

Ivory Coast entrepreneur pours love and patriotism into fine chocolate

It was love at first sight for Viviane Kouame when, as a teenager growing up in Ivory Coast, she first saw cocoa trees with ripe pods on their trunks that reminded her of babies clinging to their mothers' backs.



Viviane Kouame, Ivorian chocolate artisan who aims to promote the country's origin, mixes chocolate paste during the production of chocolates at Chocovi, her chocolate factory in Abidjan, Ivory Coast on 13 April 2023. Reuters/Luc Gnago

She decided cocoa would be a part of her life, and in 2021 she set up her own company, Chocovi, to make and sell chocolate.

"I want to be the face of Ivorian chocolate," said Kouame, a rare female entrepreneur in a male-dominated industry.

Ivory Coast is the world's top producer of cocoa beans, but the vast majority are exported and then processed elsewhere, with Ivorians missing out on the added value.

Chocovi is one of only a small number of companies making chocolate locally. So far, Kouame and her five employees are

processing about two tonnes of cocoa per year and selling at stalls in malls in the commercial capital Abidjan, but she is seeking investors to scale up.

She expresses her patriotism through her elaborate packaging, with some chocolate bars shaped like a map of Ivory Coast and others wrapped in paper decorated with images of the country's beauty spots and cultural traditions.

Philomene Dable, a customer at a mall, was impressed with both form and content.

"I tasted the chocolate, it's pure, it's natural," she said, holding an elegant box wrapped in orange, white and green ribbons. "This box, with the national colours of Ivory Coast, it's wonderfully presented. I love it."

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