The next time you savor a steaming cup of hot chocolate, think of Shadrack Frimpong. Shadrack comes from Ghana where his father is one of the 1.6 million cocoa farmers who have made the country the world’s second leading exporter of cocoa. But there’s a catch.

“Many of the cocoa farmers, like my parents, whose hard work make this possible, live in rural areas with dire health issues. They lack nearby health facilities and struggle with infectious diseases. These challenges make them vulnerable to epidemics. For these farmers whose sweat drives the Ghanaian economy and, further, make it possible for you and me to enjoy our chocolate, this is an injustice.”

It’s an injustice that Shadrack is determined to change.

“For me, this issue is deeply personal. At age nine, I had an infection that nearly led to leg amputation because it took several months before my parents could find money to send me to the nearest hospital, five hours away.”

Shadrack says his parents are his greatest inspiration because, in spite of their abject poverty, they worked hard to provide him and his siblings with the opportunities they never had. While his father worked the cocoa farm, his mother traveled long distances to sell charcoal.

“My passions stem from my parents’ deep-seated convictions that if we strive hard enough, we can improve our own circumstances and positively transform the lives of others as well,” Shadrack says.

And his hard work did pay off. He won a full scholarship to the Ivy League’s University of Pennsylvania, the first person in his village of Tarkwa Breman to attend college in the United States. He says it was an incredible opportunity that changed the trajectory of his life.

He graduated in 2015 with a degree in Biology, honored as a university scholar and the first black student to be awarded the prestigious $150,000 President’s Engagement Prize (PEP).

“Despite my great fortune, I remembered how much my community had invested in me as a child,” says Shadrack, “and I was compelled to create meaningful change for my brothers and sisters back home.”
He returned to Tarkwa Breman to establish the nonprofit Cocoa360 with the PEP as seed funding and with a pioneering ‘agro-campus’ model, which uses proceeds from a community farm plantation to self-sustain a hospital and a school within easy reach for area residents.

“At Cocoa360, we believe that education fundamentally shapes a child’s lifelong health and impacts their ability to make sound health decisions,” says Shadrack. “We, therefore, go beyond medical treatment - focusing on education for the most vulnerable targets of risky health behaviors and infections-- young girls.”

In 2016, Shadrack established the first private, tuition-free girls’ elementary school and a community clinic, sharing a 40-acre cocoa plantation that will be developed over four years.

The “Health Equity Campus,” combines prevention programs and treatment measures to form an innovative approach to health care equity.

“This work is difficult - I will admit. However, I am equally motivated by the life-changing impact that we continue to achieve.”

Today, with 20 paid staff members, 90 students, and an annual reach of 2,500 patients, Cocoa360 continues to impact lives and serves as an inspiring example of excellent and sustainable community-based care.

Frimpong’s work has caught the attention of Buckingham Palace. Recently, he was chosen out of 4-thousand applicants to be a 2018 Queen’s Young Leader Award Winner, representing Ghana. He is excited to be traveling to England this year to receive the award from Queen Elizabeth.

Shadrack is a non-profit leader, public health researcher and scholar whose work is inspired by his background. The son of a peasant farmer and charcoal seller, he grew up without running water and electricity in rural Ghana. Yet, he became the first person from his village to attend college in the U.S, graduating from the University of Pennsylvania in 2015, winning the $150,000 President’s Prize, Penn’s highest honor. Shadrack founded Cocoa360 and pioneered the “farm-for-impact” health equity model...a tuition-free girls’ school and community hospital sustained by proceeds from a cocoa farm.