

Zululand athletes dominate global challenge

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DESPITE the Covid-19 pandemic and unrest disruptions, 138 South Africans and British school children between 9 and 10 years old linked up for a unique athletics challenge - albeit virtually.

The Bambisanani Partnership International Athletics Challenge brought together four schools from the two countries to learn together through a range of fun athletics activities.

South African pupils from Vumanhlamvu Primary School in Nkandla and John Wesley Primary School in eShowe connected with St Mary's Horsforth Academy and St Joseph's Catholic Primary for a range of running, jumping and throwing challenges.

The programme was of 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 and then established their own 'personal best' in each of the activities. Over the following weeks and months, the children were given the opportunity to practise, rehearse and experiment to improve their performances.



Top-placed female athlete Lwandile Shange who won five gold medals, with top-placed male athlete Sambulo Mbuyazi who bagged four gold medals - both of John Wesley Primary School

Seventy-six learners who progressed to at least three different stages, were awarded special certificates.

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.

Each school then entered their best three performers in each of the 15 stages for the international competition, and 126 medals (bronze, silver and

gold) were presented to the top three performers/teams in each event.

The top-placed girl who won five gold medals was Lwandile Shange of John Wesley Primary, while the top-placed boy athlete winning four gold medals and one silver was Sambulo Mbuyazi, also from John Wesley.

'This is the first time my learners have participated in athletics, which was made possible by the equipment and programme provided by the Bambisanani Partnership,' said Vumanhlamvu Primary School Principal William Vilakazi.

'The learners loved these fun challenges, setting their own targets as well as competing against others. They were very excited about linking with schools in Leeds, and enjoyed the videos from St Joseph's and St Mary's.

'We have seen great progress in some personal performances, which has improved the pupils' confidence. We don't have a sports field and our children don't have running shoes, but we did our best.

'For us to win 35 international medals, including two gold and two silver, is just amazing. Who knows, we may even discover a world champion one day'.

The idea for the International Athletics Challenge came from Bambisanani founder and chair David Geldart.