

AUTISM, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: UNIVERSITY EXTENSION AND SDGS AT AMA-PI

**AUTISMO, DIREITOS HUMANOS E DESENVOLVIMENTO SUSTENTÁVEL:
EXTENSÃO E ODS NA AMA-PI**

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes a university extension experience developed in 2024 by Law students at Universidade Estácio - CEUT in partnership with the Association of Friends of Autistic People of Piauí (AMA-PI), in Teresina, Brazil. The study aimed to engage people connected to the institution in dialogue about rights, social inclusion, and institutional challenges, implement an educational activity, and propose a tool for strengthening partnerships. The methodological pathway included non-member participant observation, a diagnostic visit to the institution, a lecture followed by a talking circle with family members and the AMA-PI team, and development of a three-point Likert scale for the “Friends of Autistic People” seal. The diagnosis identified limited public and private partnerships, difficulties in obtaining resources, and gaps in information about rights and services. The educational activity addressed human rights, education, employment, accessibility, leisure, and legal protections for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The resulting seal was organized into four dimensions: legislation, accessibility, support for autistic people and their families, and commitment to human rights, diversity, environmental rights, and social justice. The proposal is discussed in relation to the 2030 Agenda, particularly inclusion, inequality reduction, institutions, and partnerships.

Keywords: Social inclusion; Neurodiversity; 2030 Agenda; Accessibility; Institutional partnerships.

RESUMO

Este artigo analisa uma experiência extensionista desenvolvida por acadêmicos do Curso de Direito da Universidade Estácio - CEUT, em parceria com a Associação dos Amigos dos Autistas do Piauí (AMA-PI), em Teresina-PI, em 2024. O objetivo foi dialogar com pessoas vinculadas à instituição sobre direitos, inclusão social e desafios

institucionais, desenvolver uma ação educativa e propor um instrumento de fortalecimento de parcerias. O percurso incluiu observação participante do tipo não-membro, visita diagnóstica à instituição, palestra seguida de roda de conversa com familiares e equipe da AMA-PI e elaboração de uma escala Likert de três pontos para o selo “Amigos dos Autistas”. O diagnóstico apontou limitações de parcerias públicas e privadas, dificuldades de obtenção de recursos e lacunas de informação sobre direitos e serviços. A ação educativa abordou direitos humanos, educação, trabalho, acessibilidade, lazer e marcos de proteção das pessoas com Transtorno do Espectro Autista. Como produto, o selo foi estruturado em quatro dimensões: legislação, acessibilidade, apoio às pessoas autistas e familiares e compromisso com direitos humanos, diversidade, direitos ambientais e justiça social. A proposta é discutida em diálogo com a Agenda 2030, especialmente quanto à inclusão, redução de desigualdades, instituições e parcerias.

Palavras-chave: Inclusão social; Neurodiversidade; Agenda 2030; Acessibilidade; Parcerias institucionais.

1. INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) requires the articulation of rights guarantees, access to services, social participation, and concrete conditions that allow individuals and families to exercise citizenship across different settings. Under Brazilian law, equality and human dignity are constitutional principles, while Law No. 12,764/2012 recognizes people with ASD as persons with disabilities for all legal purposes, reinforcing the need for protection against discrimination and access to rights. The family dimension is also relevant: among parents of children with ASD, environmental conditions, social relationships, income, access to

services, leisure, and communication with their children may be associated with quality of life (Brasil, 1988; Brasil, 2012; Dias; Costa; Barbosa-Medeiros, 2021). For children and adolescents, the Statute of the Child and Adolescent also forms part of this protective framework (Brasil, 1990).

Inclusion, however, does not end with the formal recognition of rights. In the workplace, research with managers indicates that inclusive practices depend on organizational culture, monitoring, training, accessibility, health support, and adaptation of the environment to the needs of people with ASD. Recent studies on neuroinclusion likewise emphasize individualized accommodations, revision of recruitment and selection processes, and adaptation of organizational communication as components of more effective inclusion (Basto; Cepellos, 2023; Ziebarth, 2026). In education, staff preparation also remains a challenge, because knowledge gaps regarding interaction with autistic students may affect different professionals and require contextualized training and collaborative work (Alfaro-Urrutia; Pérez-Godoy, 2026).

This discussion broadens when inclusion is situated within the framework of sustainable development. Studies connecting ASD and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize that SDG 4, which addresses quality education, presupposes inclusive and equitable perspectives and can be examined through a transdisciplinary lens (Oliveira; Vitorino; Pellanda, 2023). The 2030 Agenda has also been discussed through socio-environmental education and social and civic competencies, connecting sustainable development, human rights, diversity, and social transformation (Morales Hernández; Caurín Alonso; Lacruz Pérez, 2023; Souto et al., 2025). In studies of inclusive education policies,

SDG 4 provides a reference for examining actions directed toward groups historically exposed to barriers to access and retention (Tonet, 2024).

An inclusive reading of the SDGs requires sustainability strategies to explicitly incorporate people with disabilities. In this direction, recent literature on Inclusive Sustainable Development Goals organizes inclusion around five interdependent pillars—non-discrimination, accessibility, support services, participation, and awareness-raising—providing a useful framework for examining institutional actions aimed at reducing barriers (Adams; Harrison; Mosen, 2025). At the same time, implementation of the SDGs does not depend solely on global formulations: analyses of Brazilian municipalities reveal heterogeneous levels of adherence and reinforce the importance of local diagnostics and management strategies (Peretti; Bernardy; Machado, 2024). University extension experiences in the legal field have also used the SDGs as an axis for bringing academic training, legal instruments, and concrete municipal problems into closer dialogue (Balbino, 2024; Souto et al., 2026).

This is the context of the experience conducted with the Association of Friends of Autistic People of Piauí (AMA-PI), a philanthropic organization based in Teresina that works with information, study, research, and services for people with ASD and their families. The initial contact between the extension team and the institution revealed demands related to circulation of information about rights, maintenance of services, expansion of partnerships, and strengthening of social inclusion. The project therefore emerged from a concrete legal and social problem: the gap between formally recognized rights and the institutional and everyday conditions required for those rights to be known and effectively exercised.

Against this background, the study aimed to engage the community connected to AMA-PI in dialogue about social problems experienced in Teresina; identify institutional challenges related to operation, reception, and inclusion of autistic people; conduct an educational activity consisting of a lecture and talking circle on rights and possibilities for social inclusion; systematize observed demands as input for dialogue with public authorities; and present a seal designed to recognize managers, companies, and institutions committed to the autistic community. In addition, the seal proposal is discussed from the perspective of sustainable development and its potential interfaces with the SDGs.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1. Context And Participants In The University Extension Initiative

The study derives from a university extension project developed in 2024 within the Human Rights course of the Law program at Universidade Estácio - CEUT, in Teresina, Piauí, Brazil. The team comprised nine undergraduate students and established a partnership with AMA-PI. Representatives of the institution and family members of people with ASD assisted by the association participated in the activities. The identities of family members were preserved, and the photographs used in the activities and retained in this article were taken with participant authorization, as reported in the original project document.

The initiative was organized into three interconnected components: an institutional diagnosis through a visit and observation; an educational activity consisting of a lecture and talking circle; and

development of a seal proposal to recognize organizations and managers committed to the inclusion of autistic people.

2.2. Institutional Diagnosis And Participant Observation

In September 2024, members of the team conducted non-member participant observation (Alvesson; Sköldberg, 2017). The visit aimed to understand the operating dynamics of AMA-PI, identify problems and demands, and examine their interfaces with Law, with particular emphasis on human rights (Bernard, 2006).

During the visit, the institution was presented by the local coordinator, Rosália Oliveira, who guided the team through the facilities and provided information on the profile of the families and the services offered. The diagnosis was recorded descriptively, prioritizing aspects related to legal support, coordination with public authorities and the private sector, availability of resources, and circulation of information on rights and services.

2.3. Lecture And Talking Circle

The second stage took place on October 31, 2024, and consisted of a lecture followed by a talking circle at AMA-PI headquarters. The activity was led by attorney Cláudia Lyssia (OAB-PI No. 17,572) and included family members of autistic people and members of the institution's management team. The talking circle was used as a strategy for interaction and sharing experiences, consistent with the aim of promoting trust, belonging, and participation among those present (Bernard, 2006; Rieth, 2023).

The activity addressed human rights, inclusion in education and employment, mobility and accessibility, participation in leisure

activities, the history of autism recognition, and the evolution of legal frameworks. Difficulties reported by family members regarding diagnosis, prejudice, access to benefits, and access to treatment were also discussed.

2.4. Development Of The “Friends Of Autistic People” Seal

As the third component of the project, a three-point Likert scale (see Bernard, 2006) was developed to form the initial structure of the “Friends of Autistic People” seal. The scale assigns 0 points to “never,” 1 point to “sometimes,” and 2 points to “always” across four dimensions: (1) compliance with federal, state, and/or municipal laws that protect the rights of autistic people; (2) existence of accessibility and/or priority policies; (3) provision of social, financial, leisure, health, public-policy, or other support services to autistic people or their family members; and (4) existence of an institutional philosophy or recognized actions supporting human rights, ethnic diversity, environmental rights, and social justice.

The proposal comprises four seal levels. The basic seal requires a score in all four dimensions. Bronze requires scores in all four dimensions and a score of 2 in at least one dimension; Silver requires a score of 2 in at least two dimensions; and Gold requires a score of 2 in all dimensions. The proposed validity period is three years, followed by reassessment. The original design also proposes evaluation by an independent committee supervised by AMA-PI, with specialists representing each evaluated dimension and the possibility of on-site visits and meetings. The seal concept was informed by the use of thematic certifications as strategies for institutional recognition and partnership strengthening (see Certified Humane Brasil, 2021).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Institutional Diagnosis Of AMA-PI

The initial visit identified four central aspects. AMA-PI (Figure 1) provides a range of services to the autistic community, including legal support; maintains forms of cooperation with public authorities that the project team considered limited; has similarly limited partnerships with the private sector; and faces difficulties in obtaining the financial and material resources required to maintain and expand its activities. Coordinator Rosália Oliveira also reported that a large proportion of the families served are low-income and identified information losses or gaps regarding available services and the rights of autistic people.

These findings reinforce that inclusion must be understood beyond the formal existence of rights. Economic, informational, environmental, and social barriers can directly affect family life. In a study of parents of children with ASD, the environmental and social domains of quality of life were associated with variables such as income, communication, and participation in activities outside the home; the environmental domain includes, among other elements, access to health services, leisure, transportation, and housing conditions (Dias; Costa; Barbosa-Medeiros, 2021). In this sense, the demand for legal information observed at AMA-PI forms part of a broader context in which social support, services, and access conditions can shape families' experiences.

Figure 1. Structure and facilities of AMA-PI recorded during the diagnostic visit.



Source: The authors (2024).

3.2. Rights Of People With ASD: Lecture And Talking Circle

The lecture “Respect for Diversity: Rights of Autistic People” was organized in response to the demand identified during the diagnostic stage. The presentation emphasized the application of human rights to people with ASD and discussed social inclusion across four areas directly related to everyday life: education, employment, mobility/accessibility, and leisure. In education, it emphasized the need for access to and retention in environments capable of responding to students’ needs. In employment, professional inclusion and workplace accommodations were addressed. Regarding mobility and leisure, the discussion focused on the need for accessible spaces and services that enhance autonomy and social participation. The lecture reached an audience of approximately 30 parents of autistic young people.

The activity also addressed historical aspects presented during the meeting regarding the understanding of autism, including the

introduction of the term by Eugen Bleuler, classification changes associated with the DSM-III, DSM-IV, and ICD-10, and the expansion of discussions about the autism spectrum. The legal component addressed World Autism Awareness Day, Law No. 12,764/2012 (the Berenice Piana Law), the Statute of Persons with Disabilities, and the Identification Card for Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The Berenice Piana Law received particular attention because it recognizes people with ASD as persons with disabilities and forms part of the set of guarantees concerning health, education, and protection against discrimination (Brasil, 2012).

The dialogical stage (Figure 2) elicited reports of difficulties obtaining a diagnosis, experiences of prejudice, problems related to benefit services, and barriers to accessing treatment through health insurance. Mothers who were present shared personal experiences and expressed appreciation for the clarifications and guidance provided during the activity. These accounts show that the talking circle functioned not merely as a content-delivery activity, but as a space for the circulation of concrete experiences and questions.

Figure 2. Records of the lecture and talking circle on the rights and inclusion of autistic people.



Source: University extension project archive (2024).

The need for continuing educational initiatives is supported by recent studies. In inclusive educational settings, professional teams may have insufficient knowledge about ways of interacting with autistic students, and training often occurs through self-directed reading, short courses, and observation of peers, reinforcing the importance of contextualized and collaborative professional development (Alfaro-Urrutia; Pérez-Godoy, 2026). Within organizations, greater familiarity and more qualified knowledge can also help challenge stereotypes and guide actions related to accessibility, monitoring, training, and health support (Basto; Cepellos, 2023). The AMA-PI experience therefore suggests that legal information and awareness-raising can be treated as components of a broader institutional inclusion strategy rather than as isolated activities.

3.3. “Friends Of Autistic People” Seal: Evaluation And Partnership Strengthening

The “Friends of Autistic People” seal proposal was developed to translate broad commitments to inclusion into observable criteria (Figure 3). The scale produced by the team organizes evaluation across four dimensions that combine legal compliance, accessibility, direct support, and institutional commitment to human rights, diversity, environmental rights, and social justice. After presentation of the proposal, AMA-PI management received it positively.

Figure 3. Dimensions and scoring system proposed for the “Friends of Autistic People” seal.

DIMENSION		
1	Complies with federal, state, and/or municipal laws that protect the rights of autistic people	POINTS
	Never	0
	Sometimes	1
	Always	2
2	Has accessibility and/or priority policies for autistic people	POINTS
	Never	0
	Sometimes	1
	Always	2
3	Provides support services (social, financial, leisure, health, public policies, among others) to autistic people or their family members	POINTS
	Never	0
	Sometimes	1
	Always	2
4	Has an institutional philosophy and/or recognized actions supporting human rights, ethnic diversity, environmental rights, and social justice	POINTS
	Never	0
	Sometimes	1
	Always	2

Source: Authors (2024), translated and adapted for this article.

The graded structure of the seal distinguishes organizations that minimally meet all four dimensions from those showing more consistent performance. The four levels—basic, Bronze, Silver, and Gold—were designed to encourage progression and reassessment rather than to produce a permanent classification. The proposed

three-year validity period and reassessment requirement introduce an important temporal component, because commitments to inclusion must be maintained and updated.

Figure 4. Proposed criteria for the levels of the “Friends of Autistic People” seal.

1) Basic seal: Score in all four dimensions. 2) “Friends of Autistic People” BRONZE seal: Score in all four dimensions and obtain a score of “2” in at least one dimension. 3) “Friends of Autistic People” SILVER seal: Score in all four dimensions and obtain a score of “2” in at least two dimensions. 4) “Friends of Autistic People” GOLD seal: Score in all four dimensions and obtain a score of “2” in all dimensions.	The seal is valid for 3 years. It must be reassessed after the indicated period.
	Independent evaluation committee Supervised by AMA-PI One specialist member for each dimension Evaluation: on-site visits and meetings

Source: University extension project team (2024), translated and adapted for this article.

The relevance of such an instrument can be examined in light of recent organizational research. Inclusion of people with ASD depends on coordinated efforts involving managers, leaders, coworkers, mentors, and support structures, as well as adaptations to environments and processes (Basto; Cepellos, 2023). In the field of neuroinclusion, concrete measures have also been proposed for adapting work environments, recruitment and selection processes, and organizational communication, emphasizing institutional commitment and individualized accommodations (Ziebarth, 2026). The seal may therefore function, on a propositional basis, as a mechanism for dialogue between AMA-PI and potential partners, provided that its criteria are applied transparently and accompanied by periodic evaluation.

3.4. Seal, Sustainable Development, And The Sustainable Development Goals

The fourth dimension of the instrument—human rights, ethnic diversity, environmental rights, and social justice—allows the proposal to be interpreted within a broader sustainable-development framework. This association does not mean that the seal constitutes an official system for measuring implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Rather, it represents an analytical correspondence between the instrument's dimensions and themes addressed by the SDGs. Literature connecting autism and the SDGs already argues that quality education and the inclusion of people with ASD should be considered within sustainable development by recognizing links among equity, learning opportunities, and social participation (Oliveira; Vitorino; Pellanda, 2023).

SDG 4 has a direct connection with the experience because the talking circle had an educational purpose and because the seal values inclusive practices that may extend to educational institutions. The socio-environmental education literature likewise connects sustainable development with human rights, citizenship, diversity, and education for social transformation, which are compatible with the fourth dimension of the seal (Morales Hernández; Caurín Alonso; Lacruz Pérez, 2023). In a comparative analysis of inclusive higher-education policies in Brazil and Argentina, SDG 4 is used as a reference for examining inclusion, equity, and diversity within educational systems (Tonet, 2024). Training teams to interact with autistic people, in turn, remains a practical element in making inclusion effective (Alfaro-Urrutia; Pérez-Godoy, 2026).

Correspondences also emerge with other SDGs. The axis concerning support for autistic people and their families aligns with SDG 3, Good Health and Well-Being, particularly when access to services and family quality of life are considered. The accessibility and priority dimension addresses barriers and inequalities, allowing connections with SDGs 10 and 11. The employment and professional-inclusion component discussed in the educational activity establishes an interface with SDG 8, while the focus on human rights, social justice, and compliance with legal standards aligns with SDG 16. Finally, the seal's central purpose—expanding and improving partnerships among AMA-PI, companies, managers, and public agencies—corresponds particularly clearly with the logic of SDG 17. This interpretation is strengthened when inclusion is organized around the pillars of non-discrimination, accessibility, support services, participation, and awareness-raising (Adams; Harrison; Mosen, 2025).

The local scale is relevant to this articulation. Studies of Brazilian municipalities show that adherence to the SDGs occurs at different stages and that local diagnostics can provide input for public management and the definition of implementation strategies (Peretti; Bernardy; Machado, 2024). In legal university extension, the approximation among the SDGs, legal instruments, and municipal problems has also been used as an educational and intervention strategy (Balbino, 2024). In this sense, the “Friends of Autistic People” proposal can be understood as a social technology at an initial stage of development, capable of articulating rights, inclusion, and institutional sustainability without replacing official public-policy assessments or formally regulated certification systems.

An emphasis on sustainable development also broadens understanding of inclusion beyond any single sector. Recent

literature on inclusive SDGs argues that people with disabilities must be incorporated into education, health, employment, and community-participation strategies, and that accessibility and support services should be accompanied by non-discrimination, participation, and awareness-raising (Adams; Harrison; Mosen, 2025). For AMA-PI, this perspective is consistent with the multidimensional nature of the observed demands: legal information, family support, accessibility, services, employment, education, institutional resources, and partnerships appear as interdependent rather than isolated issues.

4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The university extension experience demonstrates the value of connecting legal education with concrete demands identified by AMA-PI and the families associated with the institution. The institutional diagnosis identifies challenges related to expanding partnerships, obtaining resources, and circulating information about services and rights. The lecture and talking circle respond directly to this diagnosis by articulating human rights, education, employment, accessibility, leisure, and legal protections for people with ASD.

The “Friends of Autistic People” seal constitutes the principal applied product of the experience. By organizing evaluation into four dimensions and establishing progressive levels, a validity period, and reassessment, the instrument provides a simple framework for recognizing and encouraging institutional commitments to the autistic community. Its dimension addressing human rights, diversity, environmental rights, and social justice also makes explicit a connection with sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda.

An SDG-based interpretation indicates that the project engages most directly with good health and well-being, quality education, employment and professional inclusion, reduction of inequalities, urban and community accessibility, strengthening of rights and institutions, and partnership building. This association should be understood as an analytical interpretation of the experience rather than as certification of official alignment with the SDGs. Further development of the seal depends on pilot application, refinement of its criteria, and establishment of transparent evaluation procedures with AMA-PI and interested partners.

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