EMPOWERING REFUGEES THROUGH MECHANICS

A Strategic Partnership Between UNHCR, Toyota Tsusho Corporation, and CFAO Motors

Context & Project Scope

Since 2023, UNHCR Cameroon has partnered with Toyota Tsusho Corporation (TTC) and CFAO Motors to deliver certified automotive maintenance training to young refugees. This initiative builds on a pilot programme launched in Uganda and represents an innovative model of co-development between UNHCR and the Japanese private sector. Cameroon is currently running its second cohort, comprising 16 refugees selected based on a principle of geographic diversity, with participants drawn from both urban areas (Yaoundé and Douala) and rural regions (East and Adamawa).

A lever for socio-economic inclusion

This project aims to equip refugees with technical skills that can be directly exploited on the Cameroonian labour market, thus opening up concrete prospects for employment, self-employment and economic integration. By providing them with access to recognised qualifications, the programme promotes their self-reliance, reduces their dependence on humanitarian assistance and strengthens their contribution to host communities.

Concrete Results

- Three refugees have been recruited by CFAO Motors on fixed-term contracts, paving the way for permanent contracts.
- Several former trainees work in the informal sector or on their own account.
- A second cohort of 16 refugees is being trained, with CAC Cameroon already recruiting early.

Current Overview

- First cohort (18 initial participants, including 2 deaths)

Professional integration:

- 2 refugees work in the informal sector (motorcycle taxis and heavy goods transport)
- 1 refugee is an independent convenience store
- 1 intern on a paid internship at CFAO (currently being audited)
- 2 refugees recently recruited by CAC Cameroon.

Other situations:

- 7 refugees actively looking for work
- 3 refugees employed in sectors other than mechanics

Second cohort (16 participants)

- Learners continue their training until the end of August 2025
- 1 refugee has already been recruited by CAC Cameroon, even before the end of the programme

Why Toyota Tsusho and CFAO?

The success of this partnership is based on several distinctive factors:

Structured and sustainable commitment: Toyota Tsusho and CFAO have demonstrated a long-term commitment in Africa, with a clear strategy to develop local skills.
Integrated approach: Unlike other companies, TTC and CFAO offer comprehensive support including training, follow-up, equipment and job opportunities.
Strategic alignment: The project is in line with Toyota Tsusho's "With Africa For Africa" philosophy, which aims to co-build sustainable solutions with local communities.

Perspectives

The choice of the automotive sector is not insignificant: in Cameroon, Japanese brands largely dominate the market. Toyota, in particular, has more than 60% of the market share, thanks to its reputation for reliability, durability and parts availability2. This strong presence creates a constant demand for qualified technicians for the maintenance and repair of these vehicles, reinforcing the relevance of the program.

A market favourable to Japanese brands

The certificates are scheduled to be handed over at the end of August 2025. At the end of the training, the refugees will be supported in their professional integration through:
Orientation towards local opportunities: The Cameroonian market, strongly dominated by Japanese brands such as Toyota, has a growing demand for qualified technicians in automotive maintenance. The skills acquired through this program directly meet the needs of the sector, particularly in large cities such as Yaoundé and Douala, but also in border areas.
Regional mobility and cross-border employability: This programme also aims to strengthen the professional mobility of refugees, particularly those from the CAR. By providing them with strong and certified technical skills, the project enables them to consider economic reintegration in their home countries, where automotive infrastructure is being developed and technical skills are scarce but in demand.
Empowerment: By facilitating access to formal employment or self-employment, the project contributes to reducing dependence on humanitarian assistance and promoting sustainable inclusion of refugees in local and regional economies.

Opportunities

This project illustrates the transformative potential of strategic partnerships between UNHCR and the private sector. However, to ensure the sustainability and scale of such initiatives, it is essential to engage a wider range of partners, including:

- **Private companies** ready to invest in the training and employment of refugees;
- **Financial and development partners** capable of supporting the continuation of this initiative, as well as the spread of this model to other sectors and regions;
- **UNHCR's donor countries,** whose support is crucial to building local capacity and fostering innovation in responses to forced displacement.

By working together, as humanitarian and development actors, we can contribute to creating sustainable, inclusive and market-based solutions, while strengthening refugees' self-reliance and socio-economic integration.

Testimonials

Cheville Mahamat Taar

"Before this, I had no stable work. Now, I have a skill that gives me dignity and a future. I can support my family, or easily find work upon my return to CAR."

This training is a turning point. I dream of opening my own garage one day. I feel empowered."

Mandaba Jean Claude

Saidou Aladji Djankado

We are passionate, focused, and eager to learn. This is more than training—it's transformation."

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