Customer experience professionals in Rwanda are pushing for clearer standards, professional recognition and specialised training as the sector develops beyond traditional ideas of customer care.

The effort includes plans to register an association for service professionals and establish recognised training and certification for people working in the field, according to Nyinawinkindi Gloriose, who has been elected to lead the proposed association.

Nyinawinkindi said the profession currently lacks clear standards and regulations, making it difficult for practitioners to gain recognition and protection based on their skills and experience.

“Professionally, the work we do does not have clear standards and regulations governing it. We want to establish this association to improve the quality of services in Rwanda generally,” she said.

She said the association would also seek better professional security for workers and ensure they receive compensation appropriate to their knowledge and experience.

Plans are also being considered for a specialised higher-learning institution that would train people in customer experience and customer care and offer recognised CX certificates.

The developments come as professionals call for a broader understanding of service delivery. They say good customer experience goes beyond welcoming people with a smile or using polite language and includes what customers see, hear and receive during their interaction with a service provider.

Kpunsa Mbinkar, leader of the Africa Customer Experience Leaders Forum, called for common standards across African countries so customers can receive consistent levels of service.

He also said service skills should be taught from an early age rather than being left to universities and professional training.

“As schools teach children how to cross the road to avoid accidents, we should also teach them how to provide good service. It should not be taught only at universities; it should start in primary schools,” he said.

Artificial intelligence is also changing the sector, with participants saying it can speed up services and handle large numbers of requests. They said, however, that human interaction remains important where customers need empathy and an understanding of their emotions.

The discussions were held during the Africa Customer Experience Leaders Forum in Rwanda from Sept. 15 to 18, which brought together more than 300 participants from different countries.