


African Mental Health Initiatives



Africa Forum, 21 February 2025

Context

- More than 116 million people were estimated to be living with mental health conditions in Africa before the Covid-19 pandemic, and this is likely to be higher now
- Africa is home to six of the ten countries with the highest suicide rates (linked to facing violence, including gender-based violence, poverty, unemployment, food insecurity and drug abuse).
- On average, across African countries, there are fewer than two mental health workers per 100,000 people
- Resources concentrated in large psychiatric institutions in urban areas, with people at community and primary care levels left critically underserved.
- African governments spend an average of \$0.46 per capita per year on mental health
- Exponential increases in rates of alcohol use and abuse among adolescents
- Mental health conditions are often considered as taboo, and may be linked to ideas of witchcraft and curses. This leads to people with mental health conditions experiencing stigma and discrimination.
- Mental health is often not covered by health insurance policies



Three years ago I was diagnosed
with multiple mental illnesses.

Mental health projects supported by CBM

- Africa CDC Mental Health Leadership Programme (funded by Wellcome Trust) – training and mentoring of health professionals and civil society leaders to improve policy making and resourcing for mental health across the African continent. Ensuring that the voices of those with lived experience of mental health conditions informs policy making.
- SUCCEED (with LSHTM) – research project to identify the best options for treatment and support for people with psychotic illness in Africa
- HOPE (with King's College London) – research project investigating the link between mental health conditions and homelessness in Ethiopia and Kenya

- Projects aimed at strengthening civil society organisations in Africa which have a focus on mental health, including the Pan-African Network of Persons with Psychosocial Disabilities and national organisations representing people with mental health conditions in specific countries.
- In Nigeria, projects providing mental health and other supports to people with diseases such as leprosy and lymphatic filariasis.
- A project delivered by youth organisation, Mentally Aware Nigeria Initiative, funded by Comic Relief, to raise awareness and provide mental health support in universities and colleges in Lagos, using social media and WhatsApp.
- Projects in Kenya and Zimbabwe providing community-level support to people with mental health conditions, including awareness raising, anti-stigma work, livelihoods and self-help and savings groups.

BasicNeeds Self Help Group in Kenya



TINADA Youth
Action –
community
theatre raising
awareness of
mental health
issues







#CallACounsellor Initiative





Tips for Communicating With Your Teen

PT 1

Build on your relationship

- Show an interest in what is important to your child.
- Identify shared interests; share things about yourself.
- Ask about their opinions, views and perspectives







Friendship Bench, Zimbabwe



Why I train grandmothers to treat depression

BBC



*For you to come to Kisumu
will take a long time.*

Basic Needs Model

Common approach to mental health care

- Medical led
- Pharmacy heavy interventions
- Solely a health issue
- Focuses on the individual only
- No connection between health, welfare, social support, education, housing
- No intervention focusing on poverty/mental health cycle
- Coercion used
- Based mainly in secondary or tertiary care
- 'Illness' focus (reactive)



Ideal approach to mental health care

- Holistic (Bio-psycho-social approach)
- Range of effective evidence-based treatment options
- Seen as an issue that impacts on health, welfare, social support, education, housing
- Focuses on individual and community health
- Includes economic interventions to address poverty/mental health cycle
- No coercion
- Based mainly in community or primary care
- "Wellbeing" focus (proactive)

Four elements



Four foundations



Human Rights



Recovery

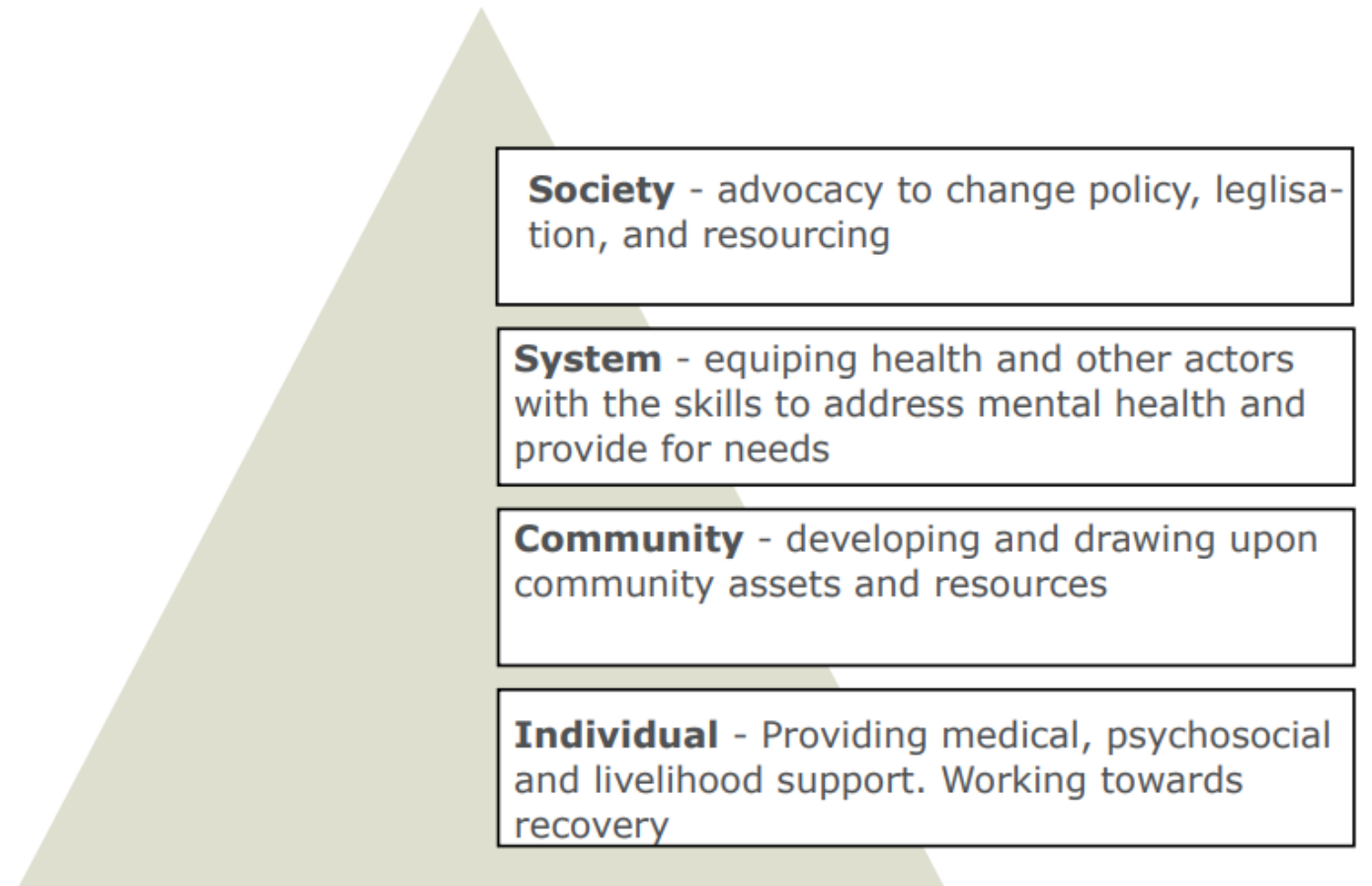


Integration



Quality

Interventions at different levels



The importance of reducing stigma and discrimination

- Most people living with a mental health condition consider the stigma associated with it to be worse than the condition itself
- People with mental health conditions must contend with more than just the symptoms of the condition. They also face a range of negative and incorrect beliefs (misinformation), negative attitudes (prejudice) and negative behaviours (discrimination) related to their condition, which make it harder for them to live and flourish. These three components make up stigma.

I was disowned by my community when I started to hear voices. They would not speak to me or even look at me. My family were shunned as well. The health clinic I attended did not understand mental illness and said that there was nothing that could be done for me. I was a burden to my family and wanted to die.

BC



Mental health in Africa – video clips

- https://www.ted.com/talks/dixon_chibanda_why_i_train_grandmothers_to_treat_depression
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0dy267l#:~:text=%27What%20Is%20Eating%20My%20Mind,mental%20health%20is%20often%20taboo.>
- <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1876777529395541>
- [Speak Up – I want your empathy not your sympathy - Edwin Mburu](#)
- [Speak Up: My mental health problem has not limited my ability to professionally run by business](#)