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## IMPACT STORY

# MELISSA VARMAMBA WOUMDI



**“I will still become a lawyer”  
SCE Melissa Varmamba**



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Melissa Varmamba striving in her small business in Mora

**Melissa Varmamba Woumdi is a 21-year-old woman from Mora, a refugee host community in the Mayo-Sava Division of the Far North Region. After completing her high school, Melissa had to stop school because her parents couldn't afford to pay for her university studies.**

*“Things were very tough for us; my parents were barely making ends meet. We couldn't afford to feed ourselves properly, let alone pay for tuition, for all of us to go to school. Being the eldest child with several siblings, the best thing for me to do was to drop out and let my siblings continue,”* Melissa explains.

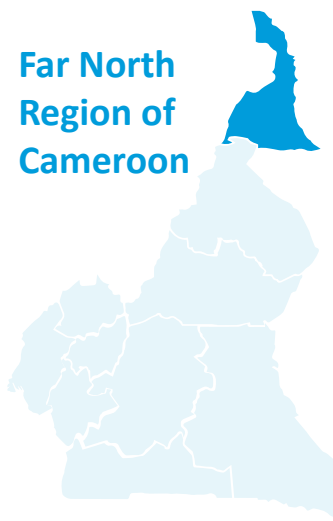
Like many other women in her community, Melissa decided to start selling 'koki', a type of bean commonly sold by women in the area. *“When I sell, I save the little money I earn in a 'Njangi', (a community meeting savings group)”*, she explains. However, this business was not very profitable, as many other women in the community were also selling 'koki' to support their families. This was due to the high number of school dropouts in the community as a result of financial difficulties, which was further compounded by the Boko Haram insurgency in that region causing many refugees from Nigeria and IDPs to settle in Mora.

Because of her situation, Melissa was limited in what she could do and could not live her dreams of becoming a lawyer and helping families in her community who were suffering from financial hardships and illnesses. *“I hate seeing people in my community suffering. I have always had a desire to help them and give hope to the hopeless,”* she states.

Melissa learned about the SCE Programme under the ALDEPA Mora project (a local NGO working for the rights of women and serving as an implementing partner with UN Women) and immediately registered herself. When she joined SCE, she received entrepreneurship training that helped her to acquire skills on how to manage a small business. *“It has transformed me and made me more confident. Among other things, I learned how to start up a business, conduct a feasibility study, locate a target audience and environment with specific objectives, and run an online business. I also learned to be humble as I carry out business in my community. The project helped me and all those who were trained to be creative, live peacefully, and work together in the community, running community businesses,”* Melissa attests.

After the training, SCE helped her to start up a small business. Her revenue increased as she acquired more household accessories such as plates, flasks, and so on. Thanks to the training, she is now able to sell her products online. *“When I purchase accessories, I take photographs of them and post them online. Interested individuals can send me messages, and I deliver the products to their respective towns. I also carry outdoor-to-door sales in the community, give out stock, and I collect money after five days based on the arrangements I have made with the clients.”*

After the SCE programme ended, Melissa and her peer group continued to meet weekly to share ideas and encourage and assist one another. With her dream of becoming a lawyer, Melissa is determined to save more money and enrol for her university studies. *“I am optimistic that my daughter will become the lawyer she wants to be even though I could not afford her university studies. Her business has been a great relief to me and the entire family,”* Mr Woumdi, Melissa father explained.



From 2019 to 2023, UN Women’s Second Chance Education (SCE) and Vocational Learning Programme, executed through UN Women’s Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection (LEAP) initiative, offered refugee and internally displaced women in the conflict-affected areas of Cameroon, along with vulnerable women from host communities, training and learning opportunities in entrepreneurial, employment and life skills. SCE was implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and the Family (MINPROFF), reaching over 12,000 participants across seven regions: the Far North, East, Adamawa, Littoral, Canter, Northwest and Southwest. SCE’s main objective is for more marginalized women to have access to, participate in and achieve quality learning, entrepreneurial and employment outcomes.

SCE’s approach recognizes that, for women who are marginalized by crisis, poverty or harmful social norms, transformational change requires more than the offer of training or education alone. SCE works with women who have been held back by gender-based barriers and discriminatory practices all their lives without necessarily being aware of it. SCE provides access to practical support and life skills training that enable women to participate fully in whichever learning pathway they choose. Similarly, it recognizes the importance of social learning and personalized support throughout the SCE journey. This scaffolded global approach has led to high retention and low dropout rates.



Photo: UN Women/

Melissa sells most of her items online. She also does door to door delivery