AVSI Foundation founded in 1972 and headquartered in Italy, operates in more than 30 countries. AVSI’s **Mission** is to carry out cooperation projects for development with particular emphasis on education focusing on the defense and promotion of the dignity of the person, the cornerstone of every project. AVSI began operations in northern Uganda in 1984, focusing on education, economic empowerment and livelihoods, health, disability, HIV and AIDS, nutrition, child protection, energy, sanitation and hygiene.

AVSI remained a direct supporter of communities and partner organizations throughout the two-decade civil conflict in the northern regions of the country, demonstrating commitment and capacity to adapt to volatile circumstances.

Today, through public private partnerships, AVSI engages with private sector players, government and communities to build capacity of children, youths and households across Uganda through a comprehensive family-centered approach that builds resilience and contributes to sustainable development, responding to the real needs of people.

AVSI’s development approach aims to improve access to quality health services for vulnerable people especially children and women living with HIV and AIDS; enhance quality of education services; provide economic strengthening and improve livelihoods; improve the food security and nutrition status; and ensure social protection in the communities it serves. AVSI programs provide inclusive support to communities with special attention to the most needy persons.

Members of the AVSI-supported Meeting Point Kitgum an organization that supports women living with HIV and AIDS to engage in income generating activities such as paper bead making for jewelry.
Building resilient families and communities

AVSI boosts families to have strong emotional bonds, effective patterns of communication, and mentors them to apply the use of coping strategies to promote inclusive growth and manage adversity without distorting their family beliefs thus successfully applying the family-centered approach in its interventions to respond to the needs of orphans and vulnerable children.

Strengthening families and community structures to respond to the needs of Orphans, Vulnerable children and their families

In 2011 AVSI began implementing the USAID funded Sustainable Comprehensive Responses for Vulnerable children and their families project as the lead agency. The project is being implemented in 23 districts in Uganda to reduce the vulnerability of 125,000 people through four strategic objectives: improving vulnerable children households’ socio-economic status; promoting food security and nutritional status; increasing child protection and legal services; and strengthening household capacity to access critical services.

Enhancing the resilience of families and preventing child-family separation

To augment the resilience of families and communities and reintegrate children back into family care, AVSI partnered with FHI360 (lead agency) in 2015 through a two and a half year project funded under Accelerating Strategies for Practical Innovation and Research in Economic Strengthening (ASPIRES). The project works to prevent unnecessary child-family separation in collaboration with Companionship of Works Association (at the Naguru Remand Home), Fruits of Charity Foundation and Retrak (Tigers Club) in Kampala and Wakiso Districts.

HOW WE ARE INVOLVED

Child-Friendly Schools enable children to become compassionate, responsible, creative and thoughtful individuals.

351 schools supported to become child-friendly. More than 477,000 children engaged in Child-Friendly School activities.

Picture: Children supported by the SCORE project to stay in school
Food Security, Nutrition, Agriculture and Livelihoods

AVSI has implemented food security, economic strengthening, and livelihoods programs in the Acholi sub-region since 2002 with funding from EU, EKN, USAID, and other development partners. 24,000 households were supported with agricultural inputs and investments in targeted community infrastructure to start backyard gardens.

More than 13,000 of the 24,000 households have established backyard gardens for food security, supplementing nutrition and income generation.

Skills Development for Market-Oriented Agriculture

AVSI is providing tailor-made, market-driven agricultural programs designed to address challenges in agri-business to create employment opportunities for youth, women and men including smallholder farmers through strengthening market linkages between agriculture value chain actors.

With the Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands (EKN) funded “Skilling Youth for Employment in Agribusiness” (SKY) project, AVSI is targeting 8,000 youth to generate an annual income of Euro 3.6 million through expanding market-oriented opportunities.

AVSI builds strategic partnerships with key private sector players in agri-business and agri-institutions (BTVETs, schools, colleges and universities) to increase excellence, significance, competence and provide hands-on skills to youth in preparation for employment.

7,500 individuals received specialized value addition training and were supported to acquire equipment as part of farming as a business to increase agricultural value chains in sesame, cassava, groundnuts, maize, beans and fruits.
Support to the Health Sector

Since 2004, AVSI Foundation has been at the forefront in providing important links between the community, government, health service providers and other stakeholders focusing on promoting human well-being. In the health sector, AVSI’s several and enduring interventions have registered remarkable achievements in transforming people’s lives. Currently AVSI is implementing projects in maternal and child health services and HIV prevention and care in Uganda funded by UKAID, UNICEF, and Fondazione Cariplo.

Increasing access to quality health care for children under five and mothers

Since 2013, through the UKAID funded project, AVSI has continued to support national eMTCT efforts by providing expectant mothers with antenatal and home-based care as well as strengthening nutrition and other maternal and child health service delivery in health centers in the seven districts of Acholi sub-region (Agago, Amuru, Gulu, Kitgum, Lamwo, Nwoya, Pader) while working with technical advisors to support and mentor district health staff in the implementation of the Health Sector Strategic Plans.

Voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) has also enabled the provision of testing and informational services to tens of thousands through community outreaches. Key to the AVSI eMTCT program are Family Support Groups (FSGs) and Mother Support Groups (MSGs) for HIV positive women, their partners and children.

Strengthening Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health Services

With support from UNICEF, AVSI is increasing access to health service delivery in hard-to-reach areas through outreach programs and community health workers to strengthen the quality and continuum of care for mothers and babies with a focus to build capacity of the health systems in the districts of Agago, Kitgum and Pader.

The “Strengthening Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health Services” project which began in 2015 is utilizing known promising approaches such as VHTs, and the ambulance and transportation voucher system to carry out home visits to register Right: Health workers in St. Joseph’s Hospital receive mentoring.

AVSI works with 192 health facilities in northern Uganda to implement health services in maternal health care, HIV and AIDS support and care to the local population.
pregnant mothers, encourage them to make decisions to seek safe health facility delivery, identify danger signs in mothers and babies, and make effective referrals.

The project is also working with youth and male action groups to promote their involvement in reproductive health.

Reducing HIV incidences among young women and girls

To reduce HIV incidences among adolescent girls and young women, AVSI is partnering with Walter Reed project in a two-year USAID funded program to provide HIV services by mobilizing communities for change through a combination approach: counselling and testing, social asset building, GBV discussions, mentorship in healthy behaviour, and linking clients to health information and services in 10 districts of Uganda. The project which began in 2016 has enrolled 880 households with a total involvement of 4,335 people, 1,076 of whom are adolescent girls and young women.

Health and socio-economic well-being of vulnerable people in Bugala Island

To improve the health and socio-economic well-being of vulnerable people in Bugala Island, Kalangala District, AVSI has been implementing the community-based integrated HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment and care; public health, social cohesion and social-economic support to provide a sustainable range of care since 2014.

In partnership with a national NGO; Kalangala District Forum of People Living with HIV and AIDS Network (KAFOPHAN) and Centre for Financial Assistance to African Countries (FinAfrica), a business incubation centre based in Kampala, the two year project funded by Fondazione Cariplo is expected to improve incomes of 400 vulnerable households through promoting income making activities and participation in inclusive business; increase access to HIV prevention and treatment services for 35,400 vulnerable households; and work with these households to grow their social well-being and cohesion through culture, sports and other quality leisure activities.

Disability inclusive development

Through the Trust Fund for Victims project aimed at capacity building and advocacy to improve the quality of life of persons with physical disabilities by providing orthotics and prosthetics, psychosocial services and medical rehabilitation for northern Uganda victims of war, AVSI addresses the needs of persons with physical disabilities in the northern region through support to Gulu Regional Orthopedic Workshop (GROW) in Gulu District.

AVSI also provides medical rehabilitation support to persons with landmine-related injuries; trains district officials; constructs ramps in public buildings for PWDs; and identifies, treats and follows-up plastic surgery patients such as victims of mutilation. 1,300 landmine survivors have benefited from medical rehabilitation. Additionally, through the Distance Support Project, AVSI supports 114 children with hearing, visual, mental and other phisical disabilities to access quality inclusive education.

Since 2008, with funds from the International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus (IFSBH), AVSI has supported 500 children with Spina Bifida and/or Hydrocephalus (SB/H) annually to access neurosurgery, appropriate post-operative care/rehabilitative services, quality inclusive education, and referrals for community based rehabilitation in their area in partnership with the Lilliane Foundation, Katalemwa Cheshire Home, Cure Children’s Hospital in Mbole, and Our Useful Rehabilitation Services (OURS) in Mbarara District.

Spina Bifida is one of the most common congenital birth defects affecting 1 in every 1,000 live births globally. Children with Spina Bifida often develop hydrocephalus and have mobility and continence defects. Most of them require daily care and support from caregivers. In addition to medical and rehabilitative care, AVSI facilitates self-help groups for parents to meet and support each other for the care of their children.
Education and Training

Education is at the core of all AVSI programs globally and in Uganda. AVSI uses a holistic approach to achieve quality education with a focus on infrastructure, provision of learning materials, training of teachers, caregivers and students, and the provision of psychosocial support through counseling, recreational activities, medical care and home or school visits.

AVSI Foundation through the Distance Support Project (DSP), has supported more than 15,000 vulnerable Ugandan children and youth in primary, secondary and vocational schools and universities to contribute to holistic education since it started in 1994.

One of the DSP beneficiaries, Tony Muhumuza, was supported through his secondary education and sponsored for university education as well because of his excellent performance. With a degree in Social Studies, he won a scholarship for a Master’s degree in Economics and an additional scholarship for a PhD in Economics in Germany. Tony worked with the German Institute of Economic Research, and is currently a Director at UNDP.

Left: A child with disabilities supported in school.
Top: A student of AVSI supported Luigi Giussani High School.
The Distance Support Project not only provides access to quality education but also embraces a family-centered and community-based model of care and support to improve the capacity of communities and families to provide practical solutions for children through trainings, adult literacy programs and income making activities.

The project also provides a safe, protective environment to children, promotes child rights and healthy living and encourages effective learning.

Business, Technical and Vocational Education and Training

Under the Skilling Uganda (2011-2020) policy that aims to create employable skills and competencies relevant to the labour market, AVSI has empowered more than 2,000 youth with practical, entrepreneurial and life skills to succeed in the market-place through Business, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (BTVET) opportunities.

AVSI uses the apprenticeship model to skill trainees while simultaneously building the capacity of the facilitators/teachers to offer quality vocational skills training.

Partnering with vocational skills institutions, AVSI increases access to on-the-job-training and work-readiness opportunities for the youth and provides start-up kits for graduates.

Under youth inclusion, AVSI has strengthened infrastructure and management capacity in six BTVET institutions and reached 30 private enterprises and also improved coordination and monitoring capacity of the District Education and Community Development Offices.

AVSI has supported the establishment of 508 Farmer Field Schools, comprising 11,628 members where labor saving technologies to improve agricultural productivity and provide horticulture training were promoted. The FFSs have evolved into Production Groups able to bargain for fairer prices and guarantee bulk produce to traders and gain direct access to larger markets.

Clean, reliable and affordable electricity

To continue community participation for socio-economic transformation, AVSI is implementing a one year energy project based on the virtuous energy consumption cycle, with a focus on the productive use of electricity, funded by Absolute Energy-USA. The project aims to provide access to clean, reliable and affordable electricity to the communities of Kitobo Island in Kalangala District through a Stand-alone Smart mini-grid Solar PV power plant while applying an innovative business model based on a bilateral approach: customer’s growth is our growth.

More than 300 households will access reliable and affordable energy supply to sustainably boost local productivity, support productive demand, replace carbon intensive supply, reduce poverty as well as the population’s vulnerability to climate change for real sustainable economic development.

Additionally through the SCORE project, more than 800 households adopted the use of energy saving stoves as an environment-friendly approach.
Private Sector Engagement
AVSI works with companies to capitalize on relevant synergies that add to viable economic growth and social inclusion. AVSI’s work with the private sector influences robust corporate philanthropy and strategic contributions, creates market linkage and mainstream involvement to foster innovation, open job prospects for men, women and the youth, and tailor holistic solutions for investment and society for a successful development agenda.

AVSI perceives the private sector increasingly as the market provider. The underprivileged rely on formal and informal markets to sell their labour and products, buy inputs and access finance. Working with the private sector is a means to explore expertise, resources and talent.

Research, Partnerships and Institutional Capacity
AVSI participates in research studies and impact evaluations to guide its interventions and provide communities with improved services. In 2016, AVSI as sub-grantee successfully completed a four-year research randomized control project trial in northern Uganda studying the effectiveness of a behavioral intervention aimed at preventing the primary acquisition of HIV by uninfected pregnant and lactating women. The project funded by National Institute of Health (NIH) of the United States of America in partnership with University of California San Francisco and Makerere University and John Hopkins University was implemented in Mulago hospital in Kampala and St. Joseph’s Hospital in Kitgum District.

AVSI has been involved in various operational research programs including the Survey of War Affected Youth (SWAY), studying the state of youth and post-conflict recovery interventions in northern Uganda, and the Women’s Income Generating Support (WINGS) project which conducted market analyses and impact evaluations on economic strengthening interventions for women.

AVSI’s private sectors partners include banks such as: Stanbic, Ecobank and NC Bank which are supporting financial literacy components; the Rotary Club of Bukoto, DHL global, The Daily Monitor Publications and Nakasero Hospital have also jointly supported AVSI’s programs.

AVSI employs over 300 staff based in the different field district offices and in Kampala. AVSI has an annual budget of USD 12.6 million for a range of programs across the country. Donors include: EKN, Fondazione Cariplo, ICCO, IFSBH, Trust Fund for Victims, UKAID, UNICEF, USAID, and private donations from Belgium, Canada and Italy.
Since the 1990s, AVSI has been a prominent actor in refugee responses, working with UNHCR and the Office of the Prime Minister to provide support and services in health, distribution of non-food items, education, livelihoods and social protection for South Sudanese and Congolese refugees.

In 2017, AVSI resumed refugee response in West Nile and Northern Uganda regions with funding from the Italian Government in collaboration with UNHCR and the Office of the Prime Minister.

With a target of 3,625 households in Rhino Camp in Arua District, AVSI is currently implementing a livelihood, social protection and water, sanitation and hygiene, to establish a motorized water supply system, build capacity of refugees and host communities in income generating activities, agribusiness, and provide start-up kits for livelihoods safety net establishment (mini-agro-processors, farm implements and inputs) in partnership with ACAV.

AVSI is also present in Palabek Settlement in Lamwo District with protection (social and child protection) and education (pre-school, primary, secondary and vocational) interventions.