

By Ali Twaha

The Government has announced plans to integrate mental health support into Uganda's micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) development agenda as part of efforts to achieve the country's Tenfold Growth Strategy.

The move was revealed during a symposium on mental health and private sector development held at Imperial Royale Hotel in Kampala on Thursday, bringing together officials from Government, the financial sector and mental health advocates.

#### MENTAL HEALTH IN BUSINESS

The commissioner for business development and quality assurance at the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives, Patrick Mugisha, said mental health has become a critical issue affecting entrepreneurs, workers and business sustainability across the country.

"There is no way someone can effectively run a business when they are not mentally sound. No one will engage in business when their well-being and the surrounding ecosystem are not aligned to their aspirations," Mugisha said.

He said many MSMEs continue to struggle with limited access to affordable credit, markets, patient capital, technology and export opportunities, pressures he said are increasingly affecting the psychological well-being of

# Govt to integrate mental health into MSME strategy

PHOTO BY ALOYSIOUS KASOMA



Mugisha (right), speaking during the mental health symposium at the imperial Royale in Kampala last week, where stakeholders discussed mental health and wellbeing

entrepreneurs and employees. "Many MSMEs collapse after months of failing to pay employees. Workers themselves are struggling with the high cost of living and the increasing cost of doing business. All these factors have a direct impact on mental well-being," he said.

#### POLICY REVIEW

Mugisha said the trade ministry is now reviewing the MSME Policy and other strategic frameworks to ensure mental

health is mainstreamed as a cross-cutting issue, similar to how HIV/AIDS was integrated into development planning.

"As we review the MSME Policy, the National Standards and Quality Policy and other strategic frameworks, we want mental health to become part of the broader conversation on private sector growth," he said.

Mugisha added that the Government is seeking partnerships with organisations such as Mental Health Uganda, Ecobank

and Kampala City Traders Association to establish mental health support systems for traders and MSMEs.

Among the proposed interventions are mental health support desks in markets, associations and local governments, as well as workplace mental health guidelines and standards in collaboration with the Uganda National Bureau of Standards.

"If we do not address mental health, we are creating a huge gap and a time bomb within

the MSME space," Mugisha said.

The executive director of Mental Health Uganda, Derrick Kizza Mbuga, said economic pressures facing MSMEs are exposing many entrepreneurs to anxiety, depression and other mental health conditions.

"Many business owners tell us that most of their capital is consumed by taxes, rent and operational costs. Because of this, it becomes very easy for people to exit business or experience stress-related mental health challenges," Mbuga said.

He added that disasters such as market fires, floods and evictions have worsened mental health challenges among traders and small business operators.

"The market fires we have witnessed over the years have destroyed livelihoods and wiped out people's capital. Such incidents can easily lead to anxiety, depression and even post-traumatic stress disorder," he noted.

Mbuga warned that failure to address these challenges early could overwhelm Uganda's already underfunded mental health sector.

To respond to the growing crisis, Mental Health Uganda says it is currently offering free counseling services

#### FOREX RATES

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
US DOLLAR	3,760	3,790
EURO	4,360	4,500
POUND	5,040	5,200
KENYA SH	29	31
TZ SH	1.4	1.57
DHIRAM	990	1100
S.A.RAND	235	290
JAPANESE YEN	18	45
RWANDESE FRANCS	2	4
DOLLAR OLDER & SMALLER	3500	3790

COMPILED BY MOSES KIGONGO  
RATES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

through a toll-free helpline while also advocating for businesses to integrate mental health support into workplace systems. "Sometimes mental health support is not only about treatment.

It is also about creating an environment where employees feel valued, listened to and respected," he added.