



GREAT
Ruaha
MARATHON



SYDP Narrative Report: Great Ruaha Marathon



2025



Executive Summary

On 5th July 2025, the **Sustainable Youth Development Partnership (SYDP)**, in close collaboration with **TANAPA** and other key partners, successfully hosted **the Great Ruaha Marathon (GRUMA) 2025** inside Ruaha National Park, Iringa Region. This fourth edition of GRUMA marked a significant milestone in Tanzania's environmental, youth, and tourism landscape.

With over 700 runners, hundreds of spectators, dignitaries including the Prime Minister of Tanzania, and wide media coverage, GRUMA 2025 reinforced its position as a national flagship platform for sports, conservation, tourism promotion, and youth empowerment.



Background

Founded in 2022, GRUMA is a strategic sports-for-development initiative under SYDP. It serves as a catalyst for:

1. Environmental and river conservation awareness.
2. Community engagement and local tourism.
3. Youth development and civic participation.

The marathon uniquely takes place within a protected wildlife area, making it the only one of its kind globally and drawing attention to the fragile ecosystem of Ruaha National Park, particularly the endangered Great Ruaha River.



Event Highlights

Objectives

1. Promote sustainable tourism in Southern Tanzania.
2. Raise awareness about the conservation of the Great Ruaha River.
3. Mobilize youth as agents of change in health, development, and environment.
4. Foster cross-sector collaboration between government, NGOs, and the private sector.

Key Dignitaries in Attendance

1. Guest of Honor: Rt. Hon. Kassim Majaliwa, Prime Minister of Tanzania
2. UNDP Country Representative
3. Iringa Regional Commissioner: Hon. Heri James
4. TANAPA Conservation Commissioner: Mussa Nassoro Kuji
5. Hon. Cosato Chumi, GRUMA Patron

Participation and Inclusion



Athletes

Over 700 participants from across Tanzania and neighboring countries.



Spectators

Estimated 530, including local residents, students, tourists, and activists.



Youth Involvement

Over 200 youth participated as runners, volunteers, and mobilizers.



Special categories

Elderly walks, fishing contests, youth sprints, and walking safaris.



Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration

High-Level Engagements

SYDP conducted strategic meetings with:

1. The Office of the Prime Minister
2. The Office of the Treasury Registrar
3. UNDP Tanzania
4. TANAPA and regional government offices

These dialogues aligned GRUMA's goals with national development strategies and sustainability agendas

Partner Contributions

1. **SYDP**
Lead organizer; logistics, youth mobilization, media engagement.
2. **TANAPA**
Conservation advocacy, logistics inside Ruaha NP.
3. **Mabata Makali Lodge & Ununio Beach Park**
Tourism and hospitality support.
4. **Local authorities & sports councils**
Grassroots mobilization.
5. **Community-based organizations (CBOs)**
Volunteer support and local outreach.





Media & Outreach Impact



Radio

Reached 2 million listeners



Digital Platforms & TV

Over 500,000 impressions.



Posters & Banners

Displayed across Iringa, Mafinga, Kilolo, and Ilula.



Community Activation

Reached over 20,000 through mtaa kwa mtaa events.



Environmental and Social Impact

Theme	Impact Summary
Environmental Advocacy conservation ambassadors.	National focus on the Great Ruaha River; 700+
Youth Empowerment	200+ youth engaged in event management and conservation
Economic Growth & Tourism	Boosted local economy through increased tourism services.
Public-Private Collaboration	Strengthened multi-sector cooperation.
Health Promotion	Multiple race categories promoted fitness for all age groups.



Challenges and Lessons Learned



Logistics within the park require early coordination and permits.



Communication and mapping tools should be strengthened.



Volunteer training remains essential for seamless execution.



Environmental and Social Impact

Indicator	Number
Registered Runners	700+
Spectators and Attendees	530+
Radio Outreach	2 million listeners
Digital & TV Outreach	500,000+
Youth Engaged in Pre-Events	1,200+
Community Members Reached	20,000+
Stakeholder Meetings Conducted	15+
Regions Reached	4 regions



Acknowledgments

SYDP extends deep gratitude to:

- The Government of Tanzania
- UNDP Tanzania
- TANAPA & Ruaha National Park
- The Iringa Regional Commissioner's Office
- SYDP Volunteers and staff
- All sponsors, partners, and participants who made GRUMA 2025 possible.

Looking Ahead GRUMA 2026

With the success of GRUMA 2025, planning is already underway for the Great Ruaha Marathon 2026, scheduled for Saturday, 4th July 2026. SYDP aims to:



Expand participation to 1,000+ runners.



Introduce a Pan-African youth dialogue on conservation.



Deepen regional tourism integration.



THE GREAT RUAHA MARATHON

Since its inception in 2022, the Great Ruaha Marathon (GRUMA) has consistently been scheduled in early July. The event was initially held on a Sunday, but subsequent editions have been held on Saturdays to allow participants and organizers time to rest or travel on Sunday.

For four consecutive years, SYDP has demonstrated exceptional leadership and dedication in organizing this event. Its close collaboration with the Iringa Regional Commissioner's Office and Ruaha National Park has ensured not only operational excellence but also deepened community engagement and youth participation in conservation and development efforts across the region. This year's Marathon served not only as a platform for sportsmanship but also as a vehicle for promoting conservation, awareness, community development, youth empowerment and regional tourism.



GRUMA Events Dates Since Inception (2022 onwards):

10

July, 2022

(Held on Sunday, the only edition conducted on this day of the week)

8

July, 2023

Saturday

6

July, 2024

Saturday

5

July, 2025

Saturday

4

July, 2026

Saturday

3

July, 2027

Saturday

8

July, 2028

Saturday

7

July, 2029

Saturday



This marathon served as a flagship platform for:

- 🌀 **Tourism Promotion:** Showcase the Southern Circuit's rich natural and cultural heritage, especially areas near Ruaha National Park.
- 🌀 **River Conservation Awareness:** Raise visibility of the challenges facing the Great Ruaha River and advocate for its sustainable preservation.
- 🌀 **Youth Engagement:** Mobilize young people as ambassadors of health, environment, and community development.
- 🌀 **Health and Wellness:** Encourage fitness, mental well-being, and public health awareness through participation in athletic activities.
- 🌀 **Inter-Institutional Collaboration:** Strengthen ties between local government, regional offices, TANAPA, UN agencies, and community organizations
- 🌀 **Environmental Conservation Awareness** – particularly protection of the Great Ruaha River.
- 🌀 **Youth Empowerment & Health Promotion** – encouraging physical activity, community pride, and civic participation.
- 🌀 **Sustainable Tourism Promotion** – showcasing Ruaha National Park as a heritage and eco-tourism destination.

SYDP COLLABORATION & PARTNERSHIPS

The Great Ruaha Marathon was a remarkable display of unity, collective ambition, and shared vision—made possible through powerful multi-sector partnerships. SYDP, as the lead organizer, brought together diverse institutions, local authorities, businesses, and communities under a common goal: to promote environmental conservation, sustainable tourism, and youth engagement. This section underscores the pivotal role of partnerships in designing and executing high-impact programs that resonate both at the grassroots and national levels.

KEY PARTNER CONTRIBUTIONS AND ENDORSEMENTS



Remarks From the Prime Minister

In his keynote address, Hon. Majaliwa Kassim Majaliwa applauded SYDP for spearheading such an impactful initiative. He emphasized the strategic importance of the Great Ruaha Marathon in promoting environmental consciousness and youth engagement. He further urged TANAPA and other government agencies to support and collaborate with SYDP to ensure the continued success of future marathons, particularly the 2026 edition.

UNDP Country Representative Participation

The UNDP Country Representative reinforced the United Nations’ commitment to Tanzania’s sustainable development efforts. His message focused on:

- ▶ The intersection between sporting events and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- ▶ Promoting climate resilience and natural resource preservation
- ▶ Encouraging inclusive participation, particularly youth and marginalized communities



1 SYDP (Lead Organizer)

"Our strength lies in collaboration. This marathon is more than a race—it's a call to action to protect our natural heritage and empower young people as ambassadors of change," said **Hamim Kilahama**, SYDP Program Coordinator, during the launch press briefing. SYDP coordinated planning, mobilization, logistics, and media engagement, ensuring the event aligned with its mission of youth-led development.

2 TANAPA – Ruaha National Park

Representatives from TANAPA emphasized the critical link between environmental conservation and public participation.

"Ruaha is not just a park—it's a living ecosystem that sustains livelihoods. Engaging the community through sporting events deepens their appreciation for conservation," stated the TANAPA Park Warden during the flag-off ceremony.



3 Ununio Beach Park and Mabata Makali Lodge

Tourism stakeholders like **Ununio Beach Park** and **Mabata** Lodge provided vital hospitality and promotional support. Their partnership highlighted the role of eco-tourism in conservation advocacy.

"Events like this create lasting impressions—guests don't just visit, they learn, support, and return," said the Director of Mabata Makali Lodge.

4 Office of the Iringa Regional Commissioner

In his opening speech, **Mr. Kheri James**, the **Regional Commissioner of Iringa**, praised the event's integration of development goals.

"This is how we build the future—by creating platforms that connect environment, youth, and economic opportunity. We commend SYDP for their bold vision," he remarked.



5

Local Authorities and District Commissioner’s Office

Local leaders, including Ward Executives and community coordinators, facilitated mobilization, security, and participant coordination under the leadership of District Commissioner Hon. Benjamini Sitta.

“This is the first time many young people in our district are engaging in a regional-scale event. It’s inspiring to see them take pride in their surroundings,” noted **Hon. Benjamini Sitta, District Commissioner.**



6

Community-Based Organizations and Volunteers

Over 20 volunteers and several grassroots organizations played essential roles in outreach, registration, and on-the-ground coordination. Their commitment reflected deep community ownership of the event.

“We are not just participants—we are custodians of the Great Ruaha. Today we run for the river, tomorrow we protect it,” said a youth leader from a local CBO.

WHY THESE PARTNERSHIPS MATTER?

The success of the Great Ruaha Marathon reflects a larger truth: transformative change requires collaboration. From national institutions to small community groups, each partner brought unique value—resources, reach, credibility, or passion. Together, they formed a coalition not just for a single event, but for a sustainable movement.

By fostering these cross-cutting partnerships, SYDP demonstrates that inclusive, community-led programs can influence both hearts and policies. This approach ensures that initiatives are not only implemented—but embraced, scaled, and sustained.

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