



**SDG Champions**  
**2024**

# Minawao Refugee Camp, Cameroon

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## The Green Refugee Camp: 'changing the world's humanitarian footprint' (Cameroon)

- **DURATION**  
Completed
- **POPULATION 2024**  
**+63.000 Refugees**
- **URA SCOPE**  
ECOLOGY. Green Urbanism  
  
SOCIETY. Staying Human
- **TOPICS**  
ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE SHELTERS, REFORESTATION AND EDUCATION, COLLABORATION, RESTORING HARMONY
- **MAIN ACTORS**  
Land Life  
UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency

With 68.5 million displaced people worldwide, refugee crises are not just a human challenge but an environmental one. In Cameroon, the Minawao Refugee Camp tells this story vividly. Designed for 15,000 people, it now shelters over 63,000 Nigerians fleeing violence. This population surge has strained already fragile ecosystems. Deforestation has scarred the arid landscape, and competition for dwindling resources like firewood and water has heightened tensions between refugees and host communities.

By 2017, it was clear that the situation demanded a new approach. UNHCR, with the support of the Postcode Lottery and Land Life Company, launched a bold initiative: the Green Refugee Camp. This innovative model reimagines how we care for displaced people, blending global expertise with sustainable practices to address both immediate human needs and long-term environmental challenges.

The Postcode Lottery Group, a global leader in charity lotteries, is driven by a social mission. By raising funds for causes that span local charities to international NGOs, the Postcode Lottery empowers organizations to enact meaningful change.

Since 2002, its unwavering support has allowed UNHCR to go beyond emergency aid, enabling durable, life-changing solutions for refugees.

Land Life Company, a pioneer in reforestation, brings science, technology, and local communities together to restore degraded land. Their work aligns perfectly with the vision of the Green Refugee Camp, where restoring ecosystems benefits both nature and the people who depend on it.

Today, Minawao stands as a beacon of hope. Thanks to this unique partnership, barren landscapes are being revived, and lives are being transformed. The Green Refugee Camp is not just about survival—it's about creating a sustainable future where refugees and host communities can thrive together. This collaboration is proof that ingenuity and collective action can turn adversity into opportunity, restoring harmony between people and planet.





## Impact

The Green Refugee Camp Extra Project (2017–2018) delivered remarkable results, fostering hope and sustainability for both people and the planet. It introduced scalable models to reduce the environmental footprint of humanitarian efforts and safeguard natural resources for future generations.

### Pillar 1: Environmentally Sustainable Shelters

The project improved living conditions for 30,277 refugees. Over 5,217 families received sustainable shelter kits, while 2,352 families repaired weather-damaged shelters. Local production enabled the construction of essential community infrastructure, including classrooms, a community center, a nursery, and a police station.

### Pillar 2: Sustainable Cooking Alternatives

Eco-friendly stoves were provided to 9,345 households, benefitting 37,380 individuals. Training sessions educated 3,000 refugees and host community members on building and using energy-efficient stoves. Additionally, 150 women learned to construct improved traditional stoves, ensuring the continuity of these sustainable practices.

### Pillar 3: Environmental Protection Through Reforestation and Education

The project planted 38,731 trees, established 12 school nature clubs to care for trees and teach environmental stewardship, and reached 25,000 people through an awareness campaign. Three tree nurseries were also created to support reforestation efforts.

**Tangible Environmental Impacts:** The project introduced locally and sustainably sourced goods, reduced the carbon footprint of UNHCR materials, and implemented Cocoon technology to conserve water and increase tree survival rates.

**Tangible Health and Well-Being Impacts:** Benefits included fostering community bonds through education and action, reducing harmful gases from wood-burning stoves, eliminating long and dangerous walks for firewood, and improving mental health by greening the camp.

The project brought new tools to address technical and political challenges, enhanced the sustainability of UNHCR operations, and demonstrated immense potential for scalability and expansion.

## The Challenge

In 2018, escalating violence in neighbouring countries forced thousands of refugees into Cameroon, intensifying pressure on the country's already limited resources. Cameroon now shelters over 425,500 refugees. The Minawao refugee camp, originally built for 15,000 people, now accommodates 63,000, far exceeding its capacity. This population surge has strained resources such as water, firewood, and arable land, creating severe environmental and social challenges.

One critical issue is deforestation in the nearby Zamay Forest Reserve, where refugees have cut down trees, some considered sacred by local communities, to meet their basic needs for shelter and fuel. This has not only degraded the environment but also disrupted the cultural and spiritual significance of these resources. In neighbouring communities like Gawar, families face worsening firewood shortages and dwindling supplies of traditional thatching materials, essential for their livelihoods.

The strain on natural resources has heightened tensions between refugees and host communities, sparking concern among locals and the government. To address these intertwined challenges, the Green Refugee Camp model was introduced as a holistic solution. By integrating sustainable practices, this approach aims to meet immediate humanitarian needs while preserving the environment and fostering peaceful coexistence between refugees and their hosts.

## Solution Proposed

In 2017, UNHCR, and Land Life Company partnered to transform Minawao Refugee Camp into a Green Refugee Camp, blending sustainable practices to meet the needs of displaced populations while restoring the environment.

This initiative includes:

**Environmentally Sustainable Shelters** – Local, eco-friendly materials were used to build durable shelters, reducing carbon footprints and offering refugees secure, comfortable homes, while minimizing environmental impact.

**Sustainable Cooking Alternatives** – The introduction of energy-efficient stoves and sustainable briquette production reduced wood consumption, improved health by cutting down harmful smoke, and saved time for refugees. A “train-the-trainers” model helped ensure long-term adoption.

**Reforestation and Education** – Thousands of trees have been planted using innovative Cocoon technology, which conserves water and increases survival rates. This has restored hectares of arid land, created new green spaces, and provided shade, firewood, and livelihood opportunities. Within camps and villages, these efforts have included environmental education and community involvement, giving children and young people valuable learning opportunities while promoting sustainable practices.

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