

# INTERNATIONAL EVENTS WITHOUT THE TRAVEL

Over the last year, despite all the chaos and disruption caused by the pandemic, 138 children from South Africa and the UK joined together in a unique athletics challenge. Albeit virtually, the Bambisanani Partnership International Athletics Challenge brought together four schools from the two countries to learn together in a range of fun, athletic activities.

South African pupils from Vumanhlamvu Primary School in Nkandla and John Wesley Primary School in Eshowe connected with pupils from St Mary's Primary School in Horsforth and St Joseph's Primary School in Pudsey through a range of running, jumping and throwing challenges that enabled them to learn about athletics. The event provided the pupils with opportunities to compete against themselves – improving personal performances over time, compete against children in their school and, significantly, by comparing performances, they were also able to compete against children from all of the other schools.

The programme gave great importance to all participants working hard to improve their own personal performances over time in six different events for both boys and girls: 50m run, 200m run, standing long jump, three hop jump, tennis ball throw and football throw. Initially pupils were taught the basic activity then established their own personal best in each of the activities. Over the following weeks and months, they were given the opportunity to practise, rehearse and experiment in order to improve their performances.

A remarkable 76 pupils made significant progress over time in at least three different events and were awarded special certificates to recognise this. All four schools had their own competitions in the events which created 12 champions in each school. The top three performers in each event received a certificate. Three very exciting 10-person x 40m relay events (boys, girls, mixed) were also added for the international competition. Each school submitted their best three performances in each of the 15 events for the international competition between schools. 126 international competition medals (bronze, silver and gold) were presented to the top three performers/teams in each event.

In addition, Bambisanani Partnership International Athletics Challenge certificates were also presented in each school in the following categories:

- most improved pupils
- best individual performances
- leadership awards (for helping and encouraging other pupils).

Special trophies were also awarded to the outstanding boy and girl performers across all international events. The top girl athlete, who won five gold medals, was Lwandile Shange, from John Wesley Primary School. The top boy athlete, who won 4 gold medals and 1 silver, was Sambulo Mbuyazi, also from John Wesley.

William Vilakazi, Principal of Vumanhlamvu Primary School said:

*"This is the first time that my learners have participated in athletics, which has been made possible by the equipment and programme provided by the Bambisanani Partnership. The learners have loved these fun challenges, setting*

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*their own targets as well as competing against others. They were very excited about linking with schools in Leeds and have liked the videos from St Joseph's and St Mary's. We have seen great progress in some personal performances which is improving the confidence of learners. We do not have a sports field and my learners do not have running shoes but we did our best. For us to win 35 international medals, including two gold and two silver, is just amazing and shows what can be done with the right opportunities. We are already looking forward to the Challenge in 2022. Who knows, we may even discover a world champion one day!"*

Pupils from all four schools clearly loved the Challenge:

*"I liked the Bambisanani Challenge because one day I would like to see myself going overseas because of sport. I enjoy sport so much; I am a sport person. Sport is my life. The Bambisanani Challenge challenged me not to relax, but to do my best in everything. It also improved or put my sport career on another level. I am proud to participate in the Bambisanani Challenge."*  
Sambulo Mbuyaz

*"The Bambisanani Challenge was fun. We learnt a lot of things in sports. We first did 50 metre running, second, we did 200 metre running. I enjoyed all the activities, mostly I enjoyed running. I would like to thank all the people that were involved with organising this challenge for us. Thank you so much."*  
Lwandile Shange

*"I love sport; it is my favourite thing in the whole world and a challenge with South African students made it really interesting."*  
Scarlett Kerr

*"It was really interesting because we were against an entirely different continent! It was extremely fun to do all the competitions against them and I hope we do it again."*  
Dominic Bower

Parents and grandparents have also praised the initiative:

*"My granddaughter came home today, thrilled to bits about what she had achieved in the Bambisanani International Athletics Challenge: six individual awards and best overall girl athlete award. Lily is aware of the connection that her*

*mum and aunty have had with the Bambisanani Partnership and the thought that she has taken part in a project connected with them made it all the more special. Lily loves her athletics and cannot wait to come to St Mary's, Menston and have the opportunity to play a bigger part in the Bambisanani Partnership. Lily attends athletic training at Skyrac AC, where I coach and am currently Chair and when her aunty went to South Africa the club supplied t-shirts for the budding athletes. This is something we have done since and we will continue to support the partnership in any way we can. Encouraging youngsters to participate in athletics and have fun is fundamental to the sport, whether it be here in Yorkshire or in South Africa."*

Maria Harrison

Enormous credit must go to all the schools, staff and children involved in this inaugural event. It has been a tremendous success on so many levels and special thanks are due to the team that pulled it all together in the most difficult and challenging of times: Catherine Chattoe, William Vilakazi, David Farmer, Alan Stuart and Duncan Baines. Important connections between schools have been made and relationships are developing. The feedback from pupils, teachers, parents and grandparents has been excellent and we are already looking to 2022 to make this an annual event, hopefully involving more schools and, possibly, some additional countries. We again intend to raise the funding required for schools that are poorly resourced and do not have the equipment for the challenge.

The Bambisanani Partnership has gained international acclaim and won many awards for its pioneering work using sport to promote education, health, global citizenship and leadership. This International Athletics Challenge, held during a period of global and educational upheaval, is another example of its innovative and sustainable approaches to developing, maintaining and expanding international partnerships between schools. For more information, visit the charity's website at [www.bambisananipartnership.org](http://www.bambisananipartnership.org) ■

#### David Geldart

**David Geldart is the Founder and Chair of the Bambisanani Partnership.**