



Operationalizing Meaningful Youth Engagement in Tanzania: Establishing and Engaging University Clubs



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Background

Adolescents and youth in schools and universities face numerous challenges in relation to accessing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information and services. As a result, they face unplanned and early pregnancies, contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV/AIDS and, in some cases, abusive intimate relationships. Various institutions have youth clubs that are key in promoting awareness about SRH issues through information sharing and referrals for services.

After introducing TCI's adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive (AYSRH) program and its high-impact interventions to municipalities that self-selected to join the TCI partnership, the deans of students from various schools and universities in Tanzania expressed interest to participate in the program as a way of reaching and educating young people with critical SRH information and linking them to services. The deans supported the formation of university clubs to further aid in the dissemination of SRH

information and encourage dialogue about SRH issues. The student government body at the universities along with the Minister of Health & Gender launched the clubs.

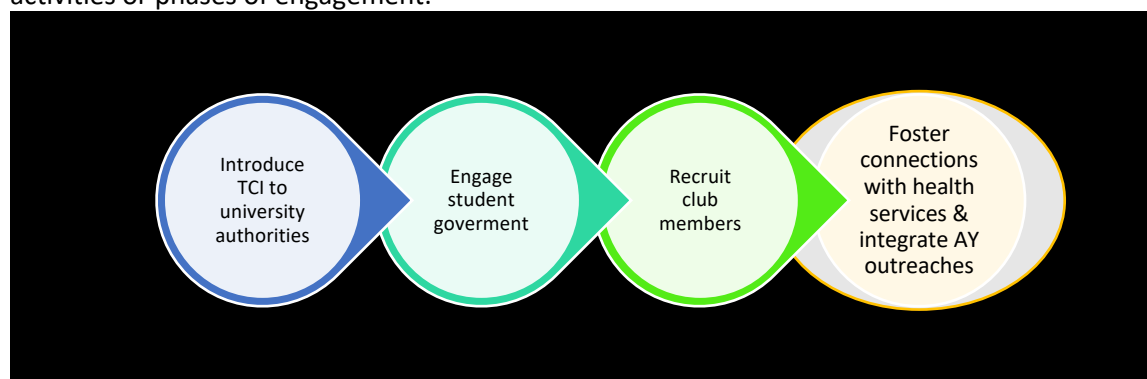
What Are the Benefits of this Approach to Meaningful Youth Engagement?

The clubs:

- Provide an opportunity to deliver SRH information to adolescents and youth at universities, increasing their knowledge and self-efficacy to make positive health decision.
- Provide an opportunity for young people to interact freely in supervised settings with adults about SRH issues, fostering an enabling and supportive environment between young people and adults.
- Are structured to support engagement with health providers within and outside of universities, increasing access to SRH services by adolescents and youth.
- Lead to stronger partnerships between student councils and health management teams (HMTs), creating an opportunity for positive health seeking behaviors beyond SRH services.

Steps in Implementing University Clubs

The figure below outlines the main steps for implementing university clubs, which are divided into key activities or phases of engagement.



At the inception phase:

- The program implementation team (PIT) member in-charge of adolescent health organizes a meeting with university deans and leaders to introduce the AYSRH package of interventions based on identified needs within a city.
- Once appropriate sharing mechanisms are granted, setup a meeting with students in the presence of the mandated oversight body. During this meeting, the students are introduced to [TCI's AYSRH program](#) and [TCI University \(TCI-U\)](#). They register with TCI-U and start to utilize it, reviewing and learning from the available resources.

Tips:

- Establishment of university clubs requires support and commitment from university deans and student leaders to address the SRH challenges faced by their students.
- During the meetings with the university deans and leaders, refer to the government's AYSRH policies, teenage pregnancy data and pillars of AYSRH according to the national standards. This helps university leadership understand the context of AYSRH education and services.

Selection of club leaders:

During commencement of the club, members get an opportunity to select the leaders of the club. Ideally, the leaders should be AYSRH champions. The leaders are responsible for setting up meeting dates for

activity planning. The activity plans should also be shared with the HMTs supporting the university to be incorporated within their workplans.

Enrollment phase:

After students join the club, they are oriented on AYSRH information and service guidelines and registered onto TCI-U to empower them with information and resources they can refer to on their own, whenever they choose. As they learn more, they often share their learnings with other club members. They should be encouraged to earn certificates on [TCI-U's proven AYSRH approaches](#) during the enrollment phase. Club champions are tasked with helping new members register with TCI-U and troubleshooting any issues that arise.

Operation of university clubs:

University clubs are overseen by the dean of students in collaboration with student government (Minister of Health) and AYSRH-trained/oriented providers from nearby facilities. The health providers/HMTs offer technical guidance on addressing any persistent myths and misconception, ensure accuracy of SRH information.

| Key Roles and Responsibilities | |
|---|--|
| University club AYSRH champions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share accurate and reliable SRH information to their peers • Provide referrals to facilities for SRH services • Support demand generation efforts during Special FP Day, in-reaches and integrated outreaches targeting adolescents and youth |
| Deans of Students/University leadership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create enabling environment for students to access informed and responsible health information, including SRH information • Establish reproductive health clubs • Integrate provision of SRH education in curriculums • Advocate for the availability of SRH information and contraception services to students |
| City AYSRH focal person | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the institutions to ensure availability of SRH services • Organize reproductive health talks to address any health issues through constructive dialogues with students |

To date, TCI has supported the establishment and strengthening of 13 university clubs in the following universities in Tanzania:

| SN | Name of university/Institution | Name of club | Geography |
|-----------|--|---------------------|------------------|
| 1 | Makumira University | Tuma TCI Club | Arusha DC |
| 2 | Tengeru Institute of Accountancy | TICD TCI Club | Arusha DC |
| 3 | Arusha Technical College | TCI Club | Arusha City |
| 4 | St. Augustine University | TCI Club | Arusha City |
| 5 | Veta Utalii College | TCI Club | Arusha City |
| 6 | National Tourism College | TCI Club | Arusha City |
| 7 | Arusha Institute of Accountancy | IAA TCI Club | Arusha City |
| 8 | Radio Habari Maalum Journalism College | TCI Club | Arusha DC |
| 9 | Nufaika College of Tourism | TCI College | Arusha City |

| | | | |
|----|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| 10 | Sila College | TCI Club | Arusha City |
| 11 | KIITECH University | TCI Club | Arusha City |
| 12 | JR Institute of Technology | JR TCI Club | Arusha City |
| 13 | Olmotonyi Forest Institute | TIC Club | Arusha DC |

Key Learnings

What worked well:

- The AYSRH toolkit on TCI-U is repeatedly mentioned by club members as a useful tool to learn about SRH issues and best practices. The certificates obtained from passing the assessments in the toolkit motivate them to read more and complete more approach assessments.
- Integrated outreaches held at the universities have provided students with a wide range of opportunities to access FP methods. This approach has been mentioned by several students as critical in reducing the number of abortion cases. In addition, the dean of student has shared the experience from integrated outreaches during quarterly review meeting held with HMT.
- TICD sponsored inter- and intra-university dialogues have helped students to unveil and share the problems that they are facing. Myths and misconceptions on family planning have triggered them to conduct dialogues so that they can share openly and attain accurate information from health care providers within their respective geography.

Types of students tend to want to get involved:

- First-year and second-year students seem to like to get more involved.
- Most want to become champions, which university authority recognize and award on an annual basis.
- More students that are studying the health sciences tend to be involved than those studying other fields.

Costs and sustainability:

- All clubs have sustainability plan. Each year when the last year students graduate, they do select the new officers (club members) to run the club. Besides that, university authorities support them with guidance and supervision to have new students enrolled and given chances within the university to operate club activities.
- Due to budget constraints, most of university club do not have a budget and therefore cannot afford to do printing or publications. In addition, inter-university exchange visits for dialogues or games and sports become impossible because of the lack of funds. At times, the students have wanted to document best practices through video footage, but that has not been possible yet due to lack of funding.

Challenges

- Lack of funding to support the university clubs to carry out some of their planned activities and reach more youth in the surrounding communities is a major challenge.
- Most vulnerable students are girls. Most of them face challenges in accessing health care services because they assume

“As a club, we would like to mobilize and reach out to more people in the surrounding community so that they can access sexual reproductive health service. But we face challenges of transport, facilitation funds, mobilization tools and IEC materials. We would like ... to serve the community better.” - Edum Adam Menja, Chairperson of TCI-TUMA Club, Arusha

youth-friendly services will be free and that is not always the case and they do not have health insurance cards. As a result, some will forgo services and treatment or seek emergency contraceptive pills as a last resort but still have a need for family planning services.

- Post-abortion care (PAC) for students becomes expensive for those with gestation more than 12 weeks as divergent from the guideline. PAC services for those less than 12 weeks gestation are free.
- Some universities are faith-based, such as St. Augustine University (SAUTI) and Radio Habari Maalum College. As a result, they discourage the use of family planning, so it is difficult to organize integrated outreaches on campus.
- Societal norms tend to allow girls to share their reproductive health problems more than boys, so often girls tend to be more vocal and involved in the clubs.
- Unstable relationships affect students' lives while at university and can lead to drug abuse due to stress, depression and anxiety.

Supporting Evidence

The university clubs help to increase young people's access to reliable SRH information. So far, each university club has at least 7-15 active AY champions who provide counselling and education on SRH issues with the university students. Over 200 students have been reached with family planning knowledge during public events at the universities each quarter.

The introduction and use of TCI University – specifically orienting university students to the AYSRH Toolkit – has increased their knowledge about SRH issues and contraception and improved their attitudes towards positive sexual behaviors and contraceptive use.

Establishing and strengthening this linkage between university students, administration and the health sector has created an enabling environment that not only promotes university students access to reliable information and quality services but also elevates their voices and feedback related to the services provided.

In addition, regular [community dialogues](#) and other interactions between university clubs and the community have created an awareness and appreciation of the needs of adolescents and youth and the benefits of family planning for them, especially among university students.

Over 11% of the university students accepted verbal referrals to nearby facilities. Clubs have also been engaged in increasing and sharing their SRH knowledge through community dialogues with different universities. These activities have contributed to a 35% reduction in teen pregnancy in Arusha from January 2020 to April 2021.

In Their Own Words

“Nowadays, more students are aware about their sexual and reproductive health issues, sexually transmitted infections, reproductive health services and where to access them from. As an individual, I now know myself better, and how to overcome problems of sexual reproductive health.” -- Edum Adam Menja, Chairperson of TCI-TUMA Club, Arusha

“... Since I am in TCI TUMA Club, I benefit a lot from TCI. First of all, I am now empowered as a woman and I am aware about how I can protect myself against sexually transmitted diseases like HIV and Gonorrhea. I also now know more about sexually and reproductive health and how to live positively in case I am HIV positive. TCI gave us sexual and reproductive health awareness and services. For example, today a team came here to sensitize us about how to play safe, use contraceptives, and protect ourselves so that we can achieve our academic dreams”. -- Teddy Mikenja, General Secretary of TCI-TUMA Club, Arusha