

# We are using sport to change young people's lives

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## What you need to know:

- The project taps into the power of sports to bring social cohesion while embracing diversity, and inclusivity and advocating for good governance.
- It has brought together more than 300 youths from the Nakuru political hotbeds, including Nakuru Town East and Nakuru Town West.
- The youth are involved in football and basketball and the organisers plan to introduce other sports like volleyball, athletics, and netball.

For a long time, youth have been mischievously used by politicians as peace ambassadors through hurriedly arranged tournaments. These seem to be sports-related events but they are not. Each one of them is turned into a political event.

Politicians use the youth as pawns to help them get elected, run campaigns and even to settle scores.

That is changing in Nakuru, thanks to an initiative dubbed the Game Project.

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(AD)

It has brought together more than 300 youths from the Nakuru political hotbeds, including Nakuru Town East and Nakuru Town West.

The youth are involved in football and basketball and the organisers plan to introduce other sports like volleyball, athletics, and netball.

Matches are not played in a league format because organisers don't want this to be sports for competition but for development.



Teresa Abel, 26, is a Research Officer who is using sports to unite youth in Nakuru.

Francis Mureithi

**Teresa Abel,  
26, Research officer**

Sport has a huge power to change Nakuru County's political equation and Kenya at large as it is a powerful tool to strengthen social ties, sustainable development and peace, as well as solidarity and respect for all.

Marginalised groups like women and children are no longer bystanders as they, too, are participating in sport and through this participation, the society respects and recognises their roles in the community.

In an open competition, sport reduces the stigma and discrimination often associated with disability by highlighting ability and talent, thereby transforming public attitudes towards persons with disabilities.

(AD)

At the same time, sport – being a universally popular pursuit and given the physical, social and economic developmental benefits associated with it – is an ideal tool to foster the inclusion and wellbeing of persons with disabilities.

Through the Game Project, youth have been able to promote peace and cohesion in Nakuru Town East and West constituencies.

The project is using sport to unite individuals and groups by participating in events at the grassroots level, and developing peace-related campaigns and initiatives.

Besides promoting peace, sport can empower women and girls, young people, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups to advance health, sustainability, and education objectives.

It can also serve as a vehicle to promote climate action, gender equality, and the fight against tribalism and hate speech during and after the General Election.

Sport is a mobilisation tool that has proved effective in bringing non-participant youth and other members of the communities together for a national dialogue.

In addition, I reflect on the political significance of sports in the development of local policy.

Sports mobilises the youth around the County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) and hence they will have a big say in development matters.

(AD)

Being a five-year plan, the CIDP also comes in handy when developing a county's long-term strategic plan that affects their welfare of the youth like sporting facilities and equipment as their voices and priorities will be captured.



Hannington Nick Omollo, 28, is a volunteer at Tribeless Youth and a sports enthusiast who

Francis Mureithi / Nation Media Group

**Hannington Nick Omollo,  
28, Volunteer – Tribeless**

Sport builds friendship, peace and social cohesion. It has proven to be a cost-effective and flexible tool in promoting peace and development objectives in Kenya and that is why I'm so passionate to join my colleagues to preach the gospel of peace in Nakuru and beyond.

As a youth, I strongly believe sport can align our passion, energy and enthusiasm around a collective cause.

As a young person living in Nakuru County and having witnessed violence, I need to amplify peace and one of the ways I can do that is to participate in sporting activities to promote peace which, as youth, we must be prepared to guard jealously as we head to 2027.

This country must remain peaceful. No more bloodshed. I will continue to support sport among the youth for the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies.

(AD)

About 80 per cent of the youth are involved in at least one sport. I believe that sport helps the youth learn about discipline and dedication, as well as how to get along with others.

Youth who are actively involved in sport are less likely to get involved with drugs, to get pregnant and are three times more likely to graduate if they are in school or college.

Sport creates a great outcome for society. It is disheartening to see the two levels of government set a negligible amount of money on sports.

I appreciate what a significant contribution sport has made to my life, communities and individual lives as well.

Sport plays an important role in the lives of young adults and their participation is a sure bet in guidance in shaping the next generation.

As a youth deeply involved in the Game Project in the slums, I do so much more than just teach technique or sports tactics to my colleagues.

Sport is a vehicle to teach young people some great skills so they can become successful contributors to society.

Sport helps youths to become better contributors to society. Research shows that young people's involvement in sport helps them improve their social interaction, increase their confidence, and improve their listening skills and health. Participation in sport is linked to higher grades, a lower dropout rate, reduced truancy and lower crime rates.

(AD)

Sport can make Kenya a better place by ending generational political differences that have put communities on the edge. Sport keeps youths' minds and bodies strong and healthy.

The two levels of the government should show their commitment to ensuring the interests of the youth are taken care of and that there is peace and cohesion in Kenya.



Brenda Seki, 24, is a psychology graduate.

Francis Mureithi

**Brenda Seki,  
24, psychology graduate**

Sport inspires the youth to always give it their best. It makes them dream, it spreads joy and it brings them together. I'm involved in the Game Project because it highlights the positive impacts sports have

on both physical and mental health.

I want to inspire the youth to move more every day as sports have been proven to be tools for healthy bodies, minds and resilient communities.

Sport plays a key role in social progress and is also an important enabler of sustainable development and peace that is currently being enjoyed in Nakuru County and the entire country at large.

I have witnessed sport play a huge role in peace promotion, tolerance and respect through the Game Project which is a sporting activity amongst the youths in Nakuru County.

(AD)

I have also seen sport make huge contributions to the empowerment of women and young people, individuals and communities as well as to health, education and social inclusion objectives.

Through the Game Project, two rival gangs in Nakuru popularly known as "Confirm" have come together and formed football teams and worked together.

They are now working together like a family and in some of the areas the gang violence has gone down and even mama mbogas are coming out to describe how they are enjoying a lot of peace as the young people are no longer engaged in violence.

My major worry is that the youth face many challenges, including the lack of sporting equipment and facilities.

This is because the number of youth embracing peace initiatives through sport for development through the Game Project is increasing.

My interest in this Game Project is to be part of the collective interest to harness the tremendous power of sport to help build a better and more sustainable future for all.

I'm excited that some of the youth are using sports to share best practices, discuss challenges, and explore collaborative opportunities to drive positive social change and contribute to efforts to bring peace in the densely populated slums.

These sporting activities among the youth are a symbol of hope ahead of the 2027 General Election.

Youth in the slums have been witnessing deadly clashes every election cycle followed by violent extremism that spread social instability, posing significant security risks in the slums.

The beauty of youth-led sports is that some of the unemployed youths are now using the sports-as-peace torch ahead of the next polls.

I'm happy that many youths have recognised the power of sports, using it to unite individuals and groups through supporting sports for development efforts, participating in events at the grassroots level, and are now developing their sports-related campaigns and initiatives after the tournament is over to promote peace and development in the cosmopolitan county.

The residents also have a chance to recognise and appreciate the positive role sports and physical activity play in communities and their lives as they are also invited to participate in activities held in their neighbourhoods.



*Stephen Khakhula, 28, is a youth leader who is passionately using his sporting skills to bring peace among youths whose communities have been involved in bloody conflicts.*

*Francis Mureithi*

**Stephen Khakhula,  
28, youth leader**

Sport has been known to be the most unifying tool for peace in the world. It's been idealised as a way to heal wounds, mend fences, and rise above differences among cultures and nations.

It is because of this that I'm passionately involved in using sport to

bring peace in our neighbourhoods, particularly amongst youth whose communities have been involved in bloody conflicts since the first-ever post-election violence in Kenya in 1992.

Sport is bridging the gap between rival gang members who have caused mayhem and forced residents to live in fear.

It is through sport that youth have a genuine one-on-one with their peers and counsellors and open up on how they are intensively recruited or coerced into gangs.

The majority of the youth seemingly have no choice. A few are virtually born into gangs but as a youth, I'm determined to win their souls so that they can be converted through sport.

Through sport, gang membership has steadily dropped and this has translated in the level of social integration in the neighbourhoods which was previously low.

The high levels of neighbourhood disorganisation and high levels of violence and gang membership has also dropped, thanks to the Game Project.

I have witnessed first-hand post-election violence. Daily, I am saddened by the war drums that are beating as the countdown to the 2027 General Election runs.

Many of the youth are still healing and when I see some of the tormentors preaching peace through sport and embracing each other, I feel there will be hope of peace in the next polls. Sport is very important in advancing peace and social cohesion agenda.

Sports has continuously bridged the political divide and animosity that has existed in this country since the 1992 post-poll clashes.

As a youth, I have learnt many other important issues affecting us, like drugs and substance abuse, mental health and social wellness.

I know that through youth-led sporting activities, it is easy to convince those still indulging in the crime to change.

The Game Project shines a light on the benefits of youth spending a great deal of their time in their favourite sports, where one of the key aims is to increase access to sports opportunities and bring the health and societal benefits of physical activity to communities in all corners of the country.

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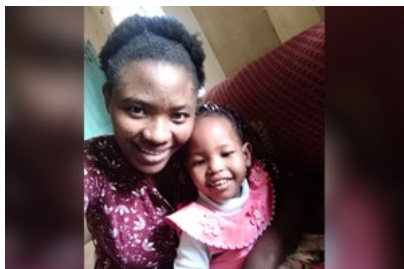
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