

*Dr. Kalinda Francois Xavier highlights cultural stigma, limited resources, and rising cases as major obstacles, urging nationwide commitment to mental health reform.*

Senate President Dr. Kalinda Francois Xavier has called on Rwandan leaders to urgently address the country's growing mental health challenges. Speaking at a national consultative forum on Wednesday, he emphasized that mental health affects everyone, yet stigma, shortages of specialists, and lack of access to treatment continue to prevent many from receiving care. Dr. Kalinda urged policymakers, health workers, and communities to work together to remove these barriers and prioritize sustainable solutions.

Dr. Kalinda on Wednesday called for urgent and collective action to address Rwanda's growing mental health crisis, urging leaders at all levels to confront cultural and systemic barriers to care.

Speaking at a Senate-hosted national consultative forum on mental health, Dr. Kalinda said no leader should be indifferent to the mental health struggles affecting a growing portion of the population.

"None of us here is untouched by mental health issues — either personally or through someone we know," Dr. Kalinda said. "The number of people affected continues to rise, yet significant obstacles remain for those seeking help."

He cited findings linking mental illness in Rwanda to the lingering trauma of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, as well as family conflict, alcohol abuse and drug use.

The consultative meeting brought together senators, health officials, and representatives from various sectors, including the Ministry of Health.

Dr. Kalinda noted that a 2018 Rwanda Biomedical Center (RBC) study found that 20% of Rwandans suffer from mental health disorders, but far fewer receive treatment compared to those with physical illnesses.

"There are serious challenges: overcrowded mental health facilities, a shortage of specialists and medications, and the lack of trained staff at health centers across the country," he said.

The Senate president also highlighted cultural stigmas that prevent people from seeking care, especially men, who are often perceived as weak or shameful for

admitting to mental health struggles.

According to RBC data released in 2024, men account for a higher percentage of mental health cases than women, yet only 5% of affected men receive treatment — often under coercion from family or employers.

Mental health professionals say men typically exhibit symptoms such as extreme anger, aggression, and hopelessness, in contrast to women who are more likely to show signs of depression and sadness.

Kalinda urged participants to work toward permanent solutions.

“No leader should fail to be concerned about why these challenges still persist,” he said.