



Mapping early childhood development publications in sub-Saharan Africa from international databases

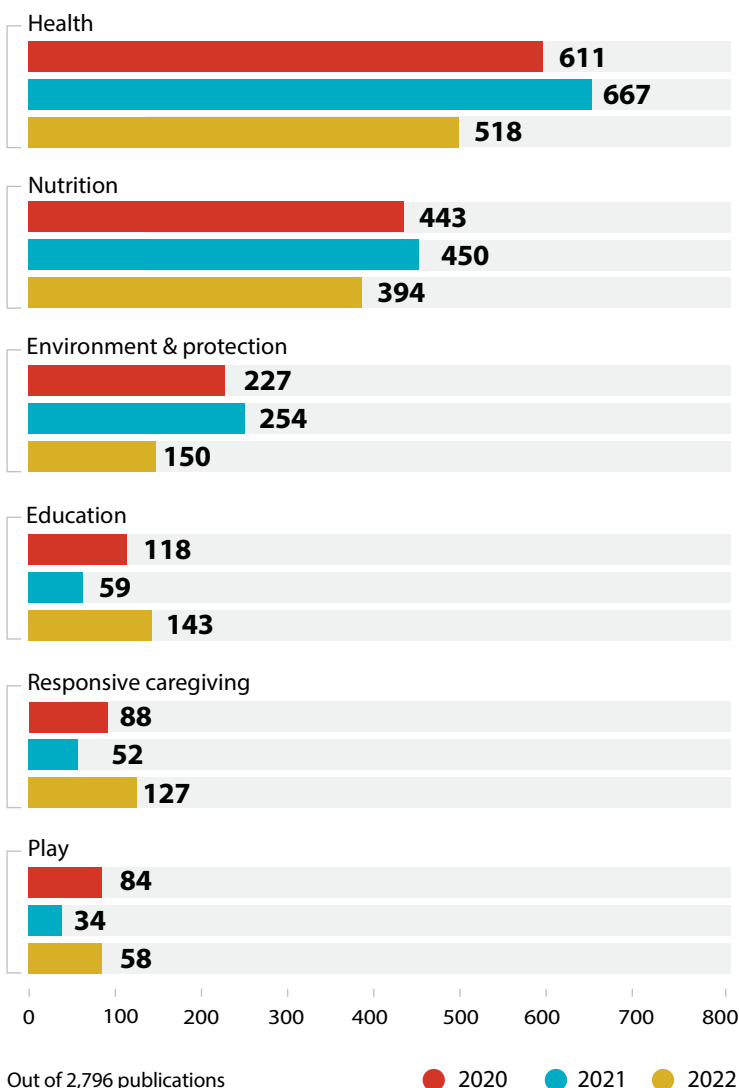
Summary

This summary covers key findings from an analysis of publications on Early Childhood Development (ECD) written by authors based in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). It is based on intensive searches of international databases from 2020 to 2022 (primarily in English journals). For the purposes of the analysis, ECD components include: education; play; health; nutrition; environment & protection; and responsive caregiving. The methodology used to conduct the searches can be found in the full report.

The importance of ECD to ensure all young children, regardless of their background, can achieve their full potential is widely recognised. The education Sustainable Development Goals include a target (4.2) on 'access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that they are ready for education.' Similarly, the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 under the Continental Education Strategy emphasised ECD as the foundation for quality education and training.

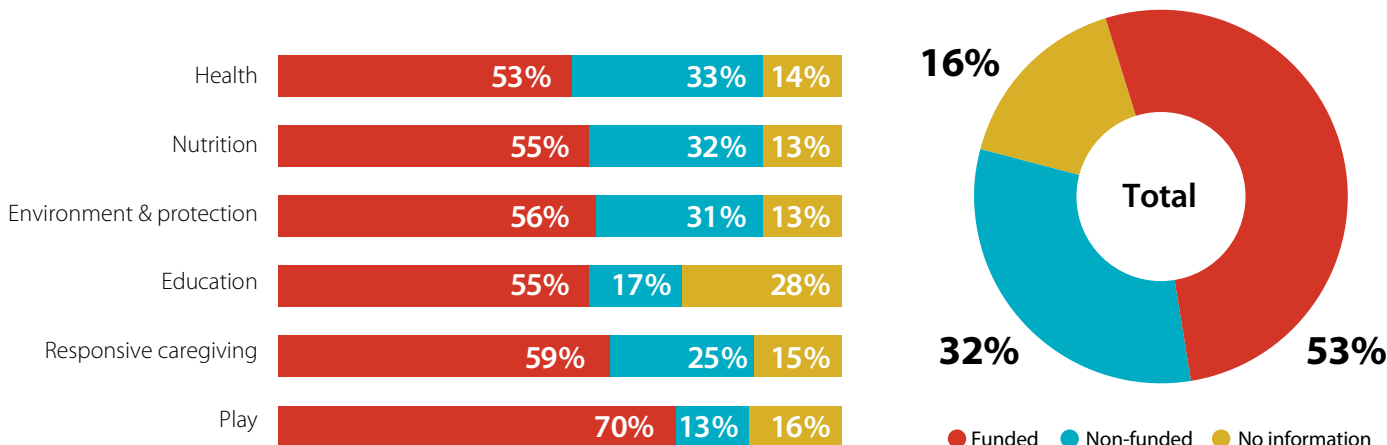
The searches revealed a substantial number of ECD publications by SSA-based researchers in international journals. In total, 2,796 publications authored by authors based in SSA were identified for the period 2020 to 2022. Two thirds of publications included a focus on health, with almost half related to nutrition. A much lower proportion was identified for the other four components, with environment and protection accounting for 23 percent. Education, responsive caregiving, and play each accounted for just 11 percent, 10 percent and 6 percent, respectively. The pattern was similar across each of the three years (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Number of publications by ECD component (2020-2022)



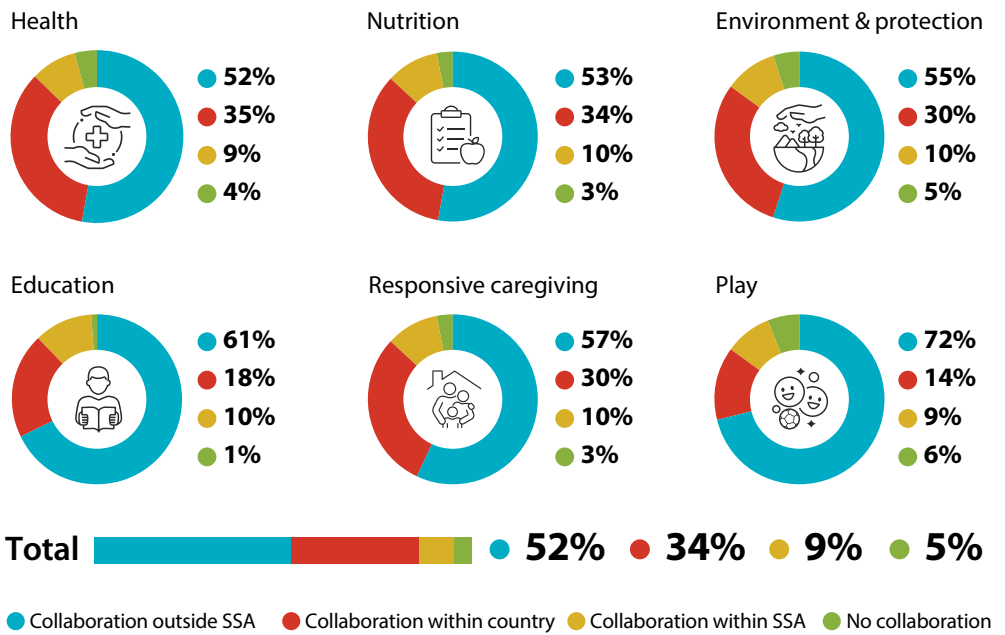
Just over half of the publications reported received funding (Figure 2). Where education and play publications received funding, it was mainly for ones that intersected with health. Across all of the ECD components, around two thirds of funding was obtained from international organisations, with around a fifth of funding obtained from external philanthropic organisations. Government funding accounted for only 2 percent of funders.

Figure 2: Funding status of publications across ECD components



The vast majority of publications involved some form of collaboration. Collaboration outside SSA was more common than within country or within SSA. Around one half of collaborations involved co-authorship with collaborators outside of SSA. Collaboration with researchers and institutions within countries was more common than across SSA: with 34 percent of collaborations within the country, compared to only 9 percent across SSA, with a similar pattern across ECD components (Figure 3). Publications reporting collaboration outside the country were more likely to receive funding (83 percent).

Figure 3: Collaboration by ECD component within and outside SSA

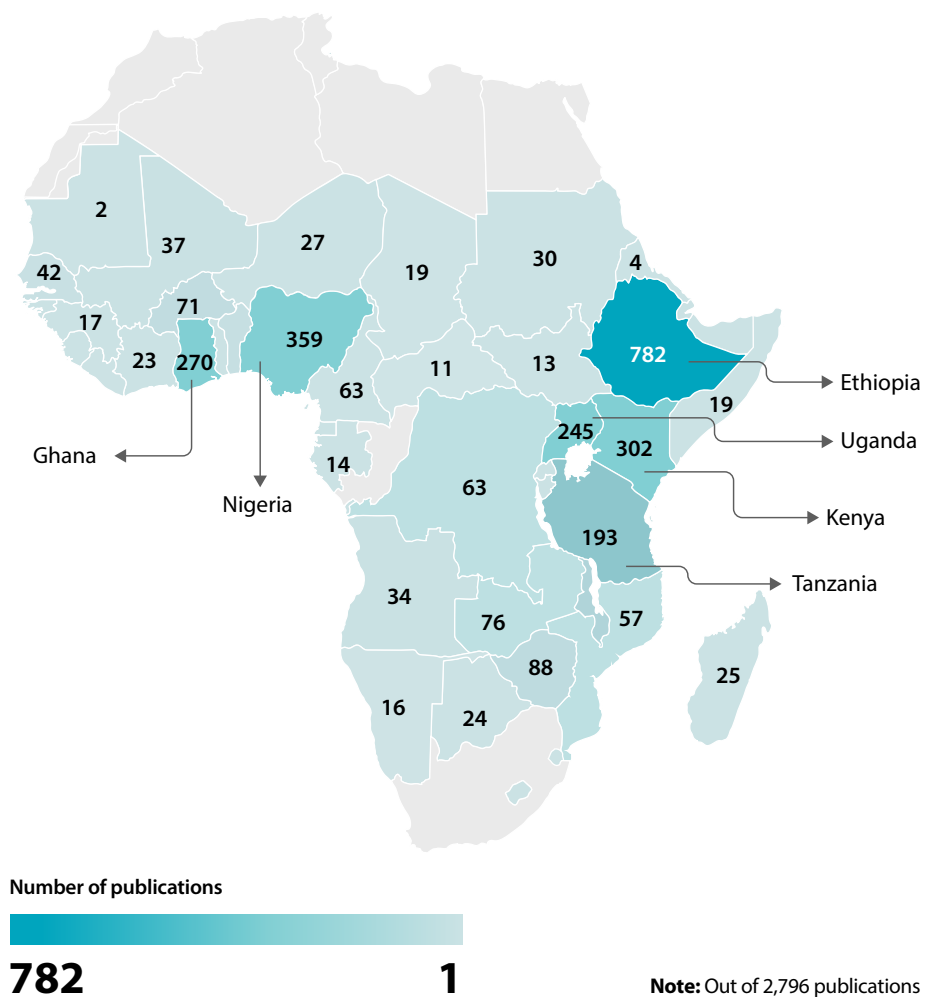


Despite the United Nations' 'leave no one behind' agenda, around one in five of the publications did not take account of inequality related to poverty, gender, ethnicity, religion, or disability. For those that did address inequality, poverty was the most frequent area included, with 42 percent of publications addressing this, and 29 percent addressing gender. Only 4 percent of publications focused on children with disabilities. In addition, approximately 18 percent of the studies were focused on rural settings, which are often the most deprived.

Gender disparities among researchers were evident, with female authors representing only 29 percent of all those identified. The gender gap is particularly high for health and nutrition, where only around one in four authors were female.

Our analysis further highlighted that four countries accounted for almost two thirds of the total ECD research conducted: Ethiopia (28 percent), Nigeria (13 percent), Kenya (11 percent) and Ghana (10 percent) (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Number of publications per country



Based on this analysis, our recommendations include:

- ◆ **Diversify research focus.** Encourage and fund research in underrepresented ECD components such as play, responsive caregiving, and education to create a more balanced understanding of child development in SSA.
- ◆ **Promote intra-African collaboration.** Develop funding mechanisms and incentives that specifically encourage collaboration among African researchers and institutions working on ECD-related topics, fostering a more sustainable and locally driven research ecosystem.
- ◆ **Address inequality dimensions.** Prioritise research that explicitly addresses inequality dimensions related to poverty, gender, ethnicity, religion, and disability in ECD studies to ensure inclusive development strategies.
- ◆ **Improve gender balance in research.** Implement policies and programs to increase female participation in ECD research, particularly in education and play research where gender disparities are more pronounced.
- ◆ **Enhance local research capacity.** Invest in capacity-building initiatives that strengthen the skills and expertise of African ECD researchers, enabling them to lead high-quality research projects and secure funding with less reliance on international collaborations.

This summary is based on:

Iddrisu, D.H., Adrupio, S., and Rose, P. (2024). *Mapping early childhood development publications in sub-Saharan Africa: Report on analysis from international databases*. REAL Centre, University of Cambridge and ESSA.

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