond the "frequently political discourse frequently repeated". The head of the CPF says he cannot understand why Burkina Faso does not yet have a large tomato processing unit in Loumbila or Yako or a large dairy in Dori, given the potentialities there!

On the side of the ministry in charge of agriculture, it is argued that the problem of post-harvest losses (PPR) and agricultural infrastructures is "taken seriously". According to the Director General of the Rural Economy Promotion, Dr. Abdelaziz Ouédraogo, his department has set up programs to build agricultural infrastructures in order to reduce PPR. For him, since 2016, thirty processing units have been built or are under construction. These include tomato processing units in Di, Bobo-Dioulasso, cassava in Diébougou, peanuts in Ganrango, potatoes in Titao. Not to mention the latest infrastructure, the Loumbila cold storage facility, inaugurated on May 28, 2020.

Faced with the inability of the state to meet the needs of the agricultural world in terms of infrastructures, the ministry advises producers to use traditional techniques for the storage and conservation of agricultural products which are successful.

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