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**Research Article**

# Echoes of Ubuntu Capacity in The Realization of Child Rights Through Ujamaa Intersections – A Case of a Parasocial Work Model in Tanzania

**Meinrad Haule Lembuka**

The Open University of Tanzania P.O Box 23409 – Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

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**Abstract:**

Child rights abuse has become a serious global concern in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it has been reflected in the global agenda of SDGs. Tanzania like other developing countries experienced significant child rights abuse in the 1990s due to the influx of the number of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) which was highly influenced by the HIV and AIDS pandemic, poverty, urbanization, etc. OVC was exposed to the high risk of being deprived of their rights following the failure of the formal systems and the shortage of childcare workforce that necessitated the government to involve the key child welfare stakeholders to revitalize and capacitate among the Ujamaa Intersections Models (UIM) under Ubuntu philosophy. Ultimate the country successfully designed an Indigenous cadre of para-social work (PSW) that advocated for and addressed the multiple rights of vulnerable children from 2007. Initiation and operation of PSW are embedded in the Ujamaa sections from side to side with social work and Ubuntu competence, this combination capacitated existing Ujamaa Intersections in the community such as family, extended families, neighborhood, local leadership, ecology, spirituality, and wider attributes in realizing child rights. The relevance of Ubuntu values and social work enabled para-social workers to identify the special needs of vulnerable children, increase community child protection awareness, create alarm systems for abused children, and sometimes link them to temporary self-shelters or social welfare services, etc. Despite the challenges, PSW succeeded in advocating for children's rights and improved the quality of life of children and their families. PSW has rendered evidence based on how the Indigenous models can offer relevant and sustainable solutions in addressing the rights of vulnerable populations in the community. Over time, several African countries adopted the PSW model and the model calls for child rights stakeholders and global decision-makers to revisit and relearn the capacity of the PSW model in the realization of SDG including protecting children from abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and violence. Also, it has relevant sustainable opportunities that ensure children attain inclusive and equitable quality social welfare services.

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**Keywords:** Community child protection, Indigenous social work, Indigenous Model, Para-social workers, Para professionals, Ubuntu child protection, Ujamaa Intersection Models.

## 1.0 Introduction

Child Rights are fundamental freedoms and the inherent rights of all human beings below the age of 18. These rights apply to every child, irrespective of the child's parent's, or legal guardian's race, color, sex, creed, or other status (UN, 2010). In 1959, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which defines children's rights to protection, education, health care, shelter, and good nutrition (UNICEF, 2021). Also, child rights are the human rights of children, every child, regardless of his or her age, race, gender, wealth, or birthplace, has rights (CRC, 1989). Moreover, these rights are enshrined in international law in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which recognizes that all children must be treated fairly, equally, and with dignity (CRC, 1989).

The child rights convention laws are non-discriminatory and are always in the best interests of the child. The UNCRC is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world and came into force in the United Republic of Tanzania in 1991 (UNICEF, 2021). Worldwide, realizations of child rights have been an integral part of the evolution of mankind from the traditional to the formal practice of child protection (Islam et al, 2021). Due to their incapacity, immaturity, and vulnerability, children require continuous and stable care, protection, and guidance for their full and harmonious development (Family for Every Child, 2014). The responsibility to care for, protect, and guide children is primarily placed on parents but the general society takes the second responsibility for child development in one way or another (Buchumi, 2021).

The advancement of human societies was accompanied by the development of several mechanisms to protect and meet the special needs of children who were vulnerable and unable to be self-sufficient such as orphans, most vulnerable children, children with a physical or mental disability, and the sick (Catholic Relief Services, 2017). On the course, this traditional helping practice was guided by cultural values, ecology, and customary laws that facilitated the emergence of social work as a social product based on human support ground through charity, voluntarism, Good Samaritan, compassion, and mutual aid support with a philosophy of pure social activity originated within human society (Buhori, 2023).

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Over time, the realization of child rights was compromised as humans developed from one stage to a more advanced stage that influenced child protection (Islam et al, 2021). The complexity of social problems affected the capacity of traditional families and parents to care for their children in society and as a result, human societies developed various means of child alternative care to address the special needs of most vulnerable children based on cultural values and customary laws to restore child development (Lembuka, 2021). Child development became more complex and traditional systems were overwhelmed by which necessity for societies to seek solutions to the respective problems and this marked the emergence of both the social work profession and formal child alternative care (Buchumi, 2021).

International standards on child rights have advanced dramatically over the past century, but gaps remain in meeting those ideals, especially in the global south (CRS, 2017). Taking a course of the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in developing countries that experienced a similar challenge of abuse of child rights following extreme poverty, urbanization, overpopulation, child labor, social conflict, civil wars, and diseases (Tanzania Association of Social Workers, 2015). In a similar trend, the HIV and AIDS pandemic swept across parts of the African continent leaving wreckage in its stir, one critical consequence has been an exponential escalation in the number of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) in most of Sub-Saharan Africa (Linsk et al, 2012). According to UNICEF, by 2010, in sub-Saharan Africa, an estimated 15.7 million children had lost at least one parent due to HIV/AIDS (UNICEF, 2010).

As of 2007, an estimated 970,000 children in Tanzania had lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS (Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS, 2008), about 11 percent of the total child population (United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS, 2010). The number of children orphaned due to HIV/AIDS as well as other causes is significantly higher, encompassing approximately 2,600,000 children (United Nations Children's Fund, 2010). About 8 percent of all children are considered to be vulnerable children, as identified within the framework of the National Costed Plan of Action for Most Vulnerable Children (Tanzania HIV/AIDS and Malaria Indicator Survey, 2007–2008). An estimated 140,000 children in Tanzania under the age of 15 are infected with HIV and AIDS, according to a 2008 UNAIDS survey estimate.

Children who are orphaned or made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS face a range of challenges, including stigma and discrimination, abuse, exploitation, neglect, poverty, and illness and depression. In Tanzania, 3 percent of children under age 18 had a parent who was very sick from HIV/AIDS; 7 percent lived in a household in which at least one adult (a parent or other household member) was very sick; and 1 percent lived in a household where at least one adult had been very sick and died during the 12 months preceding the survey. According to the Rapid Country Assessment, Analysis, and Action Planning (RAAAP) Final Report, forty percent of all children under age 18 are living in households at or below the national poverty level (Policy Project, 2005). Orphans in Tanzania are less likely to attend school compared to non-orphans. Recent most vulnerable children (MVC) data reports from the MVC Data Management System indicate food and education are priority needs for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) (Government of Tanzania, 2010).

In the African Ubuntu practice, regularly the care of orphans and vulnerable children falls to the existing community sections that are determined by either matrilineal or patrilineal systems in the community (Makuu, 2017 & 2019). The HIV and AIDS pandemic has hampered Ubuntu child protection leaving annual reported cases of child rights abuse than other continents in the past 40 years more than colonial legacy (Buhori, 2023). According to Linsk et al (2012), the increasing burden of vulnerable children threadbare the capacity of Ubuntu social safety nets of most African countries, creating a crisis of child care and protection. Some formal social welfare systems in some African countries were overwhelmed (by skills and resources) to fill the breach, providing basic services needed by OVC and their caregivers (TASWO, 2015).

Despite the challenges, African governments continued to embrace Ubuntu's philosophy of ensuring a child's rights are born in a community (Lembuka, 2023). The remaining Ubuntu models address the rights of orphans and other children made vulnerable by child rights due to HIV and AIDS living in community intersections or Ujamaa Intersections rather than in institutions (Lembuka, 2024c). In Tanzania Ujamaa Policy framework continued to be a major approach to social welfare in the country through the Ujamaa intersections approach that continues to influence the realization of child rights including a continuum of care on health and psychosocial support, protection, education, nutrition, etc. (TASWO, 2016). Tireless, the government of Tanzania invested in child rights interventions, and on the other hand, the country continued to seek external support relevant to capacitate both Indigenous and formal social welfare systems that deal with child development

The global impacts of the HIV and AIDS pandemic in distorting child rights influenced the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) in 2007/8 to authorize an increase in the number of health care professionals and para-professionals in countries receiving aid including Tanzania (TASWO, 2017). In Tanzania, the government took deliberate actions in line with the Ujamaa policy framework to collaborate with various stakeholders in developing the so-called para-social work model to address the special needs of children at the community level (Lembuka, 2024a). The Department of Social Welfare (DSW) under the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare by then represented government, The Institute of Social Work, and the Tanzania Association of Social Workers (TASWO) were among the key stakeholders involved in receiving financial and technical support in capacitating para-professionals training, deployment, supervision, and development necessary to address the rights of vulnerable children at the community level (TASWO, 2017).

In the record, the para-social work model was composed of the institutions from global North and South from 2006 to 2016 through Twinning Centre Partnership, AIHA's twinning partnership linking the Tanzania Institute of Social Work (ISW) of Tanzania with

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USA institutions including Jane Addams College of Social Work and the Midwest AIDS Training and Education Center (MATEC) at the University of Illinois in Chicago worked in close collaboration with Tanzania’s Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to strengthen the country’s social work profession (AIHA & TASWO, 2017). A particular focus was on training a new community-level social service cadre called Para Social Workers (PSWs) in key social work, case management, psychosocial support, and child development skills, so they are better able to address the needs of most vulnerable populations, including orphans living with or affected by HIV, AIDS, and People Living With HIV (AIHA, 2017).

The para-social work model entails the combination of basic social work skills, African Ubuntu attributes toward child protection and development that was revitalized in 2007 in Tanzania to advocate and address the rights of children and ultimately empower their families (Buhori & Lembuka 2024). To ensure para-social workers fit into formal systems, they undergo specialized short courses, giving them introductory skills in basic social work practice with a focus on community-based social work services targeting vulnerable children and their families (Linsk et al, 2012). Like other African countries where the social welfare workforce is under-skilled and resourced, PSWs are equipped with the necessary competence to fill the aforesaid gap, an over-burdened social welfare system, and address the challenge of a growing population of vulnerable children.

To warrant social work competence is achieved, the PSW training component comprises field experiences rather than extensive formal academic training; therefore, PSWs were quickly produced and deployed back to their community settings where they belong to address the special needs of children (TASWO, 2015). Among other roles, para social workers are responsible for identifying children and households most at risk for HIV infection and then providing necessary care or referrals to other organizations for further health services including health and social welfare services. The case management approach PSWs employ helps ensure vulnerable children and their caregivers have access to a holistic support continuum that includes health and allied care, education, nutrition, legal, and other needed services. The parasocial work model represents other African Ubuntu child protection models in the African context from pre-colonial times where every community member is responsible for child protection at the community level (Linsk 2017 & Lembuka, 2021).

According to (Linsk 2017 & Lembuka, 2023) the foundation of the Para work model is based on Tanzania’s Ujamaa value that envisions a child as a product of the community and child protection as a primary noble role for all community members. The fact that the Parasocial work cadre operates at the village or mtaa level reflects a typical African Ubuntu towards child protection in the African community setting (Lembuka, 2024d). It was argued by Mugumbate (2019) that “it takes a village to raise a child” which means that meaningful interactions among the child, family members, and those outside the family circle are necessary for children to realize human excellence (Mugumbate et al, 2019). In Ubuntu philosophy, community forms the basis of socio-economic and political structures in African settings and this was the foundation of the Parasocial work model that embraces existing Ujamaa intersections in the community (Linsk et al 2012 & Lembuka, 2023).

In the African context, Ujamaa intersections are the core platforms for the realization of all SDGs and child rights, this was used as a point of reference when designing the Parasocial work model in Tanzania and later in other African countries (TASWO, 2017 & Lembuka, 2024d). To mention a few practical examples, the para-social work model was integrated into formal social welfare services in Ethiopia, Uganda, Zambia, and Nigeria in support of SDGs in addressing child rights and special needs of orphans and vulnerable children (TASWO, 2017). The holistic and collective approach reflected in the SDGs framework is similarly reflected by PSW model interventions through community strength. PSW model is second to the global agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the provision of community-based services with an opportunity to emphasize the role of Ujamaa or community intersections in upholding children’s rights (CRS, 2017). Also, PSWs are bound to the Ubuntu culture of collective and holistic interdependence of community sections on the course of community development activities which are crucial for the sustainability of restoration and promoting child rights interventions (Lembuka, 2024d).

Ujamaa Intersections are made up of interdependent community structures including families, extended families, neighborhoods, local leadership, ecology, spirituality, and wider attributes (Lembuka, 2024b). Para-social work model is evidence of how indigenous models can operate smoothly with formal systems for the best interests of the wider community in addressing the special needs of vulnerable populations including children (Buhori & Lembuka, 2024). The Ujamaa Intersections is compatible with Ubuntu's philosophy toward child protection and development in the African setting, the fact that the community is made up of nucleated families that form the basis of the Ujamaa intersections model that influences traditional social work education in Tanzania from pre-colonial times (Lembuka, 2024a).

**Table: 1.0 Functions of Para Social Workers in the Ujamaa Intersections Framework**

SN	Level	Linkage to Social Work
1	Family hood/Kaya	Parasocial workers ensure that the family is a safe place for child development and observe the responsibility of families in safe parenting, education, and nutrition
2	Extended family/Relatives	Parasocial workers ensure the extended family members are connected and involved in times of child case management whenever possible.

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		Parasocial workers are responsible for encouraging family bonds between related families, providing alternative care to orphans and vulnerable children, and family-to-family counseling. Also, neighbors can be used by PSW in the provision of permanent child alternative care.
3	Neighborhood	Parasocial workers take part in making sure the neighborhood is a safe passage and playground for children. When every neighbor's eye is observing child movement is crucial for early prevention or response to child rights abuse. Also, neighbors can be used by PSW in the provision of temporally child alternative care.
4	Local leadership (Village/Street leaders)	Parasocial workers work closely with local leaders to ensure cultural values and customs are followed in the provision of child welfare. Also, Responsible for settling immediate family disputes that are likely to affect the welfare of children.
5	Elders	Pare-social workers work closely with community elders fact these are senior citizens who can enforce orders and norms that protect child rights, they have wisdom and knowledge of child rights based on the ethnic tribes or community-based locality
6	Ecology section	Parasocial workers are equipped with the knowledge of ecology necessary to ensure that all the surroundings in the community are conducive to child development. Also, social-economic activities do not exploit children, or expose them to harmful activities such as human trafficking, child labor, and female genital mutilation, etc. PSWs are responsible for ensuring the existence and restoration of a protective environment where children's rights are respected, the world's most vulnerable children can flourish and reach their highest potential
7	Spiritual section	Parasocial workers are equipped with psychosocial care and support competence that involves spiritual components. In African settings, spiritual practice is a key to understanding and intervening in child case management and restoration of child rights

**Source:** *Lembuka (2024)*

Realization of child rights by para social workers depends on the functionality of the Ujamaa intersections in the community, and the existence of various sections in the community such as families, neighborhood, local leadership, ecology, spirituality, and wider attributes. (*Nyerere, 2011*). Guided by Ubuntu and social work values, para-social workers work closely with community or Ujamaa intersections in advocating and restoring child rights in the community, in the process the primary focus of para-social workers strive to ensure the family remains a custodian and key implementer of child rights compared to other community sections (*Lembuka, 2024c*). The linkage of Parasocial workers into Ujamaa intersections improved child protection from violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, etc.

Over time, the Ultimate goal of the PSWs in advocating and managing child cases in Tanzania became an evidence-based approach to realizing children's rights in the country. It was reported by community members to refer to it as children's savior for evil practices to children in the community (*TASWO, 2017*). Also, para-social work interventions brought together community intersections, governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to play a vital role in realizing children's rights to protection (*Links et al, 2017*). On the other side, para-social workers empowered children to play an important role in protecting themselves from abuse and exploitation, through their evolving capacities (*AIHA, 2017*).

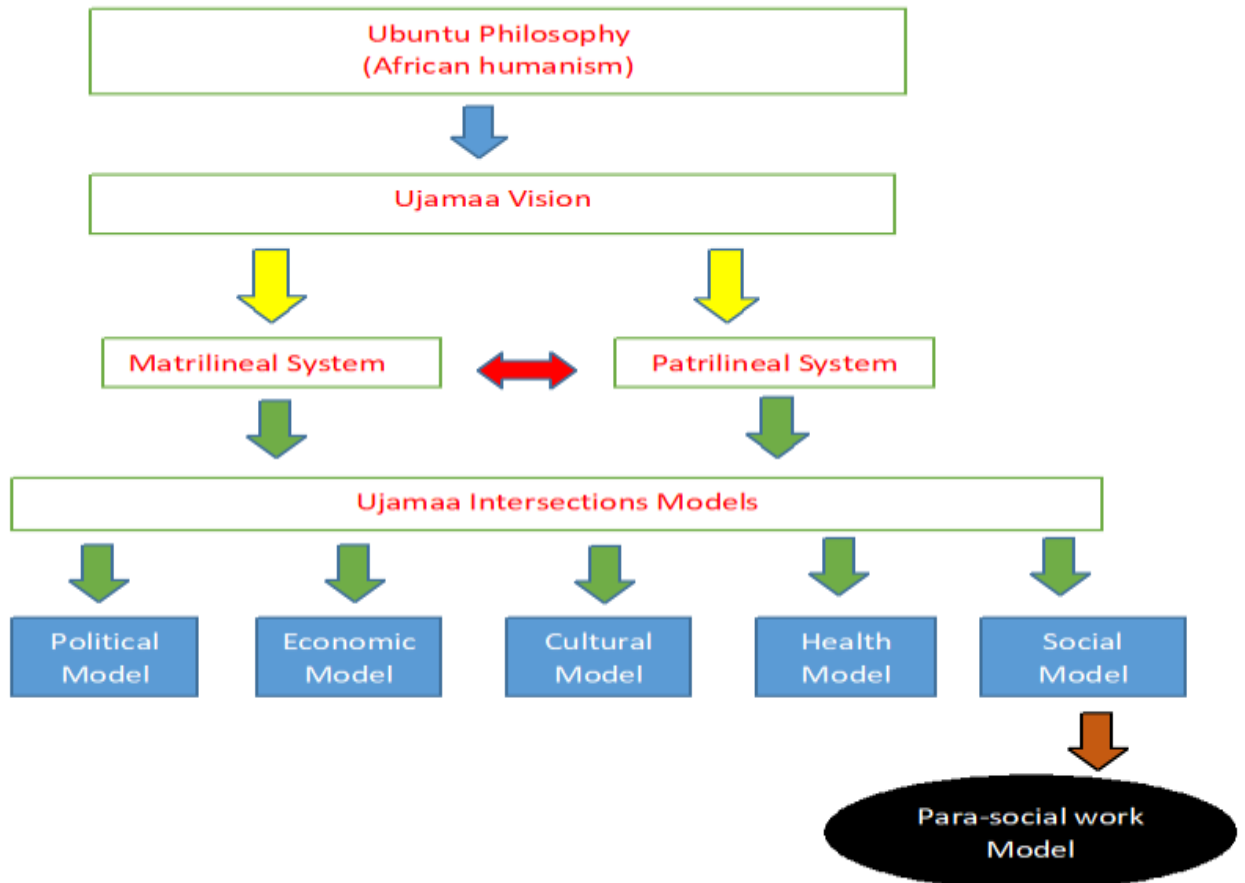
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have reflected the vital role of indigenous models that operate at the community level in attaining human rights. All SDGs have touched on child rights and the capacity of the PSW model is linked to functions within the community or Ujamaa intersections promisingly in the African context and beyond. The sustainability and relevance of para-social workers to function in the community where they belong are guaranteed by their necessary knowledge, cultural values, and experiences of formal structures and Ujamaa intersections in the community (*Lembuka, 2024a*).

The Ujamaa is among the core values of the African Ubuntu philosophy that envisions on community strength toward development and social welfare that became a national policy framework in post-colonial Tanzania in 1967 after the Arusha Declaration (*Nyerere, 2011*). This was a community-based cadre for the social service workforce at the micro level referred to as para-social workers, meaning that they are volunteers in nature, but are recognized as serving as a critical link between the community-based, often informal system, and the more formal or statutory system that addresses the social welfare components (*Andrews et al, 2017*).

1.1 Conceptualizing Ubuntu and Ujamaa Intersections in Child Rights

Ubuntu philosophy represents a historically broader practice of Africa that views humanism in every aspect of life including socioeconomic, cultural, and political, etc. According to Mugumbate (2013), Ubuntu is guided by several principles including equality, solidarity, Ujamaa, sympathy, cooperation, human dignity, social justice, tolerance, social inclusion, and cultural diversity (Mugumbate, 2013). Presence of abundant African lingua-franca in a huge continent, Ubuntu entails several models with different names under similar approaches based on geographical locations. The compatibility of African Ubuntu and child rights is reflected in the reciprocal capacity of the Ubuntu approach through communal relationally, communal ideals, and human excellence, which forms part of the knowledge and wisdom of how African communities and families raise children (Metz 2016 & Mugumbate et al, 2019).

Table 1.2 African Ubuntu and Ujamaa Intersections Conceptual Framework



Source: Lembuka, (2024)

Table 1.2 is presentation of the African Ubuntu Philosophy and Ujamaa Intersections Model that conceptualizes the linkage of indigenous models on children's rights and related protection mechanisms in an African context. Every continent has its philosophical framework that guides all the aspects of life and Ubuntu is an African philosophy representing the African continent (Metz, 2016 & Lembuka, 2024c). Ubuntu values guide African indigenous knowledge and practices from pre-colonial times to the present, the capacity of Ubuntu was undermined and side-lined during colonialism in Africa. In post-colonial Africa emerged several movements including Pan-Africanism which strived to restore and uphold Ubuntu approaches in Africa.

According to Mugumbate (2013), Ubuntu simply means humanism or humanness that represents the worldviews of indigenous black populations of Sub-Saharan Africa, transmitted from generation to generation through observation, experience, language, and art. The widely acknowledged maxim “I am because we are” meaning a person is a person through other persons indicates that relationally is a crucial ingredient for human excellence (Metz, 2016). This suggests that, as with every member of the family, children “develop personhood through other persons,” which means that they must “prize communal and harmonious relationships with others” (Metz, 2016 & Buhori, 2023). The Ujamaa is among the core values of Ubuntu, in Tanzania Ujamaa's vision dominated the country's social, economic, military, health, and political aspects in the post-colonial era. The first president of Tanzania the late Dr. Julius Kambarage Nyerere (Ubuntu PhD) is among the Pan-Africanists who embraced and demonstrated the Ujamaa vision

through endorsement of the agenda into the Arusha Declaration in 1967 (Nyerere, 2011). The Ujamaa intersections Model is made up of various sub-models enriched with social, economic, political, military, health, and cultural components.

Ujamaa intersections are part and parcel of child rights in the African context based on the maxim that it takes a whole community to raise a child entails a meaningful interdependence of every community or Ujamaa section to play a critical role in creating the relational conditions that enable children to realize their rights (Mugumbate et al, 2019). Given social work's emphasis on using community and ecology strengths perspectives, there is no doubt that Ubuntu informs the ideal of realizing child rights in African contexts (Mugumbate et al, 2019).

## **2.0 Background to The Problem**

The concept of child rights has gained a global agenda in the 20<sup>th</sup> century following the reported cases of child abuse in the World at a very alarming rate (CRC, 1989). To date, child protection is a global agenda but in developing countries, the situation is not promising following the contradiction of the proper and sustainable child protection mechanism. Extreme poverty, civil wars, social unrest, urbanization, overpopulation, and weak legal systems have been reported among the long-standing causes of child rights abuse in developing countries. Also, colonialism disadvantages existing traditional social safety nets and community mutual supports that promoted and protected vulnerable populations including children (Buhori & Lembuka, 2024). The distortion of Indigenous Ubuntu models to address social equality and human dignity left a long-standing impact on vulnerable populations, especially in post-colonial African countries.

In the early 2000s, child rights abuse caught whistle at an alarming rate following the influx of orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) due to the impacts of HIV and AIDS especially in developing or least-developed countries (Bavaria et al, 2020). The rights of OVC are often not addressed due to a lack of integrated care systems, non-supportive structures of society, and scarce resources (Nyangara et al, 2009 & Links et al, 2010). Orphanhood poses a growing public health and social challenge for many communities (UNICEF, 2004). In 2015, there were 52 million orphans reported in Africa (UNICEF, 2017). While adults in the sub-Saharan African region carry the highest burden of HIV, the consequences affect entire families (UNICEF, 2004). The association between orphanhood and HIV has been extensively studied (Mmari, 2011). In 2016, 8% of Tanzanian children under 18 were orphans, many due to losing one or both parents to HIV (MoHCDGEC, 2015). Numerous studies (Mmari, 2011; Fawzi et al, 2012 & MoHCDGEC, 2015) suggest that orphanhood due to HIV increases children's vulnerability and risk of adverse health and social outcomes due to the increased infective and social concerns related to HIV (Bavaria et al, 2020). Orphans are at high risk of suffering nutritional deficiencies, lack of access to basic needs, education, and health services as well as inadequate care and support (Bryant, 2009). Similarly, vulnerable children living with disabilities, with an ill caregiver (CG), in a child-headed household, on the streets, or who are victims of abuse also face challenges in accessing essential services and resources for their overall well-being (Lachman et al, 2002 & Linsk et al, 2012). This consequently necessitates evidence-based programs for supporting and caring for OVCs (Bavari et al, 2020).

The Tanzanian government collaborated with key stakeholders and has been investing and capacitating the social welfare workforce to uphold the rights of children and address the special needs of vulnerable children in the country (TASWO, 2017). The Tanzanian social work workforce (Social workers and para-social workers) has been an integral part of implementing and contributing to the global approach toward human rights and the rights of children, inevitably impacting children's rights advocacy through the goals focus on sustainable development (CRS, 2017). Tracing back in 2007, a team of Tanzanian and American partners in social work education and training, funded by US government grants and with the support of the Twinning Center, American International Health Alliance, coalesced, including the Jane Addams College of Social Work, the University of Illinois at Chicago and its Midwest AIDS Training and Education Center (MATEC), the Institute of Social Work (ISW) of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and the Department of Social Welfare (DSW), Ministry of Health, Tanzania (AIHA, 2012).

The mission of the partnership was to develop a culturally competent para-social work model to create a sustainable, community-based workforce while also strengthening connections of families and community workers to a national care system and a national system of supervision, evaluation, and educational development (AIHA, 2012). The project is designated as The Social Work Partnership for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) in Tanzania (Partnership). The project has three over-arching goals:

- To develop a cadre of trained, organized, and supported Para Social Workers who could be recruited, supported, and supervised with great speed and who would then be further developed to meet the immediate needs of the growing number of families and children who are being caught in the crises of medical, economic and social displacement related to HIV/AIDS and poverty.
- To build on, support, and expand the vertically integrated national social service model for Tanzania that was already being developed to support orphans, vulnerable children, and their families.
- To develop a national workforce and the related educational structure required to develop, supervise, and provide policy and curricular resources to support this program. This resource was established at the Institute of Social Work, Dar es Salaam collaborating with the Department of Social Welfare at the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to expand and strengthen the professional workforce.

Despite the opportunities rendered by the Para-social work model in the country, donor dependency syndromes' have allowed

duplication of child rights interventions, and social welfare programs (Lembuka, 2024b). This has been a long-standing major challenge that influences the para-social work cadre and it has been reported that some foreign social welfare programs are similar or close to the roles of para-social workers at the community level. While the Tanzania Association of Social Workers (TASWO) failed to fully recognize and accommodate para-social workers into their constitutional database yet lack of a comprehensive social work legal framework and regulatory council in the country to support para-social work interventions is not promising in the coming years (Law Reform Commission, 2018). The fact that para-social workers are not paid cadre, and the introduction of other community social welfare and health cadres that receive stipends and incentives have continued to demoralize and undermine the Ubuntu spirit within para-social workers (Lembuka, 2024c).

### **3.0 Methodology**

The article intricate the desk research method that engaged various empirical literatures and reports were purposively selected, screened, and independently reviewed against predetermined criteria for eligibility (Schabram, 2010). The next step consisted of making decisions about the suitability of material to be considered in the review where efforts were made to be as comprehensive as possible to ensure that all relevant studies, published and unpublished relevant to the study were included in the review (Okoli, 2010). Articles were searched from 2000 to 2024 using the search terms 'para social work model, Ubuntu child protection, Ujamaa intersections, and child rights in the sustainable development goals. Eligible studies were those that analyzed the contributions and impacts of Indigenous models in Africa on child rights and child protection at the community level (Jesson et al., 2011). Finally, collected data were analyzed, collated, summarized, aggregated, organized, and compared with the evidence extracted from the included studies. The extracted data was presented in a meaningful way that suggests a new contribution to the existing literature and knowledge on a given topic thus; conclusions were based on this all-inclusive knowledge base (Watson & Webster (2002).

### **4.0 Findings and Discussions**

The human rights agenda is among the core values of Ubuntu that the government of Tanzania has embedded in the Ujamaa policy framework since 1967 (Nyerere, 2011). Demonstration of the Ujamaa Intersections Model like para-social work is proof of the underpinning vision and mission of the government of Tanzania in the fulfillment of children's rights, welfare, and development in the country (Tordoir, 2020). According to UNICEF (2021), the United Nations Child Rights Convention of 1989 is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world and came into force in the United Republic of Tanzania in 1991 (UNICEF, 2021). In 1996 Child Development Policy was endorsed marking the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to have a comprehensive policy framework that reflected child rights, the country continued to demonstrate regular commitment to children's rights protection, and in 2009 passed a bill known as the Law of the Child Act which effectively domesticated the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and provided the legal framework through which the rights of the country's children can be protected (Tordoir, 2020).

Back in the 2000s, the annual increase of orphans and vulnerable children in the country led the government to seek other solutions to uphold the rights of children ultimately resulting in the development of various models including the Para-social work model (Linsk et al, 2010 & TASWO, 2017). The government of Tanzania collaborated with child welfare stakeholders and invested in developing a sustainable and cost-effective model that directly works in the community settings to address the rights of children and capacitate the Ujamaa intersections necessary for holistic child development. The model involves the identification and confirmation of voluntary community members from the community with pre-determined qualifications including Ubuntu values and basic formal education necessary to undergo a short formal training (Lembuka 2023a).

The development of the para-social work model involved internal and external influence to support the government of Tanzania's efforts in the realization of children's rights in the country through the partnership project (TASWO, 2016). The primary mission of the partnership was to revitalize the social work workforce to improve the quality of social services and support to orphans and vulnerable children by equipping social workers and revitalizing existing Indigenous community models with the knowledge and skills necessary to ensure comprehensive social services to children affected by HIV and AIDS throughout Tanzania (Bess, 2011). The para-social work model was initiated in the year 2006 through the Social Work Partnership for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) in Tanzania (AIHA, 2017).

Through the Department of Social Welfare and the Institute of Social Work in collaboration with social welfare key stakeholders led by UNICEF conducted assessments of the social welfare system in the country that necessitated the establishment of the Social Work Partnership for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (Bess, 2011). The partnership was initiated by among others, the American International Alliance (AIHA) HIV & AIDS Twinning Center, Tanzania's Institute of Social Work (ISW), and Chicago-based JACSW/MATEC at the University of Illinois at Chicago (Intra-health Tanzania & Bess, 2011). The partnership took deliberate efforts under the guidance of the government of Tanzania to establish a community-based voluntary cadre necessary for child protection at the grassroots level (Bess, 2011 & Nathan et al, 2024). Throughout the partnership, the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare has been a key partner (Bess, 2011). PEPFAR, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-Tanzania, USAID, and the US Department of Health Resources and Services Administration of the US Department of Health and Human Services have provided funding and technical support (Guyer et al., 2012).

The para-social work model involved a comprehensive, multi-stage training program that equipped Para social workers with the

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knowledge and skills necessary for case management that addresses the special needs of vulnerable children and their families, this was competence-based training as 70 % of the training was spent in the fieldwork practice (Guyer et al, 2012). The training equipped PSWs to identify vulnerable children and households most at risk for HIV infection and then provide necessary care or referrals to other organizations for needed services at the community level (Links et al, 2010 & TASWO, 2015). In the course of engaging the case management approach, PSWs ensure vulnerable children and their caregivers have access to a holistic support continuum that provides a conducive ecology for the realization of rights to health and allied care, education, nutrition, legal, and other needed services (AIHA, 2017).

The parasocial work model attracted the attention of other sectors in the country that have a close link to health and social welfare services, which led to the introduction of other community cadres to address child rights and related interventions (Bavaria et al, 2020). The endorsement of The Law of Child Act of 2009 by the government of Tanzania influenced the establishment of more donor-funded programs that duplicated the community interventions that are related to para-social work interventions. It has been reported by TASWO (2017) that there is no clear demarcation between community development, social work, and community health interventions which sometimes influences the duplication of interventions or side-lining of professionalism (TASWO, 2017). Since the revitalization of the para-social work model in 2007, several community interventions either duplicated or merged the para-social workers into the new programs that do not prioritize social work competence.

**Table 4.0 Roles of Para-social Workers on the Child Rights**

SN	Roles
1	Identify orphans and vulnerable children in the community
2	Supporting referral and linkage of OVC for further social welfare and health services
3	Engaging OVC and their Families in case management
4	Conducting assessment of the special needs of OVC and their families
5	Assessing community needs and strengths necessary to address the rights of children
6	Developing and implementing a plan of support, working with micro and mezzo systems through case management
7	Lobbying for a budget increase at local government authority for the child protection intervention and related social welfare issues.
8	Organizing meetings (village/mtaa) with community leaders to better educate them on the importance of upholding child rights and their access to social welfare services
9	Collaborating with communities to identify, manage, and mitigate opportunities and challenges of child development in the local environment
10	Conducting a regular home visit to the orphans and vulnerable children
11	Provision of psychosocial care and support i.e. Counselling OVC and their Families
12	Actively participate in monitoring and evaluation of the child protection

**Source: Lembuka, (2024)**

Regarding table 4.0, working at the community level para social workers engaged in various advocacy roles that help to address challenges that compromise the rights of children and they engage in mobilizing community resources for the required interventions. The primary roles of Parasocial workers involve the engagement with community members to identify the vulnerable children and their families, conduct needs assessment, develop alternative solutions, and advocate for changes in the existing micro, mezzo, and macro systems that recover and uphold the child protection and realization of the child rights (Buhori, 2023). By advocating for a cause, para-social workers help community members to realize and implement their noble roles of protecting children for the best interest of the wider community and ultimately act as a catalyst for change (AIHA, 2012). The fact without para social workers’ advocacy many voices that reveal the abuse of child rights would remain silenced in the local community.

At the community level, PSWs collaborated to raise awareness about the criminal nature of child abuse and defilement and encouraged children, caregivers, and community leaders to report occurrences of abuse and speak out against perpetrators, this is verified by the case management records. In Uganda, Parasocial workers working closely with social welfare officials and community intersections attribute the increase in reported abuse to an improved understanding of child protection issues and responsibilities across the community sections, familiarity with reporting procedures, and increased resolution by PSWs at the community level (CRS, 2017). Links et al (2012) state that the uniqueness of the Parasocial work model is founded on capacitating southern institutions to solve southern development challenges concerning community strength that involves history, ecology, cultural values, etc.

In Tanzania, the para-social work involved a training component that was supported by the American International Health Alliance through the Twining Centre Program under PEPFAR and USAID funding (AIHA & TASWO, 2017). Over time, the para-social work model spread to other African countries, this marked the PSW model as an international program through partnered northern institutions with solid southern institutions in each country to not only create a new cadre of para-professional social workers but to



strengthen each country's social work schools and institutions of social welfare to make the model more sustainable (Linsk et al 2012).

Having Parasocial workers working in community settings plays a crucial role in implementing social protection and livelihood in Tanzania, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Uganda, Nigeria, and other African countries (UNICEF, 2023), Parasocial workers are tasked with providing support and assistance to vulnerable children and their households, particularly those living in extreme poverty and affected by HIV and AIDS pandemic (TASWO, 2016). This means that PSWs are responsible for ensuring that poor households receive the support and benefits they are entitled to in the existing social protection system. Taking a practical example in Rwanda, para-social workers work closely with graduation clients in economic empowerment then assisting them in selecting the most suitable graduation pathway. PSWs provide guidance and support throughout the process to support a sustainable transition out of poverty.

The interventions of the para-social workers' roles are crucial in realizing the SDG agendas that reflect child rights since all SDGs are linked to child rights. The 2030 Agenda is intended as a framework to safeguard the future of the planet and the next generation, and as such has strong potential to support the rights and best interests of all children (United Nations, 2016). More engagement of PSWs is likely to guarantee the crucial commitments that are supportive of the protection and promotion of children's rights, to ensure equality of opportunities, and to reduce inequalities of outcomes, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices. PSWs have relevant capacity with a special focus on leaving no one behind, including families in situations of vulnerability, with specific reference to children and other groups at risk of exclusion (TASWO, 2017).

Despite the various achievements brought by para-social workers' intervention in the realization of child rights in Tanzania and outside, the Parasocial work cadre faced several challenges at the community level especially when there is a duplication of resources (Lembuka, 2024d). These challenges ranged from institutional, competence, financial, and conflicts of interest among the key stakeholders, etc. Tanzania, like the rest of African countries south of the Sahara, has continued to engage stakeholders in delivering social welfare services and thus the country has incorporated several community-based, faith-based, and internationally-based non-governmental organizations to serve children and other vulnerable populations (Laura et al, 2010). On the other hand, some of the stakeholders have continued to establish new forms of paraprofessional cadres that have the same or similar roles as para-social workers at the community level. They work to varying degrees with community service networks as well as with municipal and regional government structures that affect the functioning of para-social work (TASWO, 2017).

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## **5.0 Lessons Learned**

- Para social work cadre is a sustainable intervention since it originated from the grassroots level at the community as the Para-social workers are identified by the community and local leaders as already having voluntary and active roles in the community relating to child protection and promoting children's rights
- Para social workers demonstrated the capacity to work at micro and mezzo levels in the community which is relevant in advocating for child rights in various settings necessary to strengthen the child rights movement
- Community or Ujamaa Intersections are key entry points for realizing child rights that global and national interventions should (re)strategize to integrate them as interdependent structures rather than separate structures.
- Several interventions have been established in Tanzania influenced by the para-social work models and they have been grouped under the umbrella of Community Caseworker (CCW), Community Workers (CW), Lead Community Workers (LCW), Community Health Worker (CHW), Home Based Care worker (HBC), Community Facilitator (CF), Empowerment Worker (EW), etc.
- Among other tasks, para-social workers offer psycho-social support to vulnerable children and their families relevant in promoting holistic child and adolescent development, including physical, emotional, and social development. This approach creates a long-standing resilient capacity and related protective factors for the children, including their ability to identify and timely act against risky situations.
- Evidence-based practice of PSW in Tanzania, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Uganda, Zambia, etc. This has left a social work legacy in Africa by contributing to the realization of child rights and child protection at the community level throughout the Millennium Development Goals (2000 – 2015) and in a similar path linked to the current Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030).

## **6.0 Conclusions**

Based on the primary mission of the social work profession in upholding human rights, social workers have been on the front line

in advocating and addressing human rights issues worldwide since its inception in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For decades there have been global agendas that targeted human rights and the rights of children interventions either separate or combined, these interventions have become a road map and working tools for social work interventions. Evidence of a series of international human rights treaties and other instruments adopted since 1945 has expanded the body of international human rights laws taking a reference to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), among others.

Social workers have been advocating and implementing these global calls and the recent years global goals have provided a comprehensive framework of child rights with reference to the Millenium Development Goals (2000-2015) and its successor Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030). As a global call, all Sustainable Development Goals have reflected child rights and their holistic development. SDGs emphasize the integration of child rights interventions through a community-based approach and this has been demonstrated by the para social work model since 2007. Despite the low recognition of the contribution of para social work model in the realization of Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), its capacity to influence the rights through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is very promising.

I stand to be correct, the past experiences have shown that some imposed interventions have underestimated indigenous knowledge and practices like Ubuntu toward advocating and implementing child rights and related welfare. Learning from the case of the para social work model that represents other community-based cadres of the social service workforce with combined competence of African Ubuntu and social work that still serves a critical link between the community-based, often informal system, and the more formal or statutory system. The article calls for child rights stakeholders to revisit the case of the para-social work model under the capacity of the Ujamaa or community intersections model to unlearn and relearn the opportunities that it renders toward achieving SDGs by 2023 and beyond. Taking to African settings, a community is not generalized rather it consists of several interdependent sections, then the fact remains that community or Ujamaa Intersections are key entry points for realizing child rights that global and national interventions should (re)strategize to integrate these sections as interdependent structures rather than separate structures.

In fulfilling the commitments of the 2030 Agenda of No Child Is Left Behind and that those furthest behind are made the priority of implementation efforts community-based interventions like the Para social work model are inevitable. The Parasocial woke model is an evidence-based approach that calls on national and international strategies that integration of Indigenous approaches in the so-called formal sector is crucial in the realization of child rights and their holistic development. Despite the challenges of integrating indigenous approaches into the formal systems, child rights, and welfare are more rooted in the history, ecology, norms, and cultural values of the community. Therefore a community-based child rights advocacy and implementation that involves working with local communities to address social issues and mobilize resources are vital in identifying their needs, developing solutions, and advocating for changes that improve not only child rights but the community's overall welfare.

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