

Location report

Location:

Weather	Landscape
Family	Houses
Furniture and equipment	Water
Fun	Electricity
Schools	Roads and transport
Earning a living	Environment

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

Victor Owusu

A day in the life of Juliana and Collins

5am

Juliana wakes very early and starts her day by sweeping the compound of their house. She tidies the house and starts on household chores such as washing the children's dresses for the next day.

8am

Miracle (9) and Mary (6) wake up and Juliana washes them and helps them to get ready for school. They both go to the primary school in Apoyiase village so they can walk to school easily. Their eldest daughter, Abigail, is 12, and must stay with Collins' sister in Obuase where she attends the Adanse High International School. Her father tries to visit her most weekends.

After a quick breakfast of Ampesei (cooked plantain with sauce) the girls are off to school and Collins and Juliana leave for the three-mile walk to their cocoa farm.

**8am
to
2pm**

Juliana and Collins both spend most of their day working on the cocoa farm. They must weed and tend the ground if it is the planting season or work hard harvesting the yellow cocoa pods, cutting them from the trees and scooping out the cocoa beans inside, then wrapping them in plantain leaves to ferment for five days.

Their farm is 10 acres of cocoa trees, which grow in the style of an orchard, with plenty of space between trees and taller trees providing essential shade for the cocoa trees. Ducking under the branches in the farm, it is quiet, still and shady – footsteps are muffled by layers of browning cocoa leaves and they step around piles of blackened husks of empty pods.

2pm

The children are now back from school and play in the village – the young girls like to play a fast and furious handclapping game called 'Ampe'. Meanwhile, Juliana starts preparing the day's food on a wood fire – they might eat plantains or Red-Red (a mixture of smoked fish and beans together with fried plantain). She collects water from the village well – on average she will visit the well six times a day to collect water. Each bucket of water collected is charged at 50 pesewas (about 25p) to assist in the upkeep of the well (which was paid for by the European Union).

After lunch and tidying up Juliana walks for a mile along the forest tracks to reach their vegetable garden. Here she grows okra, tomatoes, yam and onions for the family to eat and also sells some in the market if she can.

4pm

Juliana returns home and starts the chores for making supper – collecting water, lighting the fire and cooking up vegetables from the garden. The family eats together in the early evening.

A day in the life of Lynda

Lynda lives in a longish single story house with mud and brick walls and a tin roof.

7am When I get up in the morning I take out my bed mat, shake it out and roll it up, then I pray to God. When I've done that I go and say hello to my dad.

Then I sweep my house and take the metal water jars to collect water – it's not too far and the jars aren't too heavy, so I don't mind doing it. Then I wash and clean my face and have breakfast.

Sometimes I even do a little homework.

8am I walk to school.

3pm After school, I walk home and get changed out of my uniform (the yellow and brown uniform which all Junior school children wear in Ghana). Then I help my mum in the kitchen. I help her to cook fufu - a kind of dumpling. It's made out of cassava and plantain. I cut them up and put them in the pot to boil. When they're cooked I mash them with a mortar and pestle.

5pm I eat. I love fufu, groundnut (peanut) soup and chicken.

6pm I'll play with my friends. I really like playing Ampe. Ampe is a jumping and clapping game played by two people, where each person jumps into the air at the same time, claps and lands in a different position. Certain positions 'win' over others.

7pm Then I do some more homework by the light of a gas lamp. The problem is when I want to do my homework my sister often takes the lamp, and then I cannot read!

9.30pm Then it's bedtime.

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