

Bambisanani Partnership International Athletics Challenge 2022 continues to raise the bar

The 2nd Annual Bambisanani Partnership International Athletics Challenge, supported by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Sport and Recreation, brought together 12 primary schools: 6 from rural KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa and 6 from the Leeds/Bradford area of Yorkshire in the UK. 394 students (aged 9 and 10) participated in a range of six Athletics Challenges in their own schools and then compared performances 'virtually' to create competition between the schools. The involvement of 12 schools this year is a significant increase from the 4 involved in the 2021 pilot programme.

The South African schools involved were: Vumanhlamvu, Makhanyezi, John Wesley - Eshowe, Manyala, Iwangu, and Ntolwane. The UK schools involved included Sacred Heart - Ilkley, St Joseph's - Tadcaster, St. Mary's - Horsforth, Holy Name - Cookridge, Hovingham - Harehills and St. Joseph's - Pudsey.



The Challenge was devised last year in response to various Covid restrictions by the Bambisanani Founder, David Geldart who explained,

“ The Bambisanani Partnership is about bringing young people together in sport from both countries in order that they can ‘work together and learn together’. Covid made us think more creatively in order to both sustain and develop our work; the virtual Athletic Challenge programme was a great success last year which resulted in more schools being involved this year. We have tried to create a simple and fun programme that reflects the very essence of athletics with an approach that brings relevance for everyone involved regardless of ability. We have provided opportunities for youngsters to compete against themselves and against others, in their own school and between schools, in their own country and internationally. A wide range awards reflect our values with certificates and medals available to learners in all participating schools for excellence, effort, progress and leadership. The Challenge provides multiple opportunities for learners to achieve and succeed; the response from schools, educators and learners has been fantastic and has further raised the bar this year!”

The programme gave great importance to all participants working hard to improve their own personal performance 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 students were taught the basic activity and then established their own 'personal best' in each of the events. Over the following weeks and months, the children were given the opportunity to practise, rehearse and experiment in order to improve their performances.

A remarkable 72% of all learners involved made significant progress over time in at least three different events and were awarded special certificates to recognise this. All schools had their own competitions which created 130 new School Champions with the top three performers in each event receiving a certificate. In addition to this, 25 students were identified as being the best all-round performers across all events, 29 students were recognised as making the most improvement over all events and 25 students

were celebrated as Exceptional Leaders for their work during the programme 'helping, supporting and encouraging others'. Three very exciting 10-person x 40metre relay events (Boys, Girls, Mixed) were also added for the International Competition, making it 15 International titles to be decided. Each school submitted their best three performance in each of the 15 events for the international competition between schools. Inclusive of the relay events, 126 International Competition medals ('Bronze', 'Silver' and 'Gold') were presented to the top three performers/teams in each event.



Mr Agrippa Nxumalo, Headteacher at Makhanyezi Primary School highlighted the significance of the programme in terms of developing the 'healthy bodies and healthy minds' of his learners citing improved fitness levels, academic performance (including June Assessment results) and enhanced communication skills.



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Mr William Vilakazi, Principal at Vumanhlamvu said,

“ This is our second year participating in this great competition. It inspires so many learners in so many ways, not just in sports but also in the classroom. With so many opportunities to achieve it helps many learners with their belief and self-esteem. We are also finding learners with real talent in athletics; who knows where this may lead?”

Bambisanani Trustee and teacher at St. Mary's, Horsforth, Barbara Pounder added,

“**Connecting children 6,000 miles from each other through running, jumping and throwing is testament to the power of sport philosophy adopted by the Bambisanani Partnership. Providing children with opportunities to connect globally, have fun, learn new skills and experience new feelings of success is one of the greatest contributions that we can make as educators to enhance the human condition.**”



David Geldart concluded,

“**My sincere thanks to all the schools, educators and children involved in this growing event; we have had much to celebrate. Great credit must go to William Vilakazi and Alan Stuart for coordinating everything in South Africa and to Catherine Chattoe and David Farmer for organising things in Yorkshire. Special thanks also the KZN Department of Sport and Recreation for their help and support; we look forward to further partnership work with them in the future. We are already thinking about developing the Challenge further for 2023 and indeed for the Olympic year of 2024, possibly involving even more schools and more countries!**”

