

GROWTH: Over six decades, UMATI has evolved from a single clinic to a nationwide network of youth empowerment

Life in motion: How UMATI is supporting youth to make the right choices on access to SRH services

As our country celebrates International Youth Day this year, one truth stands tall above the noise: youth are not just the future they are the present. They are walking in our streets, raising questions in classrooms, building ideas in tech hubs, and navigating difficult conversations about SRH.

And somewhere in that complex journey, one organization has been quietly walking beside them—supporting, informing, and empowering them.

That organization is UMATI that has been serving Tanzanian youth since 1959. Affiliated with the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), UMATI has grown from a modest clinic in Dar es Salaam into a national force for youth sexual and reproductive health issues, with footprints in all corners of the country—from Kigoma to Mbinga, from Arusha to Zanzibar.

A safe space for hard conversations

For many Tanzanian youth, access to accurate, non-judgmental information about their sexual and reproductive health is still limited by social taboos, misinformation, and stigma.

These YFS centres currently number over 88 across the country. The services are confidential and cover a broad range: family planning, menstrual hygiene, sexually transmitted infections (STI) screening and treatment, HIV counselling and testing, gender-based violence referrals, and even psychosocial support.

Between 2018 and 2023, UMATI reported reaching over 1.3 million youth through its clinics, mobile units, and outreach programmes.

Going where others don't

In Tanzania many hard to reach and underserved communities are located far away from the health facilities which cause the long walking distance and long waiting hours.

Recognizing this gap, UMATI invested in mobile clinic staffed with nurses and peer educators, travelling to underserved regions and providing integrated reproductive health services.

Peer power: Youth educating youth

One of UMATI's most effective strategies has been the use of peer educators to educate and support fellow youth in their own language, in their own spaces.

The Peer Education Programme with over 400 trained peers has grown rapidly over the past decade, working in schools, universities, and youth clubs, discussing SRH issues including menstrual hygiene education and information on how to avoid unintended pregnancies while pursuing their goals.

Knowledge, respect, choice

UMATI has been a vocal advocate for Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Tanzania education that goes beyond biology to address relationships, rights, respect, and responsi-



UMATI's Executive Director, Ms Suzana Mkanzabi, engages with young people during a movie premier event held at the UMATI Youth Centre in Temeke District, Dar es Salaam.



A service provider gives SRH information and provides education to adolescent girls during the school season.

bility.

Working with government ministries, including the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, UMATI has helped roll out age-appropriate CSE materials in several regions. This includes teacher training and curriculum development in line with global best practices but tailored to Tanzanian values and laws.

In more than 20 schools and five Universities in Coast Region students now participate in interactive discussions on sexual reproductive health with support from Dean of students and Teachers.

Standing strong against shadows of violence

A crucial component of youth well-being is freedom from violence—especially for girls and young women.

According to the 2022 Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS), about 27 percent of women aged 15–49 reported having experienced physical violence at some point, and 12 percent had experienced sexual violence.

UMATI responds through survivor support services integrated into its clinics.

Young survivors are offered medical care, trauma counselling, and legal referrals. Peer educators are trained to recognize signs of abuse and refer cases confidentially.

Additionally, UMATI has been

involved in community sensitization campaigns to address the roots of gender-based violence—such as harmful traditional practices, early marriage, and rigid gender norms. Radio programmes, theatre, and school debates are among the tools being used.

Digital outreach: Reaching youth where they are

In today's digital age, young people increasingly turn to their phones for information. UMATI has adapted accordingly. Through social media platforms like Instagram, X, YouTube and Facebook, the organization runs youth-centred campaigns and shares videos covering topics like contraceptive myths, healthy relationships, and mental health. One of the successful campaigns is known as Ishi Kismati Campaign that allows youth to submit anonymous questions and receive through evidence-based answers from trained professionals.

UMATI, in collaboration with partners, has also recently launched a call centre at the UMATI Youth Centre in Temeke, Dar es Salaam.

The centre serves as a key resource hub for young people, providing information and education on SRH, child protection, nutrition, and gender-based violence through the toll-free number 0800-750-360, youth can call free of charge to receive assistance and referrals on SRH and related services.

• Over 5 million young people accessed UMATI's youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services between 2018 and 2024.

• UMATI operates with 83 health facilities and 5 youth centers in provision of Adolescents Youth SRH services across Tanzania, including mobile outreach for rural communities.

• The organization has introduced school-based comprehensive sexuality education and peer educator programs and reaching over 2,396,833 youth

Shaping policy through youth-centred vision

UMATI is more than a service provider; it is a key voice in shaping national youth and SRH policy.

As a member of various policy forums, including the Adolescent Reproductive Health Technical Working Group,

UMATI also contributed to the development of Tanzania's National Adolescent Health and Development Strategy (2018–2022), which emphasized youth-friendly health services, adolescent participation, and community support.

Additionally, UMATI participated in consultations for the National Family Planning Costed Implementation Plan (NFPICP), which prioritized adolescent access to contraceptives and comprehensive education.

Building futures, not just health

Recognizing that youth well-being goes beyond health, UMATI has begun integrating life skills and eco-

nomic empowerment components into its programmes.

UMATI empowers youth beyond health by offering vocational skills, mentorship, and SRHR education to build self-reliance and dignity.

In 2022, over 100 young people benefited from these programmes.

Youth at the heart of tomorrow

As Tanzania moves forward with Vision 2050 and its emphasis on inclusive development, UMATI will be critical in ensuring that youth are not left behind especially in matters of health.

In 2025, UMATI plans to expand its reach, scale its digital education campaigns, and advocate for stronger national funding for adolescent health.

Dignity is the heart of it all

At its heart, UMATI's work is not only about family planning, but also it is about dignity. It is about giving a 14-year-old in Manyara the vocabulary to speak about her body, about equipping a young man in Morogoro with knowledge to prevent HIV and about helping a survivor in Mbeya find the strength to rebuild.

On this International Youth Day, UMATI reminds us that information is power and power, when shared wisely, can transform lives. Over six decades, UMATI has evolved from a single clinic to a nationwide network of youth empowerment, contributing to major policy frameworks aligned with national health priorities, and consistently reaching underserved communities.

The organization's continued collaboration with development partners such as UNFPA, ministries and donors ie IPPF, Bergstrom Foundation, French Embassy, Amplify Change and Gutmacher Institute in enhancing its capacity to deliver results that are scalable, inclusive, and sustainable anchoring youth at the centre of national development.



Leaving no youth behind: UMATI's youth weekend clinics in Katavi Region.

