

## AFRICA'S HIDDEN TALENT POOL

*The FIFA World Cup starts in just over 100 days, so sports economy is about to be back in global focus. For us at Amahoro Coalition, the conversation matters because fragile, overlooked communities across Africa are already producing sports talent. We see a clear opportunity. Our challenge to the private sector is to move early and build*

*the partnerships and platforms that turn this talent into careers, while generating commercial value and measurable social impact. While football is the most visible pathway, the same talent dynamics show up across athletics, basketball, rugby, volleyball, combat sports, and other high-participation codes.*

**60%**

of Africa's 1.3 billion people are under age 25—making it the world's youngest continent. Yet jobs and stable careers are scarce: **71.7%** of young Africans (ages 25–29) work in informal or precarious roles, according to data from the International Labour Organization (ILO)

Against this backdrop of limited opportunity, sports have become aspirational. Millions of young people either aim to play professionally or build practical careers around sport: in coaching, officiating, media, logistics, and events. And the market is responding:

Africa's sports economy is valued at around **\$12 billion** and could double to **\$20 billion by 2035**. But most investment still targets a small set of elite clubs and academies, missing where the majority of grassroots participation, and future talent, is forming.

One of those missing pieces is refugee-hosting areas: dense youth communities where football is played every day but rarely linked to formal scouting or development systems. Africa hosts about one-third of the world's refugees, and most of them are young. Uganda, for example, hosts 2 million refugees, 55% of whom are under 18. Many of the largest settlements in countries like Uganda and Kenya occupy areas that, while still rural and peripheral, have steadily grown into emerging trade centres. This means displaced communities are increasingly embedded in, or adjacent to, zones of rising economic potential.

In refugee-hosting areas, sport is already a high-volume inclusion, skills, and livelihoods. **Take Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya: its approximately 288,000 residents are 60% youth, and over 500 informal football teams operate there.** Reports note that community sports initiatives in Kakuma engaged over 1,500 refugee youth in tournaments, breaking down social divides and building leadership, while also connecting participants to employability programmes that equip them with professional skills for the job market. While football is the clearest example because it is easiest to organise at scale, the same talent density logic often applies across other sports where participation is high and pathways are thin.

Perhaps the clearest recent example that talent remains abundant even in displacement contexts is Sudan's top clubs Al-Merreikh and Al-Hilal. When war halted the Sudan Premier League in April 2023, the clubs kept their players' development alive by relocating to other leagues: first competing in Mauritania in 2023 and 2024, then late 2025 arranging to join Rwanda's top division. This progression would not have been possible without political goodwill from key actors, in this case Rwanda and Mauritania. The question, then, is how to build more bridges and bring in more partners, including investors, to tap into existing talent in these vulnerable settings.



## A BRIDGE BETWEEN CLUB AND CAMP

In Ghana's first-ever Refugee Football Scouting Tournament, we partnered with Samaritan Group, a social enterprise focused on accelerating the growth of small and medium enterprises in Ghana, to host a showcase. Over 120 refugee and host-community players aged 15–23 took part in competitive matches and training drills under the guidance of top players including Kwadwo Asamoah, former Juventus and Inter Milan midfielder, Emmanuel Agyeman Badu, former Ghana Black Stars midfielder, and Fatau Dauda, current Goalkeeper Coach of the Ghana National Team.

**Nana Yaw Amponsah, Chief Executive of the Samaritan Group, said:**

“The idea of this partnership is to give these young people one opportunity to take them off the streets, because sport plays a critical role in channeling their energy positively”

By the end of the event, 17 players had been identified for structured training and trials with Division One and

Premier League clubs. Local clubs and scouts expanded their recruitment funnel while gaining credible ESG narratives and lower scouting costs. Refugee and host-community youth gained skills, visibility, and footholds in the sports ecosystem.

One 18-year-old participant, **Peter Hayes**, captured the spirit of the effort: “This chance means everything to me. I want to prove that being a refugee does not define my future. I want to play for Ghana one day.”

As our Founder, Isaac Fokuo Jr emphasizes, “Refugees just like other young African men and women aspire like everybody else... It is our duty as Africans to ensure that all young people have opportunities as they grow.”

These individual stories have often depended on luck and one-off opportunities. Our goal is to make trajectories like this systematic rather than exceptional. Global initiatives already recognise the scale of the opportunity: the 2019 Global Refugee Forum's joint sports pledge raised over **\$14 million** to support **190,000 refugees** and hosts through sport, showing that meaningful capital can flow into this space when there is a clear model.

## SCALING INCLUSION OVER A DECADE

Looking ahead, success would mean a network of refugee-hosting sports hubs across Africa that link grassroots participation to structured opportunity. Imagine that every major club's talent pipeline includes an annual scouting event in a large camp or urban settlement.

Refugee-host communities would see regular coaching clinics, tournaments and accredited training in careers beyond playing, from officiating and coaching to analytics and event management. Data systems would track outcomes: numbers of signings, scholarships, internships and jobs created. Such a future is eminently feasible: similar multi-stakeholder models have yielded outsized results elsewhere.

For example, in Rwanda the Bundesliga's Mainz 05 club (with corporate sponsor Kömmerling and UNHCR) trained 85 refugees as youth coaches. Those newly qualified coaches now lead football and educational games for about 4,000 children every day, and they have spontaneously trained another 160 refugee coaches. This shows the power of an ecosystem approach.

### For private-sector partners, the entry points are clear:

01

**Co-invest in Structured Pipelines.** Partner with us to launch annual scouting camps around refugee-hosting areas, integrated with your club's season planning. Commit, say, 5 trial slots per year earmarked for participants (with transparent selection criteria). Fund mentorship sessions alongside. Co-brand the programme and report results publicly, which builds brand equity and satisfies ESG metrics. This is essentially banking on future talent: Ghana's pilot showed that a single day of competition can surface 17 promising players. Replicated with clubs in Côte d'Ivoire, DR Congo, Ethiopia and beyond, the same model lets scouts find talent.

02

**Build the Enabling Ecosystem.** Go beyond tournaments to invest in the surrounding sports infrastructure and value chain. This can include helping install proper pitches and lighting, supporting local coaching certifications and leagues, and backing ancillary enterprises such as local kit manufacturers and physiotherapy training for refugees, sports-analytics interns and event logistics firms employing both refugees and hosts.

Africa's youth dividend and refugee inclusion are not separate agendas; together they form a connected investment thesis. The remaining question is no longer whether the talent exists, it does, in abundance, but which **investors, clubs, and brands will commit to building the partnerships needed to tap it.**

If you are a forward-looking business interested in partnering with Amahoro Coalition to create jobs and economic opportunities for displaced people and host communities across Africa, we invite you to connect with us.

Reach out at [info@thecoalitionfrica.com](mailto:info@thecoalitionfrica.com) or visit <https://amahorocoalition.com/> to start the conversation.

To stay informed and learn from what works, you can also [subscribe](#) to upcoming editions of Partnerships in Practice, where we share real-world examples, insights, and lessons from private-sector engagement across the continent.