

THE SECOND GAME CONNECT ANNUAL SPORTS GALA REPORT

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Background

AVSI Foundation in a consortium with; Youth Sport Uganda, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Uganda Olympic Committee, and Right to Play, rolled out a structured sport for protection project - Game Connect targeting 11,668 vulnerable refugee and host community youth in the districts of Kampala (Nakawa and Makindye Divisions), Adjumani (Manji, Pagirinya, Goojo, Mungula Settlements), Kamwenge (Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement), Kikuube (Kyangwali Refugee Settlement) and Lamwo (Palabek Refugee Settlement) for three years (July 2020–August 2023).

The project focuses on improving the skills and capacities of youth from refugee and host communities to support their psychosocial wellbeing and mental health through improved access to safe sport; creating a new or strengthened social and support network through safe sport, including those from diverse backgrounds among refugee and host community youth, and working with and ensuring district-level officials appreciate and advocate for sport for protection initiatives.

Introduction

Through the two years of project implementation, the consortium has reached out to over 9,748 female and male youth (6,887 refugees and 2,861 nationals). The youth have engaged in biweekly sport for protection games that emphasize thirteen life skills as well as frequent house visits. Through community mobilization and mental health awareness education, parents and caregivers were also involved, and champion parents and peer leaders were rewarded for raising awareness through sensitization in their communities.

Having involved the refugee and host communities for over two years, the project attracted more than 400 youth from the five locations (Palabek, Kyangwali, Rwamwanja, Adjumani, and Kampala) and the local community of Palabek for the annual event under the theme “Sport for better mental health and a common identity,” with a focus on the inclusion of young men, women and girls as well as persons with special needs in sports.





A delegation from the Olympic Refugee Foundation, Uganda's Office of the Prime Minister, the Game Connect consortium (AVSI Foundation, Youth Sport Uganda, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Uganda Olympic Committee, and Right to Play), District Local Government representation from the five locations, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support partners, and the local leadership and residents from the Palabek community were among the guests at the event.

The event goal was to foster peaceful coexistence between the refugee and host community youth by enhancing social cohesion, inclusion, and psychosocial wellbeing.

Games

Sports disciplines played during the gala included; football and netball. These were officiated by the Federation of Uganda Football Association and Uganda Netball Federation. All five locations presented teams for each discipline - ten teams composed of males, females, persons with special needs.

The youth exhibited their talents in the different sports, and through fair play, they demonstrated Olympic values of excellence, respect and solidarity. These were shown during the games played and interactions amongst them.

“I am pleased to have met a number of other young people across the country that I have made friends with” says Phillip Mwal, captain of the Eagles team from Adjumani District.

It's significant to highlight that there were a number of youth identified with talents for each of the sports and it's a great opportunity for the project to create linkages to which these talents can be further developed.

While crowning the event, the consortium partner workers had friendly matches with the selected participants from the ten teams, this continued to portray the worker's commitment to social inclusion of youth from diverse backgrounds.

The Guests



The Lamwo Resident District Commissioner Osborn Ochieng, Palabek Refugee Settlement commandant, District Local Government representation from the five Game Connect project operational areas (Kampala, Lamwo, Kikuube, Kamwenge and Adjumani), and representation from Olympic Refugee Foundation led by Paul Tergat-Olympian and Olympic Refugee Foundation board member were the chief guests.

Paul Tergat in his remarks expressed delight at seeing young people participate in sports with a lot of energy, particularly girls and people with special needs. He noted that this helps the girl child to build self-confidence as they appreciate that they can do what men can do, which is one way of empowering girls. He further expressed that sport is a tool to connect people of diverse backgrounds, making it appropriate for a country like Uganda. Tergat appreciated the Uganda Government for embracing sports and was quoted as saying, “I would want to see a similar program in my country Kenya.”





The Resident District Commissioner, Osborn Ochieng commended the initiative of the sports for protection project by AVSI Foundation and the consortium partners. He stated that sport is a unifying factor in environments such as refugee hosting districts with people of diverse backgrounds. He noted that sport engages young people, guides their behavior, and addresses their mental health needs. He hopes the project continues its activities to reach a broader coverage of the region.

Osborn pledged the full support of the Government of Uganda to ensure continuity and sustainability of the sport for protection project. “When I received this invitation regarding the sports gala, I suspended everything on my table to ensure that I was part of this event-sport is a factor that keeps us united,” he said.



The Palabek Refugee Settlement Commandant, Fivi Akullu acknowledged AVSI Foundation’s outstanding assistance to persons with special needs in the Palabek Refugee Settlement and elsewhere. She also expressed gratitude to the youth who traveled from miles away to participate in the effort to foster strong relationships between the refugee hosting communities and the refugees themselves, and for the spirit of cooperation shown throughout the event. She noted the peaceful atmosphere at the event with no arguments or conflict, which is a testament to the outstanding skills that the youngsters have learnt.

Olympic Refugee Foundation Senior Program Manager, Jeroen Carrin expressed gratitude for the full involvement of the young people in sport for protection activities and appreciated the Government of Uganda for embracing sports. More so, he recognized the Office of the Prime Minister and the partners for the great dedication to sports activities among the youth and to the Game Connect Project overall. “I was thrilled to see the girls play football, displaying skills at par with the boys,” he added.



“Seeing the transformation that sport for protection has created in the young people with their esteem, self-awareness and improvement in conflict resolution is impressive. The impact that the Game Connect coaches have had on the youth both with their Mental Health and Psychosocial Support and their talent identification has been visible through their demonstration of fair play and the Olympic values at this annual sports gala,” Lydia Murungi, Game Connect Project Consortium Manager.





It's amazing to see both refugee and host youth meet and play together with such remarkable participation and performance, and the collaboration among the consortium partners which contributed to this colorful event and added value to the activity.

Jojo Ferris,
Head of Olympic Refuge Foundation

One of AVSI Foundation's approach is putting the person at the center and this is precisely why the Game Connect project is working with more than 11,000 young people across Uganda through sport for protection to ensure their mental wellbeing is prioritized so that they can adequately cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn and contribute to their community.

John Makoha
AVSI Foundation Country Representative.





“This event teaches us life skills and how we can build relationships with people. We have exchanged contacts with many of the soccer players and we will connect even after today. The energy and friendly conversations people have shown from the time we camped in Lamwo until today is a sign that we can live with any cultures peacefully. We love Game Connect!”

Nhial Gatkuok, 18, a refugee from South Sudan resident in Adjumani District.



“I am excited, I have made more than ten friends at this event. My team’s results don’t show we might win a medal but we are leaving this place entertained, refreshed and ready to return to school in a few weeks,” Winifred Aparo, 18, is also at the sports gala. She lives in Lamwo Refugee Settlement. She’s from South Sudan and she’s her team’s captain.



Award Ceremony and Key Outcomes



As is customary for the annual social cohesion events, specific categories such as winners, most valuable players, and persons with special needs are awarded as determined by the technical bench.

The awarding ceremony was officiated by the Resident District Commissioner, Office of the Prime Minister representatives from the five locations, and the Olympic Refuge Foundation team. The awards included gift hampers, trophies, and certificates of participation. The categories and winning teams were: Netball Champions - Kampala, Netball runners up - Lamwo, Football Champions - Adjumani, Football runners up - Kampala, Most Valuable Player - Esther Jua of Adjumani, Most Valuable Player with Special Needs - Annuarite Tetiane of Kamwenge, Youngest Player - Shimana Eva of Kamwenge, Best Shooter - Annet Akello of Kampala, Best Defender - Phillip Khemis of Lamwo, Best Midfielder - Safii Asifiwe of Kyangwali, Best Fair Play - Francis Okello of Lamwo.

The key outcomes included the youth employing better coping mechanisms and coping techniques to support their psychosocial and mental wellbeing and utilizing them in daily life. Youth strengthened or created new social networks, including ties to persons from various backgrounds. Stakeholders appreciated the Sport for Protection approach to addressing mental health and fostering peaceful coexistence.



AVSI FOUNDATION IN UGANDA
Plot 1119 Ggaba Road
P.O. Box 6785, Kampala, Uganda
Tel: +256 312 501604
Email: communication.uganda@avsi.org

ITALY
Via Donatello, 5B 20131 Milan, Italy
Tel: +39 02 67 49 881 | Fax: +39 02 67 49 00 56
Email: milano@avsi.org
www.avsi.org