



Episode Four: Group orders for fertilizer

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Synopsis

Group ordering is a system of obtaining supplies of inputs based on centralized demand from farmers which is channelled through their producers' organizations (PO), and subsequently through the unions of these organizations and their federations. The arrangement involves the POs and their unions and federations in negotiating sales directly with agreed suppliers, ensuring distribution of inputs, among other things. The management board of the Albarka union reviews this activity and programmes the next purchase.

Characters

Parsidan: the union Chair

Chair of Group Orders Committee (GOC)

Rabi: Secretary of Group Orders Committee

Sadjo: Member of Group Orders Committee

Biba: Union facilitator

Adamou: Radio show host

Saidou: Manager of input shop

Djibo: Extension agent from the Department of Agriculture

Alhaji Bashir: Fertilizer retailer

Aissa and Hadjo: Two women farmers

➤ Scene 1: Meeting of management board of the Albarka union

Harvest time is drawing to a close. Management board members of the Albarka union meet to review activities that have been carried out and to prepare a group fertilizer order for the coming season. Attending the meeting are the union Chair and facilitator and training officers from the Department of Agriculture.

Music: Cue in theme music. Keep for 30 seconds and crossfade.

Parsidan (Chair of union): *(after the traditional greetings, he checks the presence of people called to the meeting)* Sarkin Noma (agricultural extension agent), are you there?

Djibo: Yes, Chair. I am here. This meeting is as critical for the POs as it is for the Department of Agriculture. I wouldn't think about not being present.

Parsidan: We believe that. We want this meeting to reach a wide audience. I am sure that the community radio show hosts are also here?

Adamou (radio show host): Yes, Chair. We are here. Yesterday we broadcast news about the meeting, to inform people wanting to participate. We have also produced an awareness-raising radio programme, to remind listeners of the aims of group orders. Biba, the union facilitator who is here today, was on the programme to answer our questions. Did you not hear the radio broadcast?

Parsidan: Yes, yes. I take my radio wherever I go, and it is tuned into your station. Biba, your advice is very useful for farmers. I have also noticed that, thanks to your awareness-raising programmes, women have become more active in our union.

Biba: Yes Chair. They have really understood all the advantages to be had from being members of a producers' union.

Parsidan: Good. Now that I know everyone is here, we are going to hear from members of the union's group orders committee. Let me remind everyone that the aim of our meeting is to review the activities carried out during the 2012 winter season and to prepare the group orders for the 2012-2013 off-season. We must not overlook any of the farmers' needs. Who wants to take the floor? The secretary or the committee chair?

Chair of group orders committee (GOC): Rabi, the secretary, will speak first. She has all the papers with her.

Rabi: We have worked together: members of the union's group orders committee, managers of input shops and members of POs. Here are the main points to emerge from a review of the activities conducted: for this year's winter season, we have ordered 15 tonnes of NPK and 15 tonnes of urea from the supply centre. That comes to about 8 100 000 FCFA. The farmers also specifically asked for DAP. Unfortunately, there was none on the local market. If we include all expenses (purchase price, transport costs, loading and unloading charges and fees for the union etc.), the cost of the orders rises to 8 390 000 FCFA. At present, all these stocks are exhausted. Or almost. The money earned for the union, through the input shop, has been deposited in our "Bon Batou" mutual account.

Parsidan: Thank you Rabi for all this information. If none has anything else to add, let's begin organizing the group order for our out-of-season cultivation.

Chair of GOC: There are a few difficulties which should be noted Chair. First and foremost is the problem of mobilizing funds in time. That is the main difficulty encountered by the group orders committee. As you know, our farmers still have limited financial capacities...

Parsidan: How about applying to the savings and credit mutual to finance this operation?

Chair of GOC: Our concern here is the interest rate. It's sometimes very high.

Chair: We'll think about that, depending on the fertilizer requirements expressed by the members of our union. For the time being, let's first prepare the campaign for awareness raising and identifying needs. Starting tomorrow, we are going to undertake some fact-finding missions. *(addressing the radio show host)* Adamou, we need to broadcast the results of our work and let the farmers have our timetable for activities.

Sound of participants leaving. Cue in transition theme music. Keep for 20 seconds

➤ **Scene 2: Information and awareness-raising campaign**

The Chair of the union and members of the GOC gather in front of the input shop.

Parsidan: *(addressing members of the GOC):* As you know, our union has 37 grassroots POs, with 1 500 members. As well as the radio broadcasts, Biba, the union facilitator, has informed the PO officials and members of their group orders committee, of our meeting today. Let's go. They have probably already arrived.

Voices: *"Let's go, let's go. We can't keep them waiting. Many of them haven't finished harvesting." A few seconds later, the sound of greetings signals the arrival of the mission.*

Parsidan: *(after the traditional greetings):* I see that everyone is here. You know why we are here. Each year, we meet to begin the process of grouping together our orders for fertilizer. You know how important this operation is. It enables us to negotiate a better price, and most of all to get good quality fertilizer in sufficient quantities, at the right time, when we need it. Using this fertilizer on our crops enables us to increase our yields.

A PO official: We are grateful to the union for everything it does to improve our agricultural production and our living standards. Before, we had to travel to the capital, Niamey, 80 kms away, to buy inputs. It was very expensive and sometimes, the products we were sold were not good quality. I remember buying a year's worth of fertilizer from Alhaji Bashir, but it was clay.

Another PO official: Since we have been able to benefit from these facilities, Parsidan, use of fertilizer has become widespread. Nearly all men and women farmers now use fertilizer made available by the union even before the first rains. And throughout the season, we can get supplies from the input shop.

Parsidan: *Alhamdoudoulaye.* That is the goal we are aiming for. Since we are all aware of the benefits of making group orders, let us get down to work. The management committees and your input ordering committees must identify the requirements, farmer by farmer – those who need large amounts and those who only want a few kilos, and they must also assess the needs of farmers who are not union members.

Another PO member: This year, we will have larger requirements. We have received membership applications from new farmers.

Chair of the union: That is good news. Our POs will become even more viable. Let's see, normally, how long does it take us to collect the requirements of all our farmers?

Biba: *(addressing Parsidan).* I remember that we give the POs a maximum time limit of one month to fill in the forms and send them back to the union. Once all the requests for fertilizer have been centralized at union level, we organize a planning meeting to confirm them. We stress the need for identifying farmers' requirements, whether or not they are union members, because we are anxious to satisfy the demand of all farmers, both men and women, and because we want to be as clear as possible about the volumes of inputs to order.

Parsidan: Perfect. You know what you have to do. Once the requirements have been determined, don't forget to move on to collecting funds, for "money makes the sinews of war."

Sound of people dispersing. Cue in transition theme music and crossfade after 20 seconds

➤ **Scene 3: Mobilizing financial resources**

Two women farmers review their season's output and make projections for the coming year.

Arrival of a member of the input ordering committee for their PO, to identify their requirements

Sound of millet being pounded and women chatting.

Sadjo: Good morning ladies. I'm drawing up a list of requests for fertilizer. This year I'm seeing strong demand. Have you worked out your requirements?

Aissa: Of course Sadjo. The two of us, Hadjo and I, are going to take a sack of 15 15 15. You can register the order in my name.

Sadjo: Noted. You will be given one month to pay the sum corresponding to your requirements. Union members will pass by to collect the money. Good day ladies. By the way, Aissa, would you put aside the sheep that you are fattening. I will need it for Tabaski!

Aissa: If it pleases God! Good day Sadjo.

Sounds: of millet being pounded. Cue in transition theme music and crossfade after 20 seconds.

➤ **Scene 4: Planning meeting for group order activities after all requirements have been centralized by the Albarka union and funds collected by the grassroots POs.**

Sound of chairs and participants at the meeting

Chair of the union: (after the traditional greetings) Rabi (the secretary), could you give us a summary of the requirements from the different POs?

Rabi: Based on the 400 forms outlining individual requests, the fertilizer requirements have risen to 50 tonnes (1 000 sacks). We will need 30 tonnes of 15 15 15 and 20 tonnes of urea. The union's input shop estimates it will need 10 tonnes: 7 tonnes of 15 15 15 and 3 tonnes of urea. To cover all these needs, we must find the sum of 16 200 000 FCFA, without counting other expenses (transport, loading and unloading). The grassroots POs have collected the sum of 13 500 000 and the IS 2 700 000 FCFA. The total has been deposited in the union's account. Here are the receipts Parsidan. We'll give them to the procurement officer who must make contact with the suppliers.

Parsidan: I see that this year we have had no difficulties in mobilizing funds and that is a good thing.

Union secretary: Both men and women farmers have fully grasped the importance of this initiative and the role played by fertilizer in increasing their agricultural output. That is why they have had no hesitation in paying the amounts corresponding to their requirements.

Parsidan: That is to our credit. Good. I think that all that remains is for us to contact the suppliers. In this respect, we will choose those suppliers that make us the best quality/price offers, and who can deliver quality products when and where we want them.

Issou (procurement officer for the COG): Generally, we buy our fertilizer from CAIMA. Since CAIMA was unable to satisfy our requirements, we have turned to other suppliers.

Chair of the union: Very good. Issou (procurement officer). Take all the papers you will need for the transaction and have a good journey.

Music: Cue in closing theme music. Keep for 20 seconds and crossfade.

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End of Episode Four.

