

“I LIVE IN TWO WORLDS”



Merit Buama has devoted her life to chocolate. The 32-year old manages contacts with cocoa farmers in West Africa for Alfred Ritter GmbH & Co. KG. She lived in Ghana for six years. In our interview, she explains why she prefers German public transport to the Ghanaian death cult and reveals which chocolate she just can't get enough of.

Merit Buama

1987

Born in Northern Germany

2005

One-year voluntary work in Ghana

2006 – 2012

Studied economics and agricultural economics

From 2012

Worked in a regional cocoa programme in West Africa for the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ).

Since 2018

West Africa programme manager for Ritter Sport

Ms Buama, does your job mean you like eating chocolate?

Not only do I like eating chocolate, it's almost a staple food for me. I particularly like the new cocoa class type DIE MILDE 55% – and of course the cocoa in it comes from Ghana.

What does your role as West Africa programme manager for Ritter Sport entail?

My role is very varied and that's one of the things I love about it. Visiting our partners on site is particularly inspiring, as well as strategic discussions with my colleagues on how we set up our supply chain. It's a challenge building a bridge between the cocoa farmers and Ritter. I am constantly moving between two worlds.

You know the “other world” better than most other people ...

That's true. I lived in Ghana for six years. I still travel to West Africa frequently. But at the moment my life is based back in Germany. My children are settling into day-to-day life here. After my years in Africa, I find living here very uncomplicated. I've come to appreciate efficient administration, punctuality and the good public transport system. Ghana is beautiful, the people are friendly, open and really

helpful. A lot of life takes place on the streets. The only thing I found hard was the deep rooted religiosity and the burial cult. But with tolerance, from me and from those I came into contact with in Ghana for my otherness, I was able to integrate myself quite well.

What does it mean for cocoa farmers to be a supplier for a company like Ritter?

Having a buyer like Ritter means financial security for the farmers. It enables them to invest in their cocoa production. At the same time, they benefit from our specific programmes – for example on issues like productivity, quality and environmentally friendly cocoa cultivation. We work closely with cooperatives as they are able to deliver the required quantities and ensure the quality of the beans. Whenever I visit our partners, I always bring Ritter products with me, because the farmers themselves hardly ever get to eat chocolate. It's important for us that the farmers know what happens to their cocoa and who Ritter are.

People often talk about Africa as though it were a single country and not a continent with 55 states*. What do you think about that?

I'm not familiar with the entire continent as I mainly deal with West Africa with short trips to North Africa and Ethiopia. By African standards, West Africa is

* Including West Sahara, which is not recognised by all nations



densely populated and economically it is currently very dynamic – Ivory Coast, Ghana, and Nigeria is one of the biggest economies in West Africa in any case. On the entire continent there are an incredible number of languages and ethnic groups and very different political, economic and cultural trends. I think it's important to differentiate between the countries. Even neighbouring countries like Ghana and Ivory Coast are very different in terms of their history, politics and economies. To lump Ghana together with Rwanda would be like equating Spain and Russia. Only a more detailed analysis allows you to take into account local conditions and utilise the potential for cooperation.

What major challenges do companies like Ritter or LAPP face in opening up the African market?

For me, political stability, available infrastructure and trusting, close cooperation with local partners are the keys to successfully opening up the market. It's also important to work with local personnel who know the area from day one. Also investing in young people with placements and apprenticeships to build up a strong employee base for the medium term.



Merit Buama brings chocolate every time she visits cocoa farmers



1

cocoa fruit is required for a bar of Ritter chocolate with 50 percent cocoa content.



100

percent sustainably produced cocoa is purchased by Ritter for its entire range.



1.5

percent energy savings per year is Ritter's target. The company wants to be net climate neutral by 2022.

More information about sustainability at Ritter can be found at:

www.ritter-sport.de/en_GB/Family-business-values/sustainability.html

