

# STORIES OF ENCOUNTER

## Thomas Awiapo

CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

GHANA



A grumbling belly, cries of hunger, fights over a small ration of food between starving siblings – vivid memories that CRS’ Thomas Awiapo recounts as he shares his story of survival as a child facing hunger in West Africa.

Orphaned at a young age, Thomas Awiapo is no stranger to being hungry. As a young boy in Tamale, Ghana, a village 300+ miles from the country’s capital, Accra, Thomas fought every day to find food in order to survive.

The second oldest of four young boys, became familiar with tragedy early on in life. His parents, along with two of his younger siblings died of malnutrition and his eldest brother abandoned him in search of food – events that as a small boy, have shaped Thomas’ life forever.

In his search for food, Thomas encountered CRS Ghana’s programing at an elementary school in his village. Food for education, a program set up to provide education to the most vulnerable children in places like Ghana, where a small meal is given every day in exchange

for the student’s enrollment and attendance at school. In this program, Thomas jokes that CRS “tricked him into going to school with a little snack” he also mentions that “this trick, saved his life”.

His journey and encounter with CRS Rice Bowl gave Thomas the chance to survive. He continued to pursue his studies and eventually won scholarships to attend college. Thomas now holds a master’s degree from California State University and is the father of four children, and as he proudly notes “all of whom will never know what it feels like to be hungry.”

This Lent, Thomas hopes to take you on a journey of encounter. He’d like to share with you, his personal story and the stories of our neighbors that have benefited from your participation in the CRS Rice Bowl Program.