

Linking Social Work Values and Ujamaa Intersections Model in Serving Children with Autism in Tanzania Beneath Ubuntu Lens – A Desk Review Research

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Abstract—The study guided by the Ujamaa Intersections Model necessity a review and presentation of findings on the linkage of social work values and Ubuntu values toward serving autistic children in Tanzania. The primary vision of Tanzania's policy framework is based on the Ujamaa philosophy which influences health and social welfare policy that are directly linked to social work interventions toward the autistic continuum of care. The fact that the autism continuum of care requires collective efforts and crosscutting interventions thus the applicability of the Ujamaa intersections Model to autistic children in post-colonial Tanzania became inevitable. Ujamaa intersections Model represents other Ubuntu Models in the African context from pre-colonial times to the present that are linked to social work through the value of human dignity, equality, human rights, care, sympathy, ecology, social justice, etc. Ujamaa intersections are the community sections that are interdependent in the realization of holistic and collective strategies for human welfare including family, extended family, neighborhood, local leadership, ecology, spirituality, and wider community. These intersections render relevant ecology for prevention and responses on the special needs of autistic children that social work interventions have been integrated in the country despite the government efforts in addressing the challenges of the autism continuum of care yet some health professionals and caregivers are not aware of the role of social workers in the care of Autism and planners have continued to focus autism interventions to be more health-oriented and sidelining other key component including social work and Ujamaa Intersections Model. When Ujamaa intersections Model is fully utilized it entails potentials to linger addressing the needs of autistic children by promoting full and meaningful inclusion of autistic children in social functioning and accessing public goods and services, empowering autistic children and their families through home and school visits, policy advocacy,

use different forms of empowerment with other professions to meet the needs of autistic children.

Keywords: *African child disability; African Ubuntu; Autism social workers; Autistic children; Children With Developmental delays; Social work Tanzania; Ubuntu; Ujamaa intersections model; Ujamaa policy;*

INTRODUCTION

Children affected with Autism have variable appearances and the disorder is now termed Autism Spectrum disorder (ASD) (Manji et al., 2017). ASDs, also called pervasive developmental disorders, constitute a group of neurodevelopment disorders that coalesce around a common theme of impairments in social functioning, communication abilities, and repetitive or rigid behaviors (Manji, 2013). The involvement of social workers in children with Autism is not accidental, as throughout history, social workers have been involved in various community activities that focus on prevention and response (Bloomer, 2021).

Since its independence in 1961, the government of Tanzania, through the Ujamaa policy, prioritized the universal health care and holistic social welfare approach that facilitated accessible and equal health and social welfare services including autistic children (Lembuka, 2022). The primary vision of Tanzania's policy framework is based on the Ujamaa philosophy which influences health and social welfare policy that are directly linked to social work interventions toward the autistic continuum of care (Nyerere, 2011). The fact that the autism continuum of care requires collective efforts and crosscutting interventions thus the applicability of the Ujamaa intersections Model to autistic children in post-colonial Tanzania became inevitable (Lembuka, 2023).

The realization of the Ujamaa policy in the autism continuum of care was integrated into the Ujamaa Intersections Model where key stakeholders invested in family and other community-based interventions (Lembuka, 2024a). Social work interventions are people-centered in their natural setting which is community-based and Tanzanian social workers

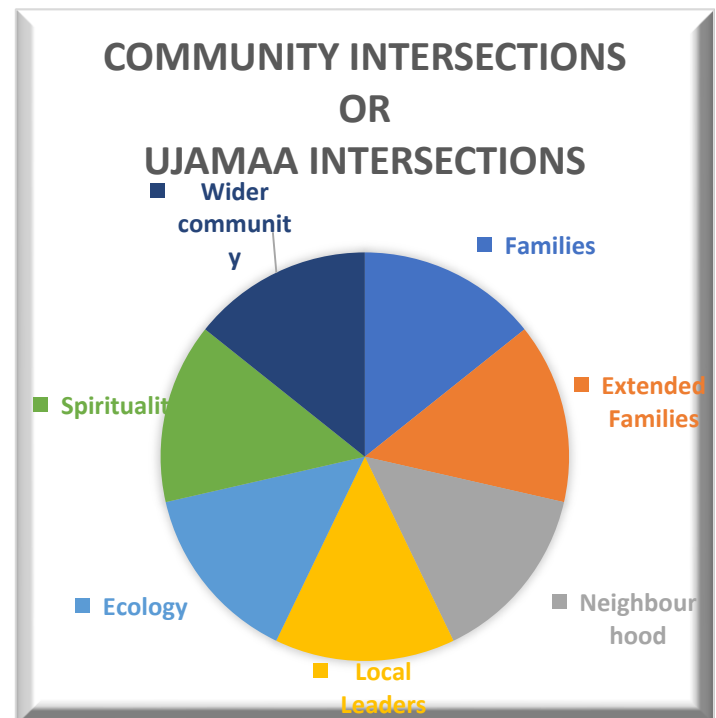
geared a similar approach by using Ujamaa Intersections Model on autistic children. In Tanzania, social workers are the custodians of children's welfare as per the Tanzania Child Act of 2009 have been putting efforts to support the Government and other key stakeholders in child development to ensure that all children, including children with ASD (United Republic of Tanzania, 2009).

As per Ujamaa policy, vulnerable populations including autistic children are envisioned through a human lens under Ubuntu values to attain their fundamental human rights and access other social welfare services (TASWO, 2016). In Tanzania, Social welfare services are community-based and social work interventions have been integrated into community intersections to support the Ujamaa policy framework and other Ubuntu interventions in the country (Lembuka, 2023). Ujamaa intersections Model represents other Ubuntu Models in the African context from pre-colonial times to the present that are linked to social work through the value of human dignity, equality, human rights, care, sympathy, ecology, social justice, etc. (Lembuka, 2023).

Child vulnerability and respective protection mechanisms became a serious concern in pre-post-colonial Tanzania where interventions were established under traditional models covered under one umbrella known as Ubuntu that places collective community gain (Mugumbate et al, 2013). Ubuntu simply means African humanness or humanism and represents the African philosophy of community's holistic and collective approaches toward human development (Mugumbate et al, 2019). In Ubuntu models, the provision of autistic service is guided by values of care, cooperation, interdependence, cooperation, voluntarism, sympathy, ecology, human dignity, Ujamaa, etc. (URT, 2021). Ujamaa intersections Model is among Ubuntu models that hold the view that "a child belongs to a community" and this renders an advantageous ecology for realizing the rights and special needs of autistic children within the Ujamaa intersections of community intersections (Buhori, 2023).

Ujamaa intersections are the community sections that function interdependently in the realization of holistic and collective strategies for human welfare including family, extended family, neighbourhood, local leadership, ecology, spirituality and wider community (Lembuka, 2024a). To complement Ujamaa Intersections Model, in collaboration with other key stakeholders the government of Tanzania has deployed social workers at community level (village/mtaa, ward to municipal level) and established specialized community interventions to address the special needs of autistic children including specialized schools, special clinics and other public services workshops and seminars which bring together families, teachers, government officials, and social service providers to create awareness about the unique needs of children with Autism (Manji, 2013).

Diagram 1.0: Ujamaa Intersections Model



Source: Lembuka (2024).

Accurately as per reflections of the above diagram, Ujamaa intersections are the community sections that are interdependent in the realization of holistic and collective strategies for human welfare including family, extended family, neighbourhood, local leadership, ecology, spirituality, and wider community (Lembuka & Buhori, 2024). These intersections render relevant ecology for prevention and responses to the special needs of autistic children that social work interventions have been integrated in the country despite the government efforts in addressing the challenges of the autism continuum of care yet some health professionals and caregivers are not aware of the role of social workers in the care of Autism and planners have continued to focus autism interventions to be more health-oriented and side-lining another key component including social work and Ujamaa Intersections Model.

Structural adjustment programs of the 1990s undermined the Ujamaa Intersections Model of Tanzania and affected its application in community health and social work interventions in the country. According to Thomson (2010: 194) the strategy behind SAPs "backfired," leaving Africa "crippled" and for Fatton (1992: 130) SAPs lead to "overall economic failure" and had "destructive social consequences". Similar destruction of Ujamaa intersections or community intersections has affected their capacity to address the special needs of autistic children i.e. imposing strictness policies that side-line Ujamaa policy and related Indigenous models like Ubuntu in the African context as a result the burden of structural adjustments falls most heavily on women, children, and other vulnerable populations at the community.

In recent years there has been a reported increase in autism spectrum disorders is a global public health and social concern that has captured social workers' attention to realize the specialized services to vulnerable populations affected by ASD, including children with Autism (Dababnah et al., 2011 & CDC, 2009). Reports have shown that even in developed countries, Autistic children are often subject to stigma and discrimination, including unjust deprivation of health care, education, and opportunities to engage and participate in their communities (Ganz, 2017). Post Structural Adjustment Policies or Programs (SAPs) exaggerated both social work interventions and the Ujamaa intersections Model in serving autistic children in Tanzania.

Moreover, social workers' position in helping deal with the problem is not yet highly identifiable as autism is considered as purely medical agenda leaving social workers and other related interventions that could be significantly helpful to the autism continuum of care in Tanzania and elsewhere (Bloomer, 2021). Most health interventions in developing countries like Tanzania are donor-funded to serve the best interests of donors rather than accommodation of community needs including autism continuum of care (Possi, 2017). African developing countries are receiving annual budgets from donors to support HIV and AIDS, Tuberculosis, Malaria, and Cholera but not autism services. Still, several pioneering treatment centers in a few regions, such as Arusha, Tanga, Mwanza, and Dar es Salaam address those concerns from a health perspective. However, in addition to that Autism is still poorly diagnosed and mostly health-managed which tends to affect the holistic welfare of the autistic children in Tanzania (Manji et al, 2017). Additionally, there is a deficit in the empirical findings on social work interventions and the application of Ujamaa intersections on autistic children in Tanzania this review envisions to fill the gap.

METHODOLOGY

The desk review was guided by Ubuntu theory to analyze the existing literature and Ubuntu theory was found to be relevant to link social work and Ujamaa intersections model toward serving autistic children in Tanzania (Lembuka, 2023). Ubuntu theory rendered a required capacity to support the objectives and philosophy of the study by linking social work with the fact that the Ujamaa Intersections Model originated from Tanzanian representing other Ubuntu Models in an African context that embraces collective and holistic interventions on child protection. According to Buhori (2023) Ubuntu theory advocates for the community's commitment to raising a child, "It takes a community to raise a child" (Buhori, 2023), thus the selection of the theory was carefully thought to make the study more inclusive and non-bias. Also, among the pillars of Ubuntu theory include cultural values, communality, history, and ecology, these pillars are compatible to reflect the noble interventions of social workers to

autistic children within Ujamaa intersections (Lembuka, 2024b). Therefore, the theory was considered more relevant as its applicability in the study of the social work profession is compatible with studying human behaviour and functioning in a social environment.

With support of Ubuntu theory, desk research provided an insight by pulling data from other resources targeting secondary data from library search (Bhandari, 2020), which was conclusive for indulgent the linkage of social work interventions and Ujamaa Intersections Model (Buhori & Drive Research, 2023). The documents were purposively online searched through SAGE, AJOL, Google Books and Google Search, and careful selected, screened, and independently reviewed against predetermined criteria for eligibility under a desk review to reflect the applicability of social work and Ujamaa Intersections Model on autistic children (Bhandari, 2020, Lembuka & Buhori, 2024). Duplicates were removed and documents that were considered eligible if they focused on the relevance of social work interventions and Ubuntu Models toward autistic children.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1.0 Social Work Values and Ujamaa Intersections Model

SN	Social Work Values	Ujamaa Intersections Model Values
1	Service	<i>Huduma bora</i> (Quality service)
2	Social justice	<i>haki na usawa</i> (Equality)
3	Dignity and worth of the person	<i>Utu na ubinadamu</i> (Human dignity)
4	Importance of human relationships	<i>Mahusiano na kutegemeana</i> (Interdependence and cooperation)
5	Integrity	<i>Uadilifu</i> (Professionalism)
6	Competence	<i>Elimu ya watu wazima na kujiendeleza</i> (Inservice, distance and adult education)

Source: Lembuka (2024)

The relevance of existing values in social work and the Ujamaa Intersections Model are highlighted in Table 1.0 which provides a respective linkage toward autistic children's continuum of care in Tanzania. The values of the Ujamaa Intersections Model were in

place of the Ujamaa Policy which emphasizes the engagement of the community in planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluating socio-economic and political activities in post-colonial Tanzania (Nyerere, 1967). This is a historical linkage representing the similar values of two different approaches serving vulnerable autistic children within the community sections through service, social justice, human dignity, the importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (Nyerere, 2011).

The main objective of the health policy is to improve the health and well-being of all Tanzanians, with a focus on those most at risk, and to engender a health system that is responsive to the needs of the people (Possi, 2017). Application of the Ujamaa Intersections Model has significant contributions to the apprehension of the health policy as a relevant model that intersects between autistic children and social workers into community sections that help to address stigmatization, communication barriers, negative attitudes, and exclusion of autistic children from the community interaction and access to health and social welfare services. i.e. Autistic children sometimes find it hard to understand how other people think or feel, find things like bright lights or loud noises overwhelming, stressful or uncomfortable, and get anxious or upset about unfamiliar situations and social events (Olaitani et al., 2022).

Arusha Declaration of 1967 officiated the Ujamaa Policy as Tanzania's national framework cemented the engagement of the Ujamaa Intersections Model in all government activities that targeted community development and welfare services (Nyerere, 2011). Over time Ujamaa intersections continued to form the modality of various government interventions that influenced the restoration of various indigenous care systems in Tanzania that worked well with health and social welfare programs (URT, 2021). Ultimate made social work interventions became a vital component of serving autistic children and other vulnerable children at the community level, various national campaigns were launched with famous mottos such as "*Mtoto wa mwenzio ni wako* – Someone's child is your child", "*Watoto ni hadhina* – children are the treasure" etc. (Lembuka, 2024b).

Social work value of Service was demonstrated as *huduma bora* meaning quality of service in the Ujamaa intersections Model, Tanzanian social work interventions focused on assisting autistic children in need and addressing their multiple challenges as per their natural setting (Njimba, 2011). In the 1980s community members named government-employed social workers were nicknamed "*Baba huruma* - Mercy Father and *Mama huruma* – Mercy Mother" following their engagement in realizing the rights of vulnerable populations including autistic children (Njimba, 2011). Mercy fathers and mothers became very famous as they transformed the lives of vulnerable populations including autistic children who were somehow stigmatized by a few bad traditional beliefs especially in rural settings (Njimba, 2011 & Lembuka, 2022).

Like other children, autistic children may be at risk to child abuse within the community, and social workers intervene to protect autistic children from physical or emotional harm or neglect. Sometimes autistic children experience abuse and in these cases, social workers are called upon to investigate allegations and may testify in court proceedings and cooperate with the courts regarding these allegations (Kebede et al., 2022). Ecological assessment to understand the lifestyle of autistic children through visiting community intersections such as family, extended family members, neighbors local leaders, etc. For this case, social workers can be instructed by court order or other authority to conduct follow-up visits with autistic children in the household or the foster care environment where they were placed to ensure the safety of the child in the cases where abuse was found (Kebede et al., 2022).

It has been reported that some cultural and traditional practices have undermined the government of Tanzania's efforts in autism, sometimes cultural factors affect the family's ability to accept the child and provide the resources necessary to promote the child's adaptation and development. Variations in the coping styles of parents have a tremendous effect on their ability to accept and care for their autistic children (Manji, 2017). For example, Tanzania with more than 120 ethnic tribes, and each tribe has its own cultural and spiritual practices that sometimes tend to influence autism services to children (URT, 2009). Some families take their autistic children to traditional healers and abandon clinic attendance while others consider autistic children as a spiritual curse to the extent of hiding them from public engagement including schooling and sports etc. (Buhori, 2023).

The values of the Ujamaa Intersections Model and the social work profession uphold autism service in the interests of children and their families consistent with social justice, as a core professional objective. This influenced positive impacts on the welfare of autistic children by balancing autistic special needs and rights collectively and a holistic humanity continuum of care (Lembuka & Buhori, 2024). Also, social workers have been providing holistic psychosocial care and support to family, neighbors, local rulers, and other community sections that form a close ecology to an autistic child as per the Ujamaa Intersections Model, more important they have been conducting a follow-up therapy within the community setting as social work interventions envision to provide autistic children with the paramount Ujamaa Intersections that compromises Ubuntu values including care, love, sympathy, respect, equality, human dignity etc. (Lembuka & Buhori, 2024).

During structural adjustment policy (SAP) developing countries including Tanzania experienced external pushes to change their national policies, strategies, and programs that undermined Ubuntu models like Ujamaa Intersections Model in the 1990s (Nyerere, 2011). The public sector experienced budget cuts, employees redundancy, and privatization of public services that challenged the provision of health

and social work services in the country. Despite of shortage of workforce in health and social work care, Tanzania Social workers either in public or private settings, have been helping autistic people to address their needs to improve their social, emotional, and physical well-being (TASWO, 2016). Some are residing in early health to provide services primarily in health settings and they do recognize the role of Ujamaa intersections in their determinations to mend the health of autistic children and their families (TASWO, 2017).

According to Tanzania's health framework social welfare and health care start at the grassroots level which entails Ujamaa Intersections and thus experience of serving autistic children is through community schools, social welfare departments, and health settings such as dispensaries, health centers, etc. For example, recently the roles of social workers in health settings have become even more prominent again in the past in addressing public health concerns through direct assistance, referrals, and advocacy. They help people in a broad range of medical and community settings (VCU, 2023). In the community health setting, for example, social workers often advocate for the realization of universal rights for autistic children, ensuring they receive the appropriate care and later follow-up visits at their homes as part of community outreach service (VCU, 2023). Moreover, social workers use their competence to engage community local leaders such as ward executive officers and village/mtaa chairpersons for community outreach services including autism awareness campaigns, health education, and promotion, etc. These efforts help community intersections to practically gain control over autism and related challenges in the community holistic welfare of autistic children.

Despite the government's strategic efforts in addressing the rights of autistic children some autistic children missed or received inappropriate service, and others faced significant challenges to access various services in the country (Buhori, 2023). The government of Tanzania's tireless efforts to protect and care for children took various forms in the past 2 decades that strengthened the child protection system in the country. In collaboration with key child welfare stakeholders, the government of Tanzania was the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to develop a child development policy in 2008 (Buchumi, 2022). To complement the policy's goal and empower social workers in their interventions in child rights, the government publicized the Law of the Child Act of 2009, Chapter 13 of the Laws of Tanzania Revised Edition of 2019. The law domesticated all the international and regional policies, declarations, treaties, and guidelines that strive for the rights of children including autistic children (Buhori, 2023).

Moreover, the establishment of both Child Development Policy 2008 and The Law of the Child Act (LCA) of 2009 considered existing Ubuntu values of ecology, customary laws, history, traditional

practices, Ujamaa intersections and formal systems relevant to realize the holistic rights and positive development of children (Buchumi, 2021). Also, these 2 vital child protection instruments underpin the custodianship of autistic children in the community sections as per section 7 which guarantees the right of a child to grow up in the care of his or her natural setting (Community-based) with an emphasis on the use of family-based care and limit the use of institutional care (Buchumi, 2021).

Furthermore, The Government efforts on the autistic continuum to some extent are being undermined by the impacts of poverty, cultural and religious beliefs, and conflict of interests of donor-funded child welfare programs that prefer to invest in programs that serve their mission rather than addressing the annual emerging demand of special care for autistic children in Tanzania, etc. (TASWO, 2017). Also, some of the emerging private sectors serving autistic children either intentionally or unintentionally do not integrate the Ujamaa Intersections Model in their program while others have not employed social workers in their settings as some are not aware of the significant roles of social workers in improving the welfare of autistic children (TASWO, 2017). Moreover, the so-called private sectors in autism are very few and most of them are located in urban settings and leaving rural settings unattended (TASWO, 2016).

Therefore, experiences of engaging in formal and informal interventions have proved great achievements in the realization of the rights of autistic children due to the commitment of the government to protect and care for children including autistic children (Buhori, 2023). At different evolutions of social work practice in the country, despite their shortage, social workers have been ensuring to engage the Ujamaa Intersections Model in strengthening social work service at the heart of the community where autistic children are residing. As per the structure of Ujamaa intersections, the family unit is a key provision of support to autistic children and their families. Considering the position of the Ubuntu perspective, BoakyeBoaten (2010) pointed out the importance of taking care of children as they are the custodians of Africa and the world of tomorrow. From this point, it can be deduced that the commitment of any society to protect its vulnerable members, such as children in need of care and protection, is determined by their ability to ensure their accessibility to necessities (Boaten, 2010). In Africa, the duty to care for vulnerable members of society was in the hands of the society; it is from this argument that it is commonly noted that Africa had no orphans or a child without parents. Due to this understanding, every child belonged to the community, and each community member had a role in nurturing and providing care and protection (Buhori, 2023).

CONCLUSION

With the influence of the Ujamaa Policy, Tanzania's Development Vision 2025 provides the direction and philosophy for a long-term inclusive development strategy for the country taking into consideration community-based interventions in various aspects including improving the welfare of children in the country. This is in line with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that envision reaching vulnerable children including autistic children with a special target of leaving no one behind as a prerequisite for achieving the Goals overall. Both agendas are inclusive and focus on sustainable interventions that are inextricably linked to the rights of children generally, and the rights of autistic children specifically. Despite the shortage of social workers, poor recognition, and lack of sufficient political will to support the social work profession in the country, the integration of the Ujamaa Intersections Model in the autism continuum of care has positioned the significant roles of social workers in the welfare of autistic children through evidence-based practice.

Ujamaa Intersections Model is among the Ubuntu models that are relevant model for realizing the rights of autistic children in Tanzania and elsewhere if applicable. Despite external pressure on the application of Indigenous models like the Ujamaa Intersections Model in developing countries yet from the Ubuntu perspective the application of the Ujamaa Intersections Model in empowering communities that influenced their capacities in addressing their challenges and special needs in post-colonial Tanzania has achieved remarkable milestones in the country. The achievements have different views in the autism continuum of care as the shortage of social workers in community settings hinders the full utilization of the Ujamaa Intersections Model relevant to realizing the rights and protecting of autistic children.

Also, autism care is forged into medical interventions only and side-lining other approaches like social work and Ubuntu models that compromise the collective and holistic intervention for autistic children in Tanzania. Sideling social workers and the Ujamaa Intersections Model not only undermines the government efforts in the protection and care of children but it compromises the welfare of autistic children in the welfare of children. Moreover, the lack of comprehensive social work policy and respective legislation to guide social work has posed a challenge to the profession's visibility and relevant scheme of service that assigned their special roles in public service including the autism continuum of care, it has been reported by TASWO and LRC (2018) that some employers and supervisors do not know the roles of social workers in the various setting.

Therefore, the Ujamaa intersections Model is among Ubuntu models that hold the view that "a child belongs to a community" and this renders an advantageous ecology for realizing the rights and

special needs of autistic children within the Ujamaa intersections of community intersections (Buhori, 2023). When the Ujamaa intersections Model is fully utilized it entails the potential to endure addressing the needs of autistic children by promoting full and meaningful inclusion of autistic children in social functioning and accessing all health and social work services, empowering autistic children and their families through existing community intersections will continue to ensure relevant and sustainable programs in the country. Lastly, social workers are the custodians of children's rights thus integration of Ujamaa intersections Model on autistic children's continuum of care will increase their visibility in these legally-binding global commitments and standards. Ujamaa intersections are compatible with a rights-based framework necessary to realize SDGs in which autistic children will continue to enjoy children's rights and each community section countercheck the process and vice versa.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Political will is an essential component in addressing special needs and realizing the rights of autistic children. Conducive policy environment, decision-making, budget allocation, and integration of Ujamaa intersections into autism programs depend on the political will.
- Cultural and religious factors tend to affect the family's ability to accept and cope with autism in the African context, thus social work and other childcare interventions should empower and engage Ujamaa sections in the community for sustainable support and promotion of the autistic child's holistic development.
- Social workers have a noble duty to accommodate Indigenous knowledge and practice into their interventions, thus integration of the Ujamaa Intersections Model is relevant to empower community sections by encouraging them to take an active role in shaping policy, plans, and monitoring, evaluating, and social services that influence the welfare of autistic children.
- In the Autism continuum of care, social workers should be on the frontline in identifying effective treatments and creating early intervention plans that will continue to assist ASD children in improving, maintaining, adapting, and functioning within their learning environment and social development.
- The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a global commitment to securing the rights of children including autistic children in the World. Therefore integration of social workers (who are the custodians and

advocators for children's rights) and Ubuntu approaches like the Ujamaa Intersections Model is inevitable since they have capacities to render sustainable solutions for the autistic continuum of care by 2030 and beyond

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