

Candidate Statement for Nomination – WPA Zone 14 (Eastern & Southern Africa)

Strengthening mental health systems requires coordinated global action that responds to local realities. The World Psychiatric Association offers a platform for collaboration, knowledge exchange and support to member societies. In Eastern and Southern Africa, where mental health needs are high and resources remain limited, there is a need to translate this platform into consistent and meaningful regional engagement.

My work across clinical care, policy development, research and professional leadership has focused on strengthening mental health systems in low resource settings. I have served as National Secretary of the Kenya Psychiatric Association and contributed to national mental health policy and workplace mental health guidelines, including leading the Advocacy and Policy Committee. Regionally, I have engaged in professional forums and collaborations across Eastern Africa, working with colleagues in Rwanda, Tanzania, Zanzibar, Ethiopia and South Africa. These experiences have highlighted both the diversity of our systems and the shared challenges we face, particularly gaps in representation, workforce capacity and sustained collaboration. Currently, only about half of the countries in Eastern and Southern Africa are represented within WPA structures. Many countries remain excluded from global psychiatric platforms, limiting opportunities for collaboration, professional development and knowledge exchange, while already facing significant system constraints.

Addressing this requires a structured approach: supporting the establishment of national psychiatric associations where they do not exist, strengthening those that are under-resourced, and facilitating the integration of eligible associations into WPA structures.

This perspective is informed by my ongoing research mapping psychiatrists and psychiatric associations across Eastern Africa, as well as my experience working across different health system contexts. I have served as Head of the Mental Health Department at Jaramogi Oginga Odinga Teaching and Referral Hospital and as County Psychiatrist in Kisumu and Isiolo Counties. Working in Isiolo, an arid and semi-arid region with limited resources and high mental health needs, required delivering care within significant system constraints. Combined with my work in Kisumu, this has strengthened my adaptability and cultural sensitivity in engaging with diverse communities across different linguistic and cultural settings.

My three key priority areas will therefore be:

1. Expanding WPA representation by supporting the formation, strengthening and inclusion of national psychiatric associations.
2. Establishing practical regional collaboration platforms that enable consistent and inclusive exchange across countries.
3. Strengthening workforce development through mentorship, leadership pathways and increased access to regional and global opportunities.

If elected, I will work to ensure that Eastern and Southern Africa is more consistently represented, more practically connected, and better positioned to engage within the World Psychiatric Association. The focus will be on strengthening what exists, supporting what is emerging, and ensuring that countries currently outside WPA structures are actively brought into regional and global collaboration.

Dr Linda Nyamute -Kenya