

# Mental Health and Wellness: Changing Mindsets for Effective Governance

Advancing Responsive, Accountable, and Inclusive Institutions in Africa

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# About the panelist



- Dr Tatu-Maureen Mnimbo is an award winner-Social Impact EEA. She has over 14 years of experience in social and gender focused initiatives. Holding a PhD in socioeconomics studies with a specialization in gender and humanitarian issues.
- She is an author for a book titled "The good side of divorce" and co-authored an international book titled "BRUISED BUT STILL BEAUTIFUL" on domestic violence with a stellar rating 5.0
- She currently works as a regional manager for community at Management and Development for Health (MDH)





# What is Mental Health? Understanding the Context in Africa

- Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes their abilities, can cope with normal life stresses, work productively, and contribute to their community.  
— WHO

## Common Mental Health Issues in Africa:

- - Depression and anxiety disorders
- - Substance and alcohol use disorders
- - Post-traumatic stress (from conflict, poverty, and disaster)
- - Burnout and workplace-related stress
- - Youth and gender-based mental health vulnerabilities (A 2024 meta-analysis across African countries found that roughly **27–30% of adolescents** experience significant psychological distress)
- WHO reports that **African women are twice as likely as men** to experience depression, yet men are **three to four times more likely** to die by suicide



# Facts and figures on mental health in Africa

- - 1 in 7 people experience a mental health condition, More than 116 million people are estimated to live with mental health conditions (WHO, 2022).
- - Depression affects over 85 million Africans.
- - Suicide rates are higher than the global average, especially among youth aged 15–29.
- - Over 70% of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa spend less than 1% of their health budget on mental health. (The global average is 5%).
- - Treatment gap: More than 90% of people with mental health conditions receive no formal care.
- Fewer than 2 mental health workers for every 100,000 people, compared to a global median of 21 (psychiatrists, psychologists, and nurses combined).
- Traditional healers provide over 70% of primary mental health care in some African communities.
- Public servants experiencing burnout or stress make 30% more administrative errors.

# Why mental health matter in governance



- Governance quality mirrors the mental wellness of its leaders and workforce.
- Stress, burnout, and fatigue reduce decision quality and accountability.
- Key Question: Can we truly deliver citizen-centric service when public servants themselves are unwell?.

(Unwell public servants cannot listen deeply, Burnout reduces empathy and patience, Stress impairs judgment and responsiveness  
,Poor wellbeing undermines accountability)

**A citizen-centric system begins with a workforce that is mentally well, supported, and valued.**



# What is a mental health issue and what is not

**WHAT IS NOT** (Reacting normally to a life event eg bereavement, Low mood lasts a few days but improves naturally, when you can still function, rest, and continue with your routine)

## **WHAT IS**

- Stress becomes persistent, overwhelming, or disruptive.
- Emotions are intense, prolonged, or hard to manage.
- Significant changes in behaviour or withdrawal appear.
- Physical symptoms like fatigue or headaches persist.
- Negative thoughts or hopelessness become frequent.
- Work performance, focus, or decision-making declines.
- Daily functioning or relationships are impacted.





# The Mindset Gap on mental health

## Traditional Mindset

- Mental health viewed as *private* and unrelated to professional performance.
- Seeking support is seen as a sign of weakness or incompetence.
- Leaders are expected to be emotionally tough, detached, and always “in control.”
- Stress, burnout, and emotional fatigue are normalized as part of the job.
- Productivity is measured only by output, not by staff wellbeing.
- Institutions overlook psychological safety and focus mainly on compliance

## Transformative Mindset (What Effective Governance Requires)

- Mental wellness is recognized as a driver of performance, not a personal issue.
- Leaders understand that emotional intelligence, empathy, and self-awareness strengthen decision-making.
- “Strong leadership” includes vulnerability, openness, and the ability to seek support.
- Healthy public servants deliver responsive, patient, and citizen-centric services.
- Institutions intentionally create psychologically safe workplaces, where staff can speak up without fear.
- Burnout prevention, stress management, and wellbeing policies are treated as part of governance reform



# Changing Mindsets: The 3-Level Approach

## Personal Level – How Individuals Shift Their Mindset

- (Build emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, and understanding others, Develop healthy coping habits: rest, boundaries, stress management, and seeking support early and Replace stigma with openness: recognizing that “mental wellness is part of professionalism.”)

## 2. Institutional Level – How Workplaces Enable Wellness

- Introduce **wellness policies**: mental health days, supportive supervision, flexible work options.
- Provide **access to counseling and peer support**, especially for frontline staff.
- Train managers in **empathetic, inclusive leadership** to reduce fear, silence, and burnout.
- Build psychologically safe environments where staff can speak up.

## 3. Systemic Level – How Nations Transform Mindsets

- Integrate mental wellness into **national development plans**, governance reforms, and public service training.
- Allocate funding for **wellbeing programs** across ministries and local governments.
- Promote nationwide campaigns that normalize mental health and reduce stigma.
- Embed wellness in **education, youth programs, gender policies**, and community systems.





# Practical Tools for Leaders

- **Regular wellness check-ins and audits.**(eg short weekly check-ins, anonymous surveys, or wellbeing audits).It signals that wellness is part of performance culture
- **Leadership coaching with psychosocial elements.**(eg Coaching helps leaders develop emotional intelligence, trauma-informed leadership skills, conflict-sensitive communication and understanding staff's psychosocial realities)
- **Mindfulness and reflective practice** (eg Breathing exercises, Brief reflection sessions, Pausing before key decisions and Journaling insights after tough conversations).
- **Peer support networks and mentorship** ( eg Help leaders learn from each other, Provide emotional and professional support and Strengthen collective leadership across institutions).
- **Hybrid work models that protect rest and family time** ( eg Reduce burnout, Support parents and caregivers, Improve work-life balance and Increase motivation and productivity).



# Case Example: Rwanda's Healing Circles in Public Service

- After the genocide, the government recognized that trauma and emotional strain directly affected public servants' productivity, decision-making, and service delivery. As a response, the Ministry of Health and community partners introduced **"Healing Circles" (Ubumuntu Circles)** safe group sessions facilitated weekly or bi-weekly within sectors, local government offices, and community cooperatives.
- Safe 20–30 min spaces for staff to share stress, reflect, and support each other.
- **Outcomes:** Better teamwork, fewer conflicts, higher morale, reduced burnout.
- **Service Impact:** Faster delivery, fewer citizen complaints, improved respect.
- **Lesson:** Culturally grounded habits can transform institutional culture.



# Call to Action

- **Ministers: Champion national mental wellness frameworks.** ( eg Kenya Mental Health Action Plan (2021–2025), pushing mental wellness into public sector training and community services, South Africa national Treasury and Public Service Department promoted employee wellness units across ministries to reduce burnout and improve service delivery.
- **Young Professionals: Model balance and emotional intelligence** (eg Ghana Youth-led organisations like MindIT Africa run mental health awareness and emotional intelligence workshops for young professionals and civil servants).
- **Development Partners: Support psychosocial capacity-building in governance.**(eg BotswanaThe EU & UN agencies work with ministries on workplace wellness frameworks and mental health mainstreaming in governance.





# Closing Reflection

- When we invest in the mind, we multiply governance effectiveness.”
- Takeaway: Wellness is not a luxury it is a leadership competency.
- Responsive. Accountable. Inclusive. Healthy.



Thank you for listening!

Ngiyabonga

Asante sana

Imena

Merci

Zikomo

Ndiyabulela

Ngiyabonga

Twale Nyo

Medase

Melesi

