



ShelterBox Update

August 2019

FROM THE FIELD: Life as a seamstress in Minawao Camp

23-year-old Esther is originally from Boko in Nigeria. She now lives in Minawao camp in Cameroon. In 2014, Esther and her family were violently attacked when Boko Haram fighters stormed into their village. She told the team at IEDA Relief – ShelterBox’s implementing partner in Cameroon –she witnessed the tragic death of her parents and her brothers then ran for her life from the attackers. She was forced to flee her home and has not returned since.

Esther said she ran with many other girls who were in the same situation as her. The journey led them to Cameroon where they were met by police at the border and eventually taken to Minawao camp. Esther said it has taken a while to come out of the trauma she felt from that day. She has since married and has children of her own. “Today, I try to have a normal life, especially since I gave birth to my sons. People really helped me, and my husband is also of great support. I thank all of them.”

The support she received helped her to participate in some training organized on camp for young women. That training was on sewing. She sold food so she could make enough money to eventually buy herself a sewing machine.

Today, Esther is one of the most popular dressmakers in her bloc on camp. She said that many women around her go to her for their clothes, as well as those of their children. It has helped her and her family for household needs. *“It’s very nice. I do like it and I do it with pleasure any time I have a customer. Generally, my neighbours come to me with their children for their clothes and anytime I see somebody wearing something that I sewed, it makes me happy. I can now take care of some family needs, like cooking and other things.”*

As it is the case for other activities on camp, Esther’s work does not come without problems. “My main challenge is that of the scarcity of customers. People have important needs on camp, consequently they do not look for a dressmaker when they cannot even eat. I also do not have training for clothes for men. That’s why I feel myself limited, for I cannot have men as customers”, she explained.

Esther hopes that her business will be a huge success in the future. “I want to become a famous dressmaker not only here in Minawao. I want to see people wearing my clothes out of the camp and even in my country (Nigeria)”, she concluded.

ShelterBox has been working in Minawao camp to support families like Ester’s since 2015. ShelterKits and tents provide families with privacy and help families avoid some of the threats of the collective centre. Additional aid items like water filters and mosquito nets help prevent the spread of disease, while kitchen sets and solar lights help make the camp feel more like home. Officially, Minawao camp is home to 51,000 refugees, but families living here say the number is much higher. Globally, due to your continued support, ShelterBox has helped 11,000 families who have fled their homes due to Boko Haram. You can read more about where ShelterBox is working at www.shelterboxcanada.org/operations-update