FOREWORD

Mental health has long been a subject shaped by the assumptions, languages, and institutional frameworks of the Global North. For decades, practitioners and scholars working across Africa have had to reach for textbooks, diagnostic tools, and theoretical models that were not designed with African realities in mind. Sankofa teaches that we must look back to move forward, that reclaiming what has been lost or overlooked is not regression but wisdom. This book embodies that principle. It arrives at a moment when the need for African-centred mental health knowledge has never been more urgent.

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic made visible what many working in African mental health contexts had long understood: that existing systems were under-resourced, that communities were carrying enormous psychological weight, and that the frameworks most widely available to practitioners were poorly suited to the cultural, social, and spiritual dimensions of distress as experienced and expressed across the continent. The pandemic widened these gaps considerably and forced a global reckoning with the inadequacy of mental health provision, particularly in settings where Western clinical models have been applied without sufficient adaptation.

This book responds to a specific and long-standing gap in the literature. Much of what has been written about mental health in African contexts has been written from outside those contexts, by researchers whose primary frameworks are European or North American. The result has been a body of knowledge that too often positions African understandings as supplementary, folkloric, or in need of validation by external standards. The editors and contributors centre African philosophies, African theorists, and African-context evidence as the starting point, not an afterthought.

I was born and educated in Ghana, and it was there that I began my career in social work and community health. I continue to carry out research and outreach projects there, and that grounding in Ghanaian contexts informs how I read and evaluate work of this kind. My work in Australia has also given me direct experience of the mental health challenges facing African diaspora communities, who must often navigate systems that

were not built with their cultural frameworks, languages, or histories in mind. A book that speaks to both the African continent and the diaspora is therefore one I welcome.

The role of family and community networks in supporting those experiencing distress, the council of elders, and the spiritual dimensions of wellbeing are not peripheral to mental health care in African contexts. They are often its foundation. A book that takes these seriously, rather than bracketing them as cultural curiosities, is genuinely valuable.

The volume moves from theoretical foundations, including the work of Fanon, Diop, and Ngugi, through to assessment tools, care models, and specific populations including incarcerated individuals, widows, and school-aged children. It also addresses the African diaspora, a community that navigates the additional complexities of cultural dislocation while often receiving mental health support from practitioners with limited understanding of African worldviews. Each of these areas is addressed with care and with appropriate engagement with African-language concepts and locally developed frameworks such as the Friendship Bench and AFRICAT.

This book is best placed in the hands of students training as social workers, psychologists, counsellors, and community health workers across Africa and wherever African diaspora communities are served. It will also be of considerable value to lecturers designing curricula that genuinely reflect the populations their graduates will work with, and to researchers who want to build on an African-rooted knowledge base rather than perpetually adapting imported models. Practitioners already in the field will find it useful not only as a reference but as a prompt to reflect critically on the assumptions embedded in their current practice.

The editors, William Abur and Rugare Mugumbate, have assembled a genuinely diverse collection of contributors from across the continent and its diaspora. The scholarship here is careful and the commitment to African-centred practice is consistent throughout. I commend this book to all who are serious about mental health in Africa, and I look forward to seeing the conversations it will generate.

Kofi Awuviry-Newton, 2026