



Child Health Improvement Program International

AUTISM IN AFRICA

Newsletter

September 2026



Breaking the Stigma

Autism in Africa has traditionally been shrouded in silence. Now, despite considerable gains in autism awareness, stigma in many African communities persists as arguably the biggest barrier to accepting autism and embracing neurodiversity.

An environment of silence discourages open conversations about autism. This hinders awareness efforts, delays diagnosis, and prevents effective, considerate intervention even if available. The pre-existing negative and uninformed perceptions are then reinforced, creating a vicious, self-sustaining cycle.

CHIP International's newsletter for the next few quarters focuses on powerful influences on community perception and how those forces can be harnessed for the good of neurodivergent persons, their families, and their allies.

Together, we can build communities where every child is seen and supported.



The Role of Religion



Africa is the most religious continent in the world. A 2020 Pew research study determined that 95% of Africans identify with one religion or the other.

Faith is deeply woven into life across the continent, and religion often plays a critical role in shaping how families interpret the circumstances of life. For families raising children with autism, it can be a powerful source of hope, strength, comfort, and community.

Yet, families can also face painful misconceptions. Families may be told that autism is caused by spiritual forces, a lack of faith, or something the parents—often the mother— did wrong. Many families seek spiritual explanations and ‘cures’ before professional intervention. These beliefs, combined with limited access to affordable professional services, lead many families to rely more on pastors and faith-healers than on evidence-based assessment, education, therapy, and other practical support. Precious opportunities for early diagnosis and intervention are lost, and stigma from the community only increases.

Religious leaders have a unique opportunity to make a difference. They are trusted voices who can help families understand autism, challenge harmful myths, encourage professional support, and create welcoming places where children with autism and their families feel valued and included.

Faith and professional care do not have to be in conflict. Prayer and spiritual support may comfort, strengthen, and inspire families, while knowledge, education, therapy, and healthcare can provide practical support. With both, the child can learn, communicate, grow, and thrive in their own way.

When families, faith communities, educators, and healthcare professionals work together, we can create a more compassionate understanding of autism - one that replaces fear and blame with acceptance, dignity, and hope.

Every child deserves to be understood - not feared, blamed, or excluded. Together, through faith, knowledge, and compassion, we can replace stigma with acceptance, and build communities where every child is welcomed and every family is supported.



Stories of Faith



The vast majority of schools and centres for autism and children with special needs in Africa share one distinct, remarkable characteristic: they were started by mothers who, with no support for the needs of their own child, stepped out in faith not only to find a way forward for their child, but to create a path for countless others.

With limited resources and little understanding from their communities, they began, one step at a time: armed with faith, courage, prayer, and an unwavering determination to make a difference.

One by one, these mothers built schools, centres, and support networks. Often, they did so as single parents, with the fathers refusing to accept new realities. Invariably, where the fathers stayed, greater strides were made together. Over the years, they have served thousands of children and families. Collectively, they have transformed the conversation around autism and pushed awareness and acceptance to levels that once seemed improbable. And they have done so despite challenges that remain enormous.

For many, the journey came at a personal cost. Some could no longer attend their regular places of worship because of stigma, hurtful comments, misunderstanding, or the absence of accommodation for their children. Some were forced to move from one place of worship to another. Others chose to worship privately. And yet their faith did not falter. Today, many of these women are celebrated as pioneers and national heroes. Yet the struggle continues. They continue to fight — for their children, for their families, and for every child who deserves the opportunity to belong, learn, and succeed.

CHIP International is honoured to be part of this story, helping transform individual acts of courage into sustainable systems of support. Recognition alone does not provide the training, resources, professional support, or frameworks that these children and communities still need. We stand alongside these extraordinary mothers and the communities they have built, helping to strengthen what they started, expand what is possible, and ensure that no family has to walk this journey alone.





Cultural Autism Studies at Yale

'Autism in Africa' Series

Cultural Autism Studies at Yale

**AUTISM IN AFRICA WITH
CHIP INTERNATIONAL**

**Beyond the Diagnosis:
My Journey as an Autistic
Young Adult Living in Ghana**

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2026
12 P.M. EDT | 4 P.M. GMT | 5 P.M. BST

Kwaku Gyau

FIDDLE FOUNDATION
Autism Services and Support

CASY Sparks!

CHIP International's 'Autism in Africa' series with the Cultural Autism Studies at Yale continues this month with its new focus on autistic professionals and advocates, all from the continent.

Our premier session was remarkable, and we are excited about future sessions. We continue to uncover rare-to-find diagnosed autistic professionals in Africa and amplify their even more rarely heard voices. Join us to hear their striking stories of resilience under the most trying circumstances and in occasionally outright hostile environments.

CASY has been a remarkable success and is expanding globally, at the forefront of championing a shift in perspectives on autism. CHIP International is proud to showcase the realities, successes, and possibilities for progress in autism in Africa.

Watch previous episodes:





Center Profile

Patrick Speech and Languages Centre



Patrick Speech and Languages Centre was established in 2006, birthed out of a burning desire to nurture and cater for the educational needs and socio-economic development of Children and Young Adults living with Autism. Founded by Mrs. Dotun Akande, the Centre is the first special needs centre for the education of children with autism in Nigeria.

Vision:

To build a thriving community where individuals with developmental disabilities can RISE, through recognised ability, inspired growth, supported inclusion, and empowered contribution.

Mission:

To unlock the potential of individuals with developmental disabilities through evidence-based intervention, inclusive education, skills development, advocacy, and opportunities for lifelong growth and participation.

<https://pslcautism-ng.org/>

News articles

[Life On The Spectrum... from BBC Africa Eye](#)

Life On The Spectrum, a new documentary from BBC World Service's investigative unit, BBC Africa Eye, follows the experiences of families caring for children with autism. Centered on Malawi, the film offers a glimpse into the realities faced by families across Africa, highlighting themes around acceptance, stigma, awareness and access to care and information.

<https://www.bbc.com/mediacentre/2026/bbc-africa-eye-families-living-with-autism-in-malawi>





Get in Touch

Children with autism and developmental disabilities in Africa, like everywhere else, deserve the opportunity to live up to their potential. Your contribution helps to make this possible. Come join us in our mission!

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