

Youth Advisory Committee: A Case Study on a Participatory Accountability Mechanism from Marie Stopes Tanzania

Marie Stopes Tanzania

In Tanzania, 10% of the population of 44.9 million people are adolescents. A quarter (27%) of adolescents in Tanzania have already begun childbearing and the use of contraception is low, at just 13%. Marie Stopes Tanzania (MST) is Tanzania's largest specialised sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and voluntary family planning (FP) organization. MST is renowned for providing a wide range of high quality, affordable and client-centred services and information for women, men and young people. In 2016, MST reached 224,350 young people (aged 15-24) with voluntary FP services and held approximately 33% of the modern contraceptive market share in Tanzania. Services are mainly delivered through a network of 11 static clinics, 34 outreach teams and 13 Bajaji (auto-rickshaw) teams. Service delivery coverage is high, with MST presence in more than 100 districts (out of 169) across Tanzania. This case study is a descriptive account of a promising approach towards building participatory accountability mechanisms for adolescents into sexual and reproductive health service delivery.

Youth Advisory Committee

Since 2014, MST has organised a Youth Advisory Committee comprised of 35 adolescents and young people (aged 15-24) who have accessed an MST service and then come together to assess the friendliness and appropriateness of those services for young people. The Youth Advisory Committee meets bi-annually, over the course of three days, to discuss their views on MST services, and their beliefs, attitudes and practices about sexual and reproductive health issues. A key focus of the Youth Advisory Committee is improving quality and youth-friendliness of services at MST.

Committee members met in February 2017 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and through group discussions developed suggestions for improving the youth-friendliness of services at MST, including:

- Considering hiring a **youth receptionist** and service providers
- Placing a television in the waiting rooms/areas with **youth friendly media** (television and music)
- Increasing **awareness of SRH services among young people** through TV, radio, advertisements and social media, billboards (if possible), events and using superstars or popular people/comedians like Joti, Futuhi, Mzee Majuto, Diamond Platnumz, and more
- Organising **youth corners** in MST centres to assure **privacy, confidentiality and comfort**
- Making sure **youth-friendly FP brochures** with are available in **schools, colleges, and youth sites**
- Linking **MST's Facebook page** with high profile people, bloggers and websites such as mangelkimambi, millardayo, and socialite profiles in order to promote the use of FP to youth

As of March 2017, MST has taken the following actions based on these recommendations:

- **Edu-entertainment:** A recent youth event was conducted in the Mbeya region, and attended by a famous local musician to create awareness of FP services among young people.
- **Youth-friendly brochures:** 171,000 youth-friendly FP brochures were distributed to young people who attended a **youth bonanza event**, where FP services were provided in higher-learning institutions and during normal outreach visits at public health facilities.
- **Planning for youth staff:** In April, MST will employ a part time young person who will be responsible for tracking MST social media to promote FP and responding to youth on their sexual and reproductive health concerns.
- **Youth-friendly service delivery:** MST clinics now have working televisions placed at reception and in client waiting areas. MST has also introduced the youth corners/desks in outreach to specifically appeal to young people and provide privacy and confidential when they need to access FP services.
- **Youth radio campaign:** MST has launched a youth radio campaign, which raises awareness of quality and youth-friendly reproductive health services.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Youth Advisory Committee has proven a useful mechanism for ensuring MST's sexual and reproductive health services remain continuously accountable to its youth clients. MST has demonstrated tangible actions to improve services for youth resulting from the Committee's recommendations. It is recommended that implementers engage young people directly, through a participatory and iterative process, to increase the quality of sexual and reproductive health services.