

MCW Global Communications Team
info@mcwglobal.org
www.mcwglobal.org
+1.212.453.5811



MCW Global Co-hosts Young Leaders Conference Kenya 2025

September 3-5, 2025, Nairobi, Kenya- MCW Global, the [Kofi Annan Foundation](#), and the [Africa Alliance of YMCAs](#) co-hosted the Young Leaders Conference Kenya 2025, under [the Sawa Project](#). Bringing together 29 young mental health professionals, community organizers, and advocates in six Eastern African countries: Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Somalia, Tanzania, and Uganda, the Conference equipped them with the skills, resources, and networks needed to drive change.

Building on the unique model of the [“Young Leaders Conferences”](#) developed by MCW Global, the three-day Conference empowered young leaders to create impactful educational programs, awareness campaigns, and outreach initiatives that increase access to mental health services and break down stigma, through leadership training, advocacy, and seed funding.

The Conference began with an overview of the regional mental health landscape, followed by in-depth discussions on lived experiences, stigma, and cultural barriers surrounding mental health. These sessions created space for participants to exchange perspectives on the systemic gaps while highlighting the resilience of communities and young leaders affected by mental health issues.

Opening remarks were delivered by Dr. Rita Sonko, Researcher, Author, and Public Health Physician; Laurean Rugambwa Bwanakunu, Africa Regional Head of Humanitarian Diplomacy at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and Dr. Jebet Boit, Division of Mental Health at the Ministry of Health, Kenya.

“I encourage young people to seize the opportunity to network and recognize that this is a global challenge. Let us engage more people, connect with those rooted in communities, and make full use of our programs, especially those integrated in schools, to strengthen mental wellbeing.” stated Dr. Sonko.

“In East and Southern Africa, 1 in 4 young people live with depression or anxiety, yet fewer than 30% can access care. With only one psychiatrist per million people, rural youth are left behind. We must act now, investing in services, combating stigma, and empowering young people as agents of change to build a healthier, more resilient Africa.” noted Bwanakunu.

“In today’s dynamic world, young people face enormous pressures, lifestyle, relationships, self-esteem struggles, gender identity issues, cyberbullying, substance abuse, human rights violations, violence, and even changes in the socio-economic and climatic environment. These challenges predispose them to mental health problems, and unless we act with urgency and strategy, we risk raising a generation struggling instead of thriving.” emphasized Dr. Boit.

“Mental health is not just about cure; it is about prevention, resilience, and ensuring that young people grow up healthy, happy, and productive.” she added.

Through leadership workshops, case study presentations, and advocacy-focused sessions, the Conference emphasized collective action and practical solutions. Part of the program also included a study visit hosted by Integrative Well-Being in a local school in the Kasarani neighborhood.

Participants valued the Conference for bringing young leaders together and equipping them with the skills, tools, and connections to drive community change.

With leadership being one of the key components of the Conference, Beth Omondi, a participant from Kenya, shared her own understanding of leadership.

“Leadership means resilience and continuous learning. It is about service to humanity, making leaders, and stirring vision.”

“Leadership begins when you’re brave enough to speak your pain. Storytelling builds empathy, challenges norms, and amplifies silenced voices.” added another participant, Ruth Nazzinda from Uganda, while sharing her journey as a leader, artist, and mental health professional in her community.

Leon Gojani, Project Associate for the Young Leaders Conference at MCW Global, also reflected on the experience:

“The conference was a great stepping stone for us to continue the work, jointly with the mental health professionals, in fighting stigma around mental health and bringing mental health services to remote communities.”

Distinguished speakers (*listed in alphabetical order*) included: Adrien Bizimana, Senior Education and Leadership Officer at MC-Rwanda; Dr. Carol Chakua, Counselling Psychologist & Founder of Stawi Camp of Wellbeing; Damaris Osoro, Clinical Psychologist; Dhurata Berisha, Program Manager, Young Leaders Fellowship at MCW Global; Faith Kimunya, Community Psychologist & Community Wellness; Dr. Jebet Boit, Division of Mental Health at the Ministry of Health, Kenya, Judah Njoroge, Founder of Integrative Well-Being; Laurean Rugambwa Bwanakunu, Africa Regional Head of Humanitarian Diplomacy at the IFRC; Leon Gojani, Project Associate, Young Leaders Conference at MCW Global; Linda Peterhans, Programme Manager at the Kofi Annan Foundation; Lloyd Muriuki Wamai, Programme Innovation and Management Executive at Africa Alliance of YMCAs; Maud Roure, Deputy Executive Director and Head of Programmes at the Kofi Annan Foundation; Dr. Maureen Wanjiru (CitiesRise); Michelle Ndebele, Director of CitiesRise, Dr. Rita Sonko, Researcher, Author, and Public Health Physician; Rosemary Ayiera (REPSSI); Veronica N. Ngatia, Director of Service Delivery & Licensed Psychologist at Shamiri Institute.

Participant speakers (*listed in alphabetical order*) included: Beth Omondi from Kenya, Howard Boma from Malawi, and Ruth Nazzinda from Uganda.

The Conference concluded with the launch of efforts to map resources across the region and the development of the Eastern African Mental Health Network, setting a shared vision for future

collaboration through webinars, grants, and advocacy initiatives. The Closing Ceremony brought together participants, speakers, and team members who, over light refreshments, celebrated the connections established and explored opportunities ahead.

The Sawa Project has several phases, and participants will actively engage in all stages. The Conference will be followed by the Vision Planning Webinars (September 20- October 20, 2025) and Financial Support and Mentorship (January- June 2026).

Alumni from the Young Leaders Conference Kenya 2025 will be eligible for MCW Global's exclusive alumni programs, including the Community Leaders in Africa Internship and the Alumni Ventures Fund.

The Sawa project is implemented by MCW Global, based in New York City, United States, the Kofi Annan Foundation, based in Geneva, Switzerland, and the Africa Alliance of YMCAs, based in Nairobi, Kenya, and is funded [by Wellcome](#).

About Us

MCW Global is a non-profit organization with a vision for communities around the world to achieve greater levels of education, improved health, and increased economic security. Our mission is to address the pressing needs of communities by empowering current leaders and preparing the leaders of tomorrow. Founded in 1999, MCW Global is based in New York with affiliates in Africa (Rwanda, Tanzania, and Zambia). MCW Global offers Young Leaders and Africa Programs. Across all our programs, we seek to act with integrity, compassion, accountability, responsibility, and excellence. www.mcwglobal.org | [@mcwglobal](#)