

Letter from Victor

Mim
near Kumasi
Ghana
West Africa

Hi everyone!

My name is Victor Owusu and I live in the small village of Mim in Ghana. I am 17 and I have two brothers – Albert (11) and Opuku (5) – and one sister, Elizabeth (8).

I met the Comic Relief team here a few months ago. They told me all about the project you are doing about Fairtrade and chocolate. It sounds great!

My dad is a cocoa farmer, so I'm pretty well up on what goes on at this end of the chocolate chain. Cocoa farming is very hard work, especially at planting and harvest times, so we all have to help out. It can be fun working with your whole family (even Elizabeth helps), but it can also be dangerous, as there are poisonous snakes and we often have to work in bare feet or sandals. I would love a pair of Wellington boots, which would make things a lot less scary.

Growing up is pretty difficult in a poor country. I started secondary school, and I really wanted to continue studying. I even got top marks in my exams! But my family couldn't afford to pay the school fees, so I couldn't carry on, which was a big disappointment. I love cars and would like to become a driver and see the world, but it's really expensive to learn to drive (and even if I did there's no way I could afford my own car!), so I'm going to be an apprentice motor mechanic instead.

Our lives have been different and much better since we joined the Kuapa Kokoo co-operative – especially for Dad, who is now the proud President of the Mim Kuapa Kokoo Village Society! Kuapa Kokoo is really good cocoa – it's the best! We say our cocoa is 'Pa Pa Paa', which means 'the best of the best'. Kuapa give us the best price for it and at the end of the season we get a bonus. But we still don't earn much money – in fact hardly anything compared to you in the 'rich' countries.

I really don't want to be a cocoa farmer, because it's hard work and you earn so little. The living conditions in the village are tough, too – we don't have any electricity or running water. People don't respect cocoa farmers, but they should, because it's a really

important job and our country needs them. Most young people these days, though, go to the city to look for work, because that's where the money is. My dad understands how I feel. So I'll go to the city and come back to help him on the farm at the busy times of year. I know I'm really going to miss all my family and friends when I go, though!

To make a bit of extra cash I go to Kumasi market on Sundays and sell some handkerchiefs or biscuits. I buy the biscuits in bulk from the supermarket and then sell them a few at a time to people passing by in the market. It is my little business and it makes me really happy when it is going well. I don't sell chocolate, you can't really get it here, it's too expensive. In fact, I've never tried Divine and Dubble chocolate! I'd like to one day, because it uses our cocoa, Kuapa cocoa, and it's our chocolate.

I'm really into Hip Hop and Reggae music. My favourite MC is Achamin – he's got a great voice. I listen to music on my radio, but the batteries keep running out and it costs a lot of money to replace them!

I would love to visit Great Britain one day. I imagine that it is very beautiful, with big, noisy, busy cities and lots going on. People have lots of things that we only dream of having – cars, videos, TVs, music and fashionable clothes. Do you all have electricity in your houses? What do you see on TV? Maybe even pictures of Africa!

I think that it's great that you can make such a difference to me and my family by being smart about how you shop and by choosing to buy fairly traded products, especially chocolate bars! I do hope that you enjoy this project – when I'm helping on the farm I'll think of you eating it, and when you eat it, think of me too!

Best wishes,

Victor

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