

**Conducting rigorous
and ethical educational
research with young people
in sub-Saharan Africa:
A review of the
literature**

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Paper Series

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1. Aims and purpose of the review

This review provides an overview of research studies, published over the last two decades, which have focused on working with children/young people in sub-Saharan Africa. The focus is predominantly on work which has been published in the educational research literature. It aims to amplify methodological insights gathered from these studies and reflect on existing gaps in the literature. The question of how to capture children/youth voice with methodological rigour and consistent ethical standards remains under-researched. As a Ghana-based researcher observes, "despite a growing interest in studying youth in Sub-Saharan Africa, this field of research is still in its formative years and is characterised by limited methodological discussions" (Langevang, 2007, p. 268). This gap persists even though African youth consist of the majority of the continent's population and eight of the world's top ten countries with the youngest populations are in sub-Saharan Africa (Bakilana, 2015). Sub-Saharan African youth are thus caught in a paradox: a significant and growing global presence, yet one whose voices remain underrepresented in research.

This systematic literature review addresses the following overarching question: What research methods, approaches and processes have been applied with young people in sub-Saharan Africa and what lessons emerge to inform future research? With this aim, it considers related sub-questions including:

- What are the most prominent research methods, approaches and processes that have been applied in this region?
- What demographic and institutional trends emerge?
- What ethical issues have been highlighted in research involving young people in this region?
- How have researchers adapted their methods to ensure the voices of the most marginalised are heard?

2. Research approach adopted

A set of inclusion criteria was developed to screen eligible studies (see Table 1 below). The screening protocol for inclusion is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Inclusion criteria

| Type of criteria | Criterion |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Source | Research must be published in a peer-reviewed journal. |
| Date of publication | Published from 2000. |
| Area of interest | Education (Social Sciences). |
| Participant location and origin | Children/young people in sub-Saharan Africa. |
| Age | 12-18 years |
| Other identity characteristics | Marginalised populations are a priority (eg. low-income youth, students with disabilities, girls, out-of-school youth, and minorities in the community). |
| Transparency and detail | Research must disclose the research methodologies, approaches and processes applied, whether this involves direct data collection or secondary analysis of existing empirical data. Desirable for articles to refer to or reflect on: ethical issues involving participants; details of how the methodology has been adapted to the needs and voices of marginalised communities; or trends in the types of research methods, approaches and processes that have been applied in sub-Saharan Africa. |

A note on the peer-reviewed journal criterion: this criterion aims to increase the quality and transparency of the research. However, we acknowledge that there are some non-academic publications, especially reports published from large international projects (e.g., programme evaluations) which discuss child-centred methods employed in these programmes. We have reviewed some of the more current reports and included insights from these in Sections 5 and 6 to illustrate the kind of methods these projects have employed. These 'spotlight' boxes provide an opportunity to draw on this literature, while being mindful that they did not emerge from the search engines we used to understand the state of the more formal academic scholarship in the field.

The review was conducted in two stages. Stage one consisted of a systematic filtering exercise (see Appendix A for details). Eight electronic databases linked to relevant literature were searched. As an additional step to ensure we did not miss any key articles, we supplemented the database search with a systematic search of volumes 2000-2021 of 21 peer-reviewed journals which predominantly publish in this area. Citations referenced in identified papers were followed up to locate relevant studies.

Initial searches returned 278 studies. However, a significantly smaller number of studies (51) met all the inclusion criteria. All 51 studies were selected for the final analysis in stage two. Their methodological and ethical dimensions were analysed to address this review's overarching research question. Clear descriptions of the methodological procedures proved rare; and reflections on the ethical principles followed were rarer still. However, despite variations in the level of description and clarity, all 51 studies that met the inclusion criteria were reviewed, as well as their accompanying documentation and appendices. These articles discussed a range of child-centred activities and tools. While they utilised both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the majority of the discussions focused on qualitative approaches, which in turn influences the focus of this report. However, the report's insights are not exclusive to qualitative researchers but broadly applicable to educational researchers using a range of approaches with children and youth.

3. Overview of the report

This report begins by examining the rationale put forth in the reviewed studies on why it is important to include children/youthⁱ in educational research. We then provide a brief overview of key characteristics of the reviewed studies, such as countries which the research has been undertaken, who is funding this kind of research and the methods used. Section 5 adopts a more nuanced approach of engaging with some of the common and unique themes emerging from a deeper reading of these papers in terms of methods and processes that were adapted by the researchers in response to the field sites. This is followed by a critical engagement with the ethical issues highlighted in these studies.

4. Young people as important participants in the research process: a rationale

The clearest advantage of including children/young people in research, as articulated by sub-Saharan African researchers, seems to be its capacity to foreground children/young people's voices and lived experiences, and thereby address major gaps in sub-Saharan African literature. While conducting interviews with young carers in Tanzania and Lesotho, Robson et al (2006) observe that the social dimensions of sub-Saharan African youth are rarely probed but they deserve "the opportunity to give voice to their lives and experiences using their own words" (p. 98). Similarly, Swartz in South Africa exhorts the global research community to break away from "shallow, monocled gazes", "change position" and "go deep" to "take every opportunity to consider participants' perspectives" (2011, p. 49). Listening to youth by drawing on qualitative instruments may mean glimpsing the "subtle dimensions of student experience" that quantitative dataset miss (Camfield, 2011, p. 400). For example, drawing on research with Ethiopian youth, Camfield shows how a quantitative variable such as "reported hours studying" does not reveal the "quality of the time spent, whether the student had a dedicated quiet space, or was continually interrupted by family members" (2011, p. 400).

The studies reviewed highlight the potential of qualitative research to help understand everyday experiences and also help expose and explore the socio-structural challenges experienced by children/youth participants. Creative and participatory methods may be particularly insightful in this regard. For example, Adams, Savahl and Fattore (2017) note that when they asked South African child-participants to draw maps and place red stickers to show where they felt unsafe, this visual tool helped identify different levels of structural disadvantage. It helped tease out more subtle nuances: poorer children had less access to nature and therefore labelled all outdoor spaces as nature, unable to recognise the spatial differences that richer families could. Similarly, in order to track gender-based school violence in South Africa, Leach (2006) asked children to draw school maps, label spots where they felt safe or unsafe, and draw spiders with each leg denoting a type of stressful experience.

Engaging with children/youth is also crucial as their experiences, particularly for those living the most marginalised lines, remain hidden from the adult gaze. To understand

orphaned children's social support networks in Uganda, Kendrick and Kakuru (2012) asked two children to construct an ecomap, a set of boxes with the names of adults who supported them in any way. The children could not think of anyone's name for a very long time. This prolonged pause made the researchers realise just how isolated the children had become. In this way, through the power to "to surprise and to shock" (Burge et al, 2016, p. 730), creative and participatory methods make visible the unsayable. Most importantly, including children in the research highlighted the significant exclusion from community spaces for these young children.

These efforts to allow children to articulate the world from their perspective, is something that has been articulated by other researchers. Mampane et al (2014), who asked South African children to conceptualise school violence through drawings, note that it is because "no adult-created definitions were presented to participants" that the problem could be identified most effectively: from the perspectives of the children themselves (p. 742). Similarly, Ngidi and Moletsane's (2019) study of photovoice elicited deeper insights about learners' vulnerabilities because children staged photographs to show the violence they experienced at school. The images conveyed both emotion and practical detail. Photographs of victims crying with their heads bent down between their knees conveyed pain and isolation, while photographs of children sitting in empty classrooms suggested the aftermath of trauma. Employing participants' representations as a springboard for thoughtful questions appeared to work well; the researchers began to pay particular attention to orphaned learners after learning that this sub-group was particularly vulnerable to school violence. A bottom-up, stakeholder-led understanding may thus provide more accurate insight into school phenomena than predetermined adult frameworks. It should be noted, however, that there does not appear to be substantial reflection yet on the consequences of such exercises for child mental health. This point will be more fully explored in the ethics section.

Researching children using creative tools, as highlighted in the reviewed studies, were not only diagnostic but also generative, yielding possible policy recommendations. Leach's (2006) child-participants drew trees with roots marking the causes of school violence and branches marking the effects; they also drew colourful cards showcasing "problem" walls and "solution" spirals (Leach, 2006). The analytical stimuli for

understanding the problem and promoting structural change was therefore provided to researchers without ever explicitly pushing the children to do so. Creative and participatory methods can thus create spaces for children to bring sensitive or hidden challenges to light and the groundwork for researchers to tackle them.

The inclusion of children/youth voices also highlights the significant discrepancies between child and adult schemas. Chant and Jones' (2005) study of youth in Ghana and the Gambia showed that while the donors and policymakers extolled literacy and educational qualifications, the young people themselves found vocational training and apprenticeships more practically relevant to their lives. The researchers also learned that no youth had been consulted about the educational reforms. Amplifying youth voices in research thus offers researchers the opportunity to be surprised and challenged.

Finally, involving children/youth in research, especially when adopting child-centred and participatory approaches can also be uplifting for them, while giving them a space to reflect and voice their perspectives. For example, when asked to narrate stories aloud, Zimbabwean child-participants in Campbell et al's (2013) study "participated enthusiastically, viewing the exercise as a break from the usual monotony of a normal school day" (p. 3). Youth in Lesotho were enabled to enjoy "acts of fiction with a spirit of fun" in Dungey and Ansell's (2020) use of video-recorded role-plays to study participants' school experiences and transitions. Thus, meaningful and creative research participation can be a path to "spirit and vitality" (Loads, 2010, p. 410) and can potentially enhance children's well-being.

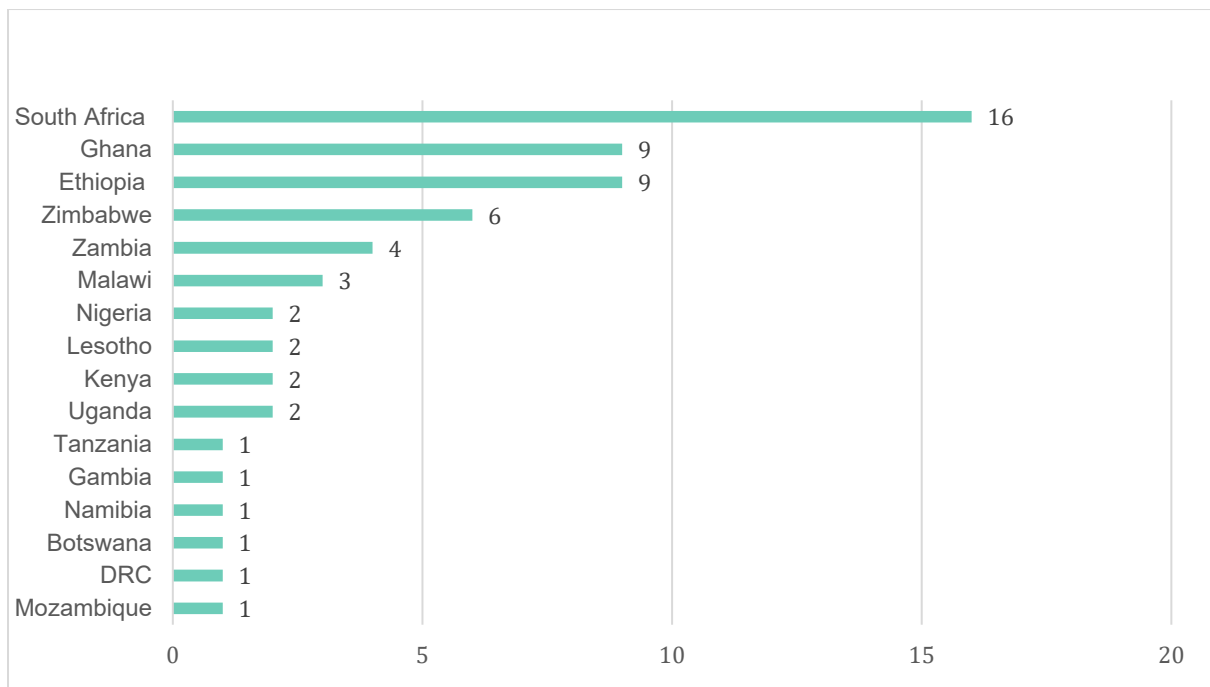
When employed as co-researchers in a Ghana-based study, children seemed enthusiastic about developing leadership skills: "I have been taught many things that will put me ahead of my friends in school and at home" (Anthony, aged 12); "We have taught others at school how to do role play... We want to extend the research to different places so we can then address problems" (Patience, aged 18); "This exercise has made research less fearful and interesting to me" (David, aged 17) (Porter and Abane, 2008). These child-participants even created a research club on their own initiative, going on to lead an independent study of schoolchildren's diets out of hope that research could foster social impact. At its best, participatory and child-centred research may therefore create positive ripple effects in participants' lives.

5. Key characteristics of the literature reviewed

5.1 Country trends

Majority of the studies which meet the criteria of this review were based in South African schools and communities, (16 out of 51, or approximately 31%). The second most-frequent sites of research were Ethiopia and Ghana, which each accounted for 9 of the 51 studies (17%). Ethiopia's presence in the literature is partially due to the geographical focus of *Young Lives*, an Oxford University-based longitudinal study of childhood poverty whose four research sites include Ethiopia (Morrow, 2013). The third, fourth and fifth most frequent sites of research were Zimbabwe (6 studies), Zambia (4 studies) and Malawi (3 studies)ⁱⁱ. Other regions in sub-Saharan Africa - namely, Uganda, Mozambique, Kenya, Lesotho, Nigeria, Namibia, Botswana, Tanzania, the Gambia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo - accounted for 1-2 studies each. In total, 16 of the 46 countries within sub-Saharan Africa were identified as the locus of research and intervention within this review. This leaves 30 countries within sub-Saharan Africa that did not comprise a main research site within the reviewed literature. This data is summarised in Figure 1 below.

Fig. 1: Country trends in the research



5.2 Most prominent research methods used

The majority of the literature on children and young people in sub-Saharan Africa appears to be quantitative, seeking to understand or predict patterns of disadvantage via analysis of larger datasets (for example, household surveys or epidemiological data). Common sources of this quantitative data include the Demographic and Health Surveys, Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality, Global School-based Student Health Survey, International Center for Research on Women, and the World Food Programme. This body of quantitative literature tends to examine reforms, interventions, policies or trends (examples include school-based nutrition programmes, HIV control policies, and female literacy rates) using exclusively statistical tools. Direct consultation of children and youth in research is thus infrequent.

However, there appears to be a small but growing body of literature highlighting the potential of child-centred, participatory and/or creative qualitative research methodologies with children and youth in sub-Saharan Africa, and exploring the possibilities and considerations accompanying these qualitative methodologies, and it is this body of literature that we draw on in this review.

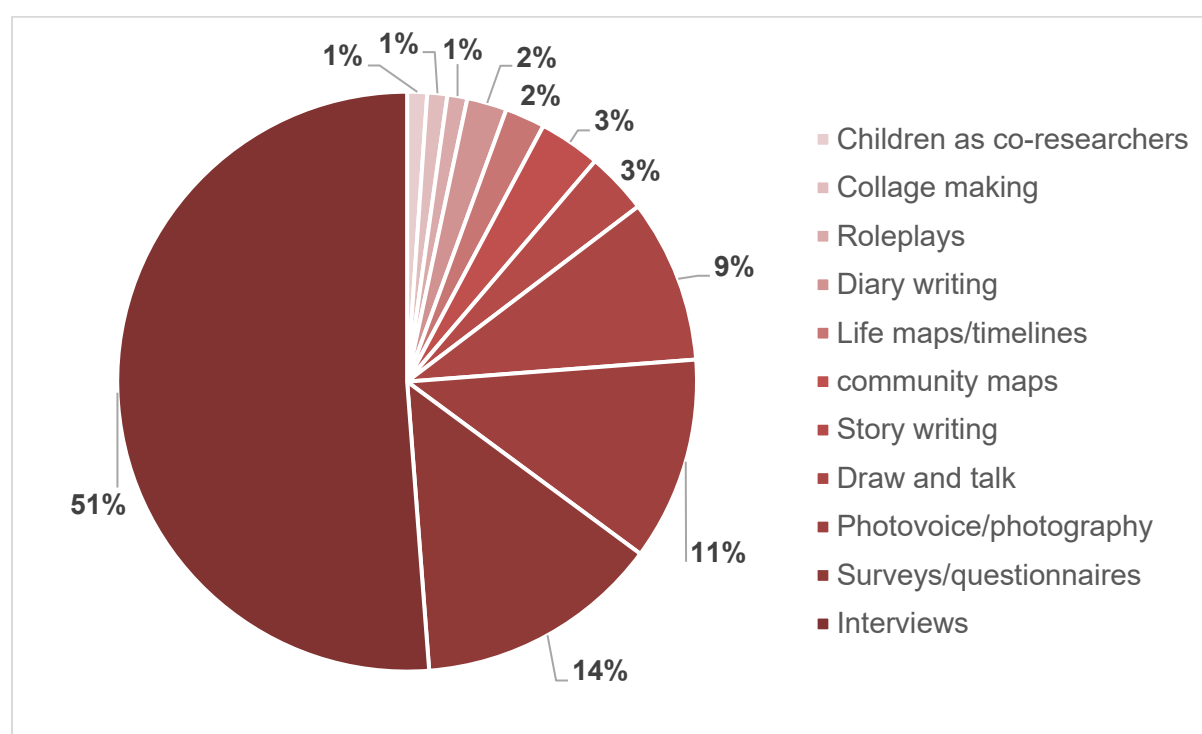
To outline the different research methods employed: nearly all the studies (45/51) utilised interviews, either in the form of one-to-one interviews, focus group interviews, or both. Two studies explicitly used a life history interview format, wherein children were invited to describe a linear timeline of major life events. Next to interviews, surveys and questionnaires were the second-most frequently used data collection tool, featuring in 12 studies. Ethnography, involving long periods of immersion in the research site, participant observation, and engagement with the children's everyday lives, was a primary tool of data collection in eight studies.

However, several studies did adopt more child-centred activities: eight studies used draw-and-talk methods, where children were asked to draw pictures relating to the theme of the research questions and then narrate the meaning and content of their pictures. One study paired the draw-and-talk method with collage-making. Eight studies utilised photovoice as a primary research tool, while two others used elements of photography (e.g. photo diaries). Life maps and life course exercises featured in two studies, with children requested to draw a timeline from their birth to age 30 years.

In these life maps, children had the option of beginning by drawing a picture of themselves at their current age or using pre-drawn images given to them by the researchers that depicted children at different stages of development.

One study also used body mapping, an exploratory exercise using a visual prompt of the human body. In groups, children were invited to use the picture to describe positive and negative emotions, preferred self-care strategies and sources of support in their life. Three studies used community mapping, where children walked around their local communities and made visual representations with special attention to features relevant to the research question (such as community safety). Story-writing was also used as a method in three studies, while two others used diaries. Only one study worked with child-participants as co-researchers. A summary of the activities and tools used in the studies is illustrated below in Figure 2.ⁱⁱⁱ

Fig. 2: Methods of child-centred activities/tools used across different studies



Keeping in mind the earlier observation that not all sub-Saharan Africa regions have been given equal attention in the literature, it is pertinent to note sub-regional and researcher-based trends in the use of creative, child-centred or participatory tools. For example, photovoice was employed predominantly in South Africa (Adams, Savahl,

and Fattore, 2017; Benninger and Savahl, 2016; Swartz, 2011; Zuch et al, 2013). The activities of individual research teams can also contribute to directing the literature. For example, in-depth reflections on participatory and child-centred research tended to come from Young Lives researchers, who work in Ethiopia (Crivello, Camfield and Woodhead, 2009; Morrow, 2013; Tekola, Griffin and Camfield, 2009) and most insights on children as co-researchers emerged from multiple publications on the same study in West Africa (Porter et al, 2010; Porter and Abane, 2008; Robson et al, 2009). It is therefore important to be mindful that the assertions being made here are not representative of the sub-Saharan African region. Nonetheless, they do highlight significant (albeit slow) changes in educational research with children.

6. Making research methods and processes relevant

When reviewing the selected studies, it became clear that the researchers were highlighting important (and sometimes subtle) ways in which they were adopting the methods being used and/or the processes being adopted when working with children/young people. In this section we reflect on some of the dimensions.

6.1 Situating the child centrally within the research and the broader milieu

Children's participation in research, as noted in section 1, is valued based on various arguments. Some researchers have argued for greater cultural sensitivity in participatory designs by including children as co-researchers. Porter et al's (2010) study, which used children as co-designers and co-interviewers in Malawi, suggests the potential of such participatory designs for letting children provide insight into how other children think, feel and make meaning. A quote from one of their child-researchers demonstrates this empathy:

"I didn't try younger children because I thought they'd give me a problem. For example, if you ask how long it takes from school to home, they wouldn't understand the measurement of time. Someone eight years could know time but around here children up to about 12 years don't know time."

(Nomaphelo, 16-year old girl, remote rural South Africa).

(Porter et al, 2010)

Moreover, Robson et al (2009) finds that when children become researchers, their relationships with child-participants can side-step some of the hurdle's child-participants face with adult researchers (such as shyness, defence, fear, social desirability bias, and concealment of information in conversation). Recruiting children as co-researchers in participatory designs can therefore be a vital part of situating child-participants within their broader contexts. We present a practical example of using such a participatory design from a project in the Girls' Education Challenge portfolio (Summary box 1).

Summary Box 1

Spotlight on Girl-led monitoring and evaluation, Girls' Education Challenge

The Girls' Access to Education-Girls' Education Challenge project in Sierra Leone (GATE-GEC) is a four-year, £13m DFID^{iv}-funded project serving 6,500 marginalised girls and students with disabilities (McMillan and Caine, 2019).

- Moving away from “extractive” monitoring and evaluation processes which “only take information out of communities”, it has introduced girl-led monitoring, which puts girls in charge of consulting on ideas, developing and executing the methodology, and disseminating the results (McMillan and Caine, 2019, p. 4)
- Girl-led monitoring aims to let girls exercise voice and agency in ways meaningful to them.
- For example, many girls photographed fruit trees and called them “survival trees” in the participatory analysis stage to explain how their families sold the fruit to pay for school fees and curricular resources. Their visual tools helped them voice their struggles to access schooling.

Innovation can also be found in another Girls' Education Challenge project: the Girl Effect, which conducted 117 interviews with 10–19-year-old girls in 4 districts of Malawi (Jere et al, 2016).

- Peer researchers were appointed to facilitate life history interviews with fellow girls, a style designed to “put the power and control of the interview in the hands of the girls, a dialogue between peers” (Jere et al, 2016, p. 19).
- “Role model” interviews were conducted with girls identified as role models for their community, with participants treated as sources of insight and asked to complete sentences such as “For girls to become equal, we need to...” and “My advice to Girl Effect is...” (Jere et al, 2016, p. 78).

Additionally, some researchers highlight that cultural sensitivity also means understanding the intergenerational dimensions of sub-Saharan African youths' meaning-making. Many studies recommended interviewing caregivers, kin, and other key adults in children's lives in order to contextualise child-participants' narratives (e.g. Crivello and van der Gaag, 2016; Robson et al, 2006; Theron, Cockcroft and Wood, 2017; Vaz et al, 2010). Some researchers adopted innovative steps to achieve such contextualisation. For example, Theron, Cockcroft and Wood (2017) invited elders in the community to be co-designers of the research tools; they "identified members of children's families and communities as cultural experts" in order to "co-compile" tools that are "culturally sensitive" (Theron, Cockcroft and Wood, 2017, p. 502). Another study complemented children's narratives with caregivers' narratives in an "ecological, layered and cascading approach to analysis" (Crivello and van der Gaag, 2016, p. 13). Child-centred research can thus include the key figures surrounding the child in his/her relational ecosystem. In the box below we present practical examples of using caregiver and community member-oriented tools, drawing on the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence study (Summary Box 2).

Summary Box 2

Spotlight: Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence tools with children's caregivers and community members

The Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) study is a 9-year mixed methods longitudinal study by the Overseas Development Institute. It tracks 20,000 adolescents in 6 Southern countries including Ethiopia and Rwanda. Jones et al's (2018) report on GAGE's qualitative tools may be of interest to those seeking low-cost, interactive and engaging exercises with young people's caregivers and community members. We present examples of their activities and questions below.

- Asking parents to list on post-it notes: "As a parent of an adolescent girl/boy, what are the three things that most concern you about your daughter/son? And why?"
- Asking parents to rank their concerns and suggest how these concerns might be effectively resolved, with attention to differences between girls and boys, and in-school and out-of-school children.
- Asking community leaders and religious leaders in group key informant interviews to write down their observations of adolescent behaviour on post-its and group similar post-its together to "cluster" behavioural patterns.

However, it is also important to be mindful of the tensions that may arise between the inclusion of adults and the freedom and comfort of the child. Tekola, Griffin and Camfield (2009) observed that Ethiopian children appeared to be most comfortable answering questions away from caregivers or elders. This led the researchers to conduct interviews on the verandah of the house, away from the earshot of parents or kin. Researchers may thus have to find a delicate balance between respecting caregivers and community members' local knowledge and affording children the opportunities for privacy and free expression meant to underpin child-centred research.

Culturally relevant adaptations to traditional research methodologies appear promising. For example, after acknowledging sub-Saharan Africa's history of colonialism, Theron, Cockcroft and Wood (2017) studied the use of folktales in South African communities by recruiting local elders to co-design child story-material for child-participants. This was not simply a move to respect individual community members, but also an effort to honour local knowledge in a region which had undergone cultural erasure (Theron, Cockcroft and Wood, 2017). Reworking existing standardised tools can also be constructive. Katsi et al (2019) revised standardised questionnaires about child resilience and aspirations to include intergenerational values considered relevant to children in Botswana, such as visits to caregivers and respecting elders. Member-checking - consulting with participants about whether researchers' interpretations are accurate - can also be useful. Mac-Ikemenjima (2018) explains how soliciting participants' feedback allowed him to foreground dimensions most relevant to their contexts in Nigeria, such as spirituality and faith. He notes that this member-checking is crucial given the "limited body of literature on students or broadly youths in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa" (p. 14).

6.2 Sensitivity and contextualisation

Generating culturally relevant methods and processes entails not only conceptually situating the child within their ecology, but also practically contextualising communication and activity at each stage of the research. For example, recruiting participants for stigmatised or otherwise controversial topics might require discretion. Based on her work on school-based sexual violence in Zimbabwe, Ghana and Malawi, Leach (2006) notes that when she originally planned her work in 1998, no research seemed available on the issue of abuse in schools. Reports only came to her informally through conversations with teachers and media rumours, and she was aware the topic was sensitive. Therefore, she felt "cautious" and "constrained to present the study in broad terms as exploring problems that girls experienced at school" (p. 10) rather than the issue of sexual violence in schools. The necessity of caution was further borne out when child-participants reported some of the teachers to be perpetrators of sexual violence, and felt fearful of consequences (Leach, 2006). Sensitivity is thus needed in the way research topics are framed and communicated, in order to safeguard participants against stigmatisation or harm.

Discretion is also needed when designing self-report tools, because the very conditions of marginalisation can hinder children's voicing of it. De Vries et al (2014), who studied violence in South African schools, note that under-reporting is likely when children are asked to self-report about sensitive and personal matters while over 40 students surround them in high-density classrooms. Le Mat's (2016) study, also on the topic of school violence, suggests a way to circumvent children's feelings of uncertainty or reticence; Le Mat recommends quiet classrooms where participants are uninterrupted and have privacy.

When children are invited to use participatory or creative tools, it is also pertinent to note potential socio-economic constraints on their participation. In one study in South Africa, researchers assumed that cutting pictures from magazines and newspapers would be a straightforward task for collage-making; however, children did not have magazines and newspapers at home (Mayaba and Wood, 2015). Even if children do have the resources to take part in creative and participatory tasks, researchers must gain enough knowledge of the local context to see if marginalised children are representing their own realities or reproducing images from the media. This is demonstrated by an incident from Clacherty and Donald's (2007) study where the researchers were asking children to draw pictures of their everyday lives. To depict their breakfast, children drew bowls of cereal that were popular in television advertisements. It was because the researchers were familiar with the local context of poverty that they could guess that this was not an accurate representation. They elicited the truth through empathetic dialogue by asking a talkative child:

*"What did you have for breakfast today?" "Just tea." "And you, Mandla?"
"Water from the tap."*

(Clacherty and Donald, 2007, p. 150).

Such encounters suggest that sensitivity to local conditions is essential to capture children's lived realities. Innovation, then, is not only a matter of the tools used but also the capacity to improvise on the spot in the flow of relational encounters with participants, based on knowledge of the local context.

Contextualisation also meant clarifying expectations to participants. Within the eight studies that utilised draw-and-talk methods, many authors identified challenges with

enabling children to understand the creative task. Namely, the process of making art in the classroom and narrating characters and emotions out loud was not culturally familiar to learners accustomed to following direct instruction and rote learning. Some child-participants were left confused, reluctant or uncommunicative (Mayaba and Wood, 2015; Tekola, Griffin and Camfield, 2009). Moreover, several children copied pictures from their textbooks or asked older siblings for help, treating the drawings as a formal school task (Tekola, Griffin & Camfield, 2009). Researchers might thus need to ensure clear communication with participants. Techniques that proved helpful, and were discussed in these studies, included reassuring children that their art would not be formally assessed; that the drawings were not a test of ability; and those children who were not literate could provide oral, rather than written, explanations (Mayaba and Wood, 2015).

Overall, to deepen researchers' understanding of the local context, it has been recommended that researchers spend long periods being immersed in the field site, conducting activities and games that engage with participants' lives such as game-playing, and making home and school visits to interact with children's caregivers and peers (Camfield, 2011; Motha, Swartz and Makgamatha, 2019; Tekola, Griffin and Camfield, 2009; Swartz, 2011). Mixed methods approaches and data triangulation have also been found useful. Langevang (2007) observes that conducting life-history interviews and gathering photo-diaries worked well in tandem, as the former helped contextualise the information in the latter. Utilising multiple sources of data and devoting time and energy to the field site can therefore be fruitful for deepening knowledge of the local context. Excerpt from the GAGE provides a useful lens into using some of these tools (Summary Box 3).

Summary Box 3

Spotlight: Child-centred exercises GAGE Baseline Qualitative Tools

The GAGE study is a 9-year mixed methods longitudinal study by the Overseas Development Institute. It tracks 20,000 adolescents in 6 Southern countries including Ethiopia and Rwanda. Jones et al's (2018) report on GAGE's qualitative tools includes three tools of interest to those seeking low-cost, interactive and engaging exercises to understand young people's lives.

- “A Few of My Favourite Things” (adapted from Thomson and Kehily et al., 2011): Asking adolescents to name three of their favourite objects (spontaneously, to prevent parents directing their choice) and explain the objects' significance and history.
- “Worries and accomplishments”: Asking adolescents to list their worries over the last week or month on index cards, as well as sub-categories of “things you worry about but can't fix” and “worries that you could potentially fix”.
- “Social Support”: Asking adolescents who they enjoy spending time with, confide in, and avoid.

6.3 Use of language

Language emerges as a strong cultural factor in survey and interview design and data analysis. Some studies note the need to be mindful that many learners are taught in a language not their own and that sub-cultural variations can exist even between children who speak the same language (Campbell et al, 2010; Katisi et al, 2019; Mayaba and Wood, 2015). Researchers must therefore clarify what children's mother-tongues are, give them options regarding the language in which they are interviewed or approached, and recruit local translators and interviewers who speak the children's language of choice (Mayaba and Wood, 2015). Otherwise, certain nuances of the findings may be lost in translation. For instance, De Vries et al (2014) note after their study of sexual violence in South African schools that they are unsure whether their adolescent-participants shared the same interpretation of assault. This suggests that

the phrases used in research should be continually checked to see if they translate cross-culturally.

This attention to language also includes how activities and tasks are described. For example, while conducting life history interviews and asking children to build life course timelines, Crivello, Camfield and Woodhead (2009) advise asking children to report on “things they remember best” rather than significant or major life events as children can become confused by the latter wording. Dungey and Ansell (2020) also shed light on the importance of linguistic nuances; when studying cultural understandings of youth wellbeing in Lesotho, the authors note: “it is noteworthy that the word for “health” (bophelo) stems from ho phela (to live or survive) and questions about life are often interpreted as questions about health” (p. 623).

6.4 Using space and movement

Transcending traditional methodologies might mean engaging with children’s life worlds beyond standard sit-down-and-talk formats. In Porter’s (2011) study of children in Ghana, she accompanied them on their 4-5 kilometre walk home from school. This enabled her to witness the dangers and constraints they faced, such as girls’ fears around assault, their lack of shoes, and the lack of affordable buses. In turn, this “mobile ethnography” (Porter, 2011) afforded insight into why the children’s drop-out rates were so high.

While using space and movement, it is pertinent to keep in mind that significant time, effort and expertise might be required for creative or participatory approaches. Body mapping, for example, has been noted to be time-consuming and requiring skilled facilitation (Crivello, Camfield and Woodhead, 2009). Not all youth are equally able or willing to express themselves freely. For instance, some children can dominate the conversation in group activities while others remain reticent, which means that such activities may yield “shared meaning” rather than in-depth insights into each child’s unique life (Crivello, Camfield and Woodhead, 2009). This is not an argument against these tools, but merely a reminder of their complexities.

6.5 Recognising exclusions

Reviewing these studies also highlighted the need to acknowledge children who typically “slip through the cracks” in sub-Saharan African research. Out-of-school children appear to be neglected in research as most studies grounded their data in school-based sources, such as systematic censuses of primary and secondary schools and school records of attendance, literacy and retention rates. Researchers often listed the exclusion of out-of-school children as a limitation of their sample (e.g. Robson and Sylvester, 2007; Wolf, Godfrey and McCoy, 2016). Reliable quantitative data on such populations to supplement qualitative data collection was often unavailable (Robson and Sylvester, 2007). Consequently, researchers sometimes missed vital information about children’s marginalisation. For instance, Wolf, Godfrey and McCoy (2016) observe that girls may not attend school because they fear violence and abuse and hence have higher absentee rates. By only recruiting child-participants who happened to be attending school on the day of the research, Wolf et al admit that “a very important segment of the population is missed” (2016, p. 190). The small number of studies that do broaden their sample beyond in-school children can therefore be seen as practicing methodological innovation. A notable example is Kendrick and Kakuru’s (2012) study in Uganda, where the researchers deliberately sought out child-headed households as a little-understood sub-Saharan African youth population who have no adult caregivers, are isolated from wider society, and remain typically overlooked in research.

Concerning gaps persist in sub-Saharan African literature on youth with disabilities: one Namibia-based study observes that almost 9 million children in sub-Saharan Africa have hearing disabilities, yet there is little research on special primary schools and educators (Abiatal and Howard, 2020).

Questions of exclusion may also arise in terms of participant retention. When working with children facing risk and precarity, high rates of attrition may affect data analysis. Cluver et al’s (2012) study of street children in South Africa notes that although they made laborious attempts to track down all participants after 4 years, 295 children were not discoverable due to their difficult conditions. The possibility of marginalised participants leaving or becoming untraceable during the research process is high because of the risks and challenges they face. This may need to be anticipated in

advance of fieldwork and attempts to retain and safeguard participants carefully planned before data collection begins. An example of adapting methods and approaches to situations of crisis is given below, drawing on the GAGE study (Summary Box 4).

Summary Box 4

Spotlight: Adapting participatory methods and approaches to crisis in the COVID pandemic in the GAGE study

Małachowska et al's (2020) GAGE report offers examples of adapting child-centred methodologies to the constraints of the pandemic to counter the risk of participant attrition and exclusion:

- 20-60-minute semi-structured conversations via phone and WhatsApp, both at the beginning and duration of the pandemic to track changes over time.
- Asking adolescents to create weekly photo essays and video diaries to explain their experiences and emotions during the crisis.
- Additional debriefing time with co-researchers to discuss participants' intensified challenges and support researchers working in isolated conditions.

6.6 Dissemination and change

The question of local impact becomes crucial if children are enlisted as co-researchers, as they may want to see that their labour has had some impact. Porter and Abane (2008) note that a child-centred approach does not end with identifying the challenges children face. To prevent their child co-researchers in Ghana from becoming disillusioned, they recruited ministry and Non-Governmental Organisations representatives to listen and respond to the children's findings. Porter and Abane's approach suggest that proactively pursuing dissemination pathways with key stakeholders is essential.

Creative approaches may help create engaging dissemination pathways. Zuch et al (2013) aimed to test the potential of photovoice as a participatory community-based

method, targeting school safety in a public high school in an economically disadvantaged, urban community in Cape Town, South Africa. They note that "this study is the first of its kind to demonstrate the potential for the Photovoice methodology to engage students" in South Africa (p. 194). To help children share their findings, researchers facilitated a 30-member community forum, including key social actors such as teachers, school leaders, parents, policemen, government representatives and activists. The authors note that using photovoice led to students becoming more confident and teachers reporting pride that students were more able to speak up and share their views. The authors state that they believe photovoice can "engage, raise awareness, and promote change among often-silent populations" because their evaluation 6 weeks after the project showed that this method can "successfully engage and empower students to think critically about their environment, and raise awareness of school safety issues among teachers, parents, police officers, and community stakeholders" (p. 194). Similarly, Suffla, Seedat and Bawa's (2015) photovoice-based study noted that the efforts to prioritise youth voice were fruitful because the child-participants began to appear more and more confident and bold, and seemed to enjoy taking ownership of a public space through creating a photo-exhibition.

Innovation does not mean overnight change, however. We have noted the possible cultural sensitivities surrounding participatory and child-centred methodologies. These cultural clashes can have direct consequences for the social impact of research. Porter and Abane (2008) who used child-researchers in Ghana and South Africa, note that because "in many Ghanaian cultures there is a strong view that children should know their place [at the bottom rung of family and community hierarchies]: children should be seen and not heard" (p. 161), they had "no well-established structure of children's advocacy organisations within which to set our study" (p. 160). This lack of networks and platforms appeared to diminish their ability to amplify children's voices in policy. When they invited a Ghanaian Minister to listen to the findings of their child-participants, he said "adults here also don't want child imperialism... do not frighten us with any form of child imperialism" (p. 161). A lack of cultural and structural support for child-centred research can therefore affect the capacity of researchers to amplify children's voices in policy.

It may also compromise researchers' abilities to advocate for change in participants' educational environments. Zuch et al (2013) note that photovoice was not successful at empowering students to speak their mind about issues of sexual harassment and dating violence. During the focus group discussion, students acknowledged that dating violence is pervasive in their school but reported their discomfort in raising these issues during the sessions and forum. These students feared that the principal or their parents would judge them harshly or assume that they were coming to school "for relationships, not education," if they spoke of matters related to sex and dating. Teachers felt that parents and other community members were not always responsive to student concerns in the discussions; broader cultural norms of authority and hierarchy came into play. Such challenges echoes Motha, Swartz and Makgamatha's (2019) broader conclusions on emancipatory methodologies with sub-Saharan African children. They question whether a culture of participation really exists to support child-centred methodologies in sub-Saharan Africa and the degree of institutional and caregiver support for such methodologies.

This does not mean the latter is impossible. While the Ghanaian minister in Porter and Abane's (2008) study felt doubtful about "child imperialism", he also demonstrated "great care and thoroughness" in listening to the children and taking notes on their findings (p. 161). Indeed, this review suggests there is scope for building long-term relationships with schools and other stakeholders to foster trust and collaboration. Based on their photovoice intervention, for example, Zuch et al (2013) recommend that researchers conduct timely and proactive follow-ups with schools to ensure that children's voices continue to be heard in the process of change implementation. Ultimately, the "tension" between developing standardised, universalist ethical protocols and the range of cultural values encountered in the field means that "complex judgements will always have to be made" (Robinson-Pant and Singal, 2020, p. 869) when pondering pathways for dissemination and change.

Summaries of considerations arising from this section are provided below (Figure 3 and Table 2).

Figure 3: Considerations for researchers while using child-centred tools in sub-Saharan African classrooms



Table 2: Examples of methodological innovation arising from this review

| Methodological innovation | Examples |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Expanding standardised tools and centering local meanings | Enlisting elders as survey designers (Theron, Cockcroft and Wood, 2017) |
| Embodied engagement with children's worlds | 'Mobile ethnography' through accompanying children on their way to and back from school (Porter, 2011) |
| Ensuring key community decision-makers listen to children's voices | Recruiting a 30-member community forum to listen to children's findings, including teachers, school leaders, parents, policemen, government representatives and activists (Zuch et al, 2013) and even Ministers and Non-Governmental Organisations representatives (Porter and Abane, 2008). |
| Rejecting deficit perceptions | Focusing on children's resources and coping strategies, not only what they lack (Kendrick and Kakuru, 2012). |
| Proactively seeking out youth excluded from typical samples | Deliberately recruiting children living in child-led households without adult caregivers, isolated from wider society (Kendrick & Kakuru, 2012). |
| Creative dissemination pathways for child-led research | Community exhibitions to showcase children's use of photovoice (Suffla, Seedat & Bawa, 2015). |

7. Ethical issues

In this section we focus specifically on ethical issues arising from a review of the literature.

7.1 Giving back

The level of time and engagement required for participatory methods may be incompatible with some high-poverty sub-Saharan African settings. When children in Ghana, Malawi and South Africa became co-researchers in Porter et al's (2010) study, their workloads proved a barrier: "The pressures on children's own time in an African developing country context are often very considerable, given the widespread need for children to help contribute to family livelihoods... particularly now in families affected by HIV/AIDS. Pedestrian load carrying (of water, fuelwood, produce, groceries, etc.) represents a substantial daily task for many young people" (p. 216). Gender exacerbates these pressures: girls were less able to participate as research collaborators (Porter et al, 2010). In turn, attrition can occur because of the pressures high-poverty families face: "One very enthusiastic young child researcher in Ghana (a girl of 14) reluctantly had to withdraw after the training week because she was required to contribute to her family income by selling cassava, and she could not cope with the additional demands of the research" (Porter et al, 2010, p. 217).

This question of sustainability also needs to be negotiated with school staff. Mayaba and Wood (2015) note that collecting visual, participatory data in an under-resourced South African school demanded a deep understanding of the day to day challenges the teachers faced. With timetables changing rapidly, pressure for children to spend their time on academic lessons, and scanty after-school transport, the researchers became accustomed to rescheduling data collection. Consistent communication with school staff may therefore be necessary for robust and feasible research designs.

A less tangible yet equally pressing challenge is how to fulfil the promise of participatory research given that child-centred research may not be culturally familiar in sub-Saharan Africa. Researchers recommend clearly explaining to children that researchers do not expect the obedience or deference other community members may require (Abebe and Bessell, 2014). However, empowerment remains elusive. Robson

et al (2009) note the intractability of the power imbalance between their Malawi child-researchers and adult researchers from Western institutions. Conducting research made children miss school and precious wage-earning opportunities. The researchers admit: "In our Western way of thinking we failed to see the implications, despite knowing (academically at least) that many children in poor households in Malawi earn income that contributes to their own and their families' economic survival" (p. 475). They concur that they "should have discussed more clearly with children, teachers and parents before the training workshops to clarify that allowances were not going to be paid, rather than disappointing expectations and putting pressures on the young people from elders" and conclude that "protecting children from exploitation from research is not straightforward within complex combinations of unbalanced social relations produced by (or at least reminiscent of) employer–employee relations, Minority–Majority world relations, and/or adult–child relations" (p. 475).

Clear and transparent communication thus appears essential. Perhaps traditional advice not to pay participants can also be reconsidered. Abebe and Bessell (2014) advocate for the monetary compensation of child-researchers in sub-Saharan Africa as a way to acknowledge their day-to-day fight for survival in high-poverty conditions. They also suggest that payment be organically negotiated and discussed with children, observing that children are not oblivious but in fact highly sensitive to questions of reciprocity (Abebe and Bessell, 2014). Other authors have made similar suggestions to offer tangible benefits to participants, whether this means intervening to safeguard child-participants at risk if needed or performing "psychosocial interventions" wherein researchers try to contribute to participants' lives in the form of advice, skill-building, or resource-signposting (Motha, Swartz & Makgamatha, 2019; Swartz, 2011). Swartz (2011) gives concrete examples: teaching participants how to use cameras, going on an adventure camp, and funding little social expenses such as going to the theatre or lunching together. Thus, a common theme emerges from the literature: in response to the precarity and marginalisation sub-Saharan African youth participants might face, traditional ethical guidelines around participant incentives and benefits might need to expand. This finding reinforces wider calls for care and compensation in research in African settings and Southern settings more generally (Cremin et al, 2021; McKeever, 2000) that deepen the need to "question the whole practice of research and the nature

of the research relationship” in the interests of justice and equity (Robinson-Pant and Singal, 2013a, p. 449).

7.2 Reflexivity (insider/outsider; research positionality)

References to the researcher’s own positionality, in terms of personal identity and biases that could influence data collection and analysis, appeared scarce. However, a notable exception was Swartz’s (2011) ethics-based reflection on her work in South Africa. Reflecting on her own identity as a simultaneous insider and outsider - a white South African woman who was highly educated and affiliated with elite Western institutions - appeared to increase the sensitivity of her data analysis, as she took care to avoid patronising or neo-colonial depictions of her participants (Swartz, 2011). Hers was the only study to reflect on these racial sensitivities in depth, mirroring a turn towards “situated ethics” that pushes researchers to recognise histories of oppression in postcolonial settings (Tikly and Bond, 2013).

Aside from race, age also influences power dynamics. Porter and Abane’s (2008) study in Ghana noted that while “agreeing to disagree” is crucial to activist-scholar relationships, they question whether child-researchers are ever truly free to disagree with their adult co-researchers in participatory models (p. 164). Further research on this vexed question of power dynamics could help push forward the growing recognition that “ethics is not just around gaining access or guiding the researcher’s conduct in the field, but also about how the researcher positions her/himself in relation to knowledge and power” (Robinson-Pant and Singal, 2020, p. 870).

This reflexivity extends not only to researchers who arrive in sub-Saharan Africa from other regions, but also to local staff recruited. Recruiting and training local staff and community members as co-researchers and local informants was recommended by the majority of studies as a way to foster community-led, participatory research (Butts et al, 2018). However, this choice can also complicate the researcher-participant relationship. Breen, Daniels and Tomlinson (2015) reflect on their choice to recruit a local community member to interview their child-participants in South Africa:

“As a young woman, who spoke the same language and lived in the same area as the children, she was more likely to have been seen as an

older sister figure than a teacher or parental authority figure, and therefore facilitated trust. However, in spite of training and experience in interviewing children, she came across at times as judgmental. For example, in one case a girl spoke about being beaten by her father for breaking something from his car. Her response could have given the child the message that it was appropriate for her to be beaten as she had been the one to take the item from the car"

(Breen, Daniels and Tomlinson, 2015, p. 138).

Careful attention therefore needs to be paid to the positionality of each researcher and how this affects their assumptions and responses when working face-to-face with children.

This reflexivity also applies to the way questions are designed. Hansen (2005) reflects on having to question her own researcher preconceptions while interviewing children in Zambia. While they appeared reticent initially, she realised it was because her questions assumed formally structured divisions between school and leisure that did not apply to the realities of many wage-earning children who assumed culturally specific responsibilities. Avoiding Westernised or adult-centric assumptions can therefore help researchers flexibly adapt their designs to local forms of meaning-making.

In the analysis and write-up stage, it may be wise to enlist multiple colleagues to maintain boundaries given that data on marginalised participants often involves graphic accounts of children's suffering. Breen, Daniels and Tomlinson (2015) reflect: "During the data analysis, it was easy to become overwhelmed by the sadness of these stories, but having three people to work with, two of who were more distant from the data, helped bring perspective so that we could consider the public health implications and not be drowned by the narratives" (p. 138). Thus, a balance of "insiders" and "outsiders" within the research team may help to maintain balance and rigour, while remaining mindful of the consequences arising from each type of positionality.

7.3 Rights: Consent and confidentiality

The right to consent and the right to withdraw may be challenging to fulfil in practice. Dialogue with school staff may be essential to prevent teachers pressuring children to participate or ordering them to complete research activities (Mayaba and Wood, 2015). Moreover, the concept of eliciting children's informed consent may not appear meaningful to all sub-Saharan African caregivers. For example, the parents of child-participants in an Ethiopian study questioned why the children's consent was necessary (Tekola, Griffin and Camfield, 2009). Vaz et al (2010) observe that sub-Saharan African caregivers "often communicate with children in a directive, rather than participatory fashion, with few opportunities for questioning, discussion, and joint decision-making made available to children" (p. 253). However, this does not mean consent cannot be negotiated. In the same Ethiopian study just mentioned, conducting dialogue with parents and caregivers eventually led to mutual understanding and assent (Tekola, Griffin and Camfield, 2009).

The medium of consent may also need to be adapted to the cultural context. For instance, instead of asking participants to sign a written consent form before being interviewed, Camfield (2011) chose a longer but more relationally sensitive process of regularly confirming whether Ethiopian child-participants were still able to participate and reminding them regularly that they were free to withdraw. This reinforces previous observations that written consent forms are not necessarily meaningful sources of trust and comfort in settings where oral literacy practices are more common or where a formal research culture has not been established (Araali, 2011; Asif, 2010; Qureshi, 2010). This is not to perpetuate essentialist or rigid notions of cultural difference, but to suggest that formalised codes of conduct may need to be adapted to reflect local community norms (Robinson-Pant and Singal, 2013a).

7.4 Impact and accountability

Recognising the impact of research upon participants' welfare is key to remaining accountable as researchers. The possibility of exploitation looms large when recruiting children as co-researchers and entering the power dynamics associated with overseas funding (Porter et al, 2010). One study noted the paradox of asking children to undertake formal labour as researchers: they may be below the minimum age of

employment *and* fail to enjoy, as young researchers, the worker rights associated with paid work (Abebe and Bessell, 2014). Moreover, they may also miss out on formal wage-earning activity due to their participation (Abebe and Bessell, 2014). Their wellbeing may also be affected by the emotional labour of participatory methods. As Porter et al (2010) muse, "How can we best prepare enthusiastic children for the abrupt refusal of potential respondents to be interviewed, the demands of respondents who want to know exactly how things will change if information is provided, occasional insults, even demands for money or the threat of physical violence?" (p. 221). At worst, physical harm may be a possibility if children are sent out into risky public spaces (Abebe and Bessell, 2014).

Impact also extends further than the individual child: the web of relationships and norms surrounding him or her may be unsettled. Porter et al note (2010) that their approach to centering children's views and recruiting children as research collaborators may be seen as 'suspect—even dangerous—approach by some adults' (p. 217) as participatory research subverts the traditional view of children as passive and risks making researchers appear ignorant, disrespectful or disruptive to cultural norms. This may disrupt children's relationships or create tensions with figures of authority in their life, such as teachers and parents (Abebe and Bessell, 2014).

Turning to the positive side of impact and accountability: participatory methods may increase the ethical significance of research if they utilise children's voices for social change. Suffla, Seedat and Bawa's (2015) study of photovoice noted that when young people presented their photographic findings about community safety and sanitation, their voices were taken seriously by a government official and an intervention was led which produced positive change. On a critical note, the authors acknowledge how the intervention became adult-led even though the findings were child-led, somewhat decentering the voices of the original child participants. The authors also admit that employing adult translators may have diminished youth voice as the authors ended up relying on adult translators to decipher youth meanings and interpretations.

These complications suggest that "ideological questions around voice, power relationships and identity" need to be at the heart of research (Robinson-Pant and Singal, 2020, p. 866). In this regard, an intriguing notion of "participatory ethics" emerges from Abebe and Bessell (2014) - a notion that they believe is "what is missing

from research design and field research” (p. 131). Participatory ethics conceptualises researchers as held accountable to children as well as institutional funders, which places child-participants’ welfare at the heart of the research process.

7.5 Relationship building

When building relationships with participants, attempts to foster trust or empathy must consider culturally relevant characteristics of the sample, such as sub-Saharan African youth's exposure to the HIV/AIDs crisis. In addition to well-known markers of marginalisation such as poverty, gender, and disability, the marker of "OVC" or "Orphaned and Vulnerable Children" proved to be a significant axis of marginalisation. Rising rates of adult mortality in the HIV/AIDs crisis have had multiple consequences for youth welfare and youth outcomes (Morantz et al, 2013). Indeed, across the studies reviewed, "OVC" emerged as the most common sample characteristic.

In response, sub-Saharan African youth research must account for the possibility that many participants may carry a HIV/AIDs diagnosis themselves; know family or friends with the condition; or have experienced bereavement as a result of the crisis. Multiple studies stressed that they took care not to accidentally pressure participants to disclose their own status or experiences with the crisis (Abebe, 2009; Campbell et al, 2014). The memories and emotions triggered during research also need to be anticipated. Robson and Sylvester (2007) note that many child-participants are young carers due to the crisis and face imminent bereavement. Consequently, they experience distress when made to disclose personal and family information in interviews. Moreover, use of some creative tools, especially when used in conjunction with sensitive topics, can also stir up unwanted emotions and memories in child-participants. A child in Mayaba and Wood's (2015) study said his drawing reminded him of his mother. Such moments may require follow-ups with participants to discern their emotional state and signpost them to appropriate sources of support if necessary.

The actual process of data collection demands similar sensitivity in communication and relationship-building. Leach's (2006) study necessitated "one-to-one interviews because we believed that girls would not want to talk about sexuality and sexual relationships in front of others, and in particular would be fearful of disclosing sexual advances by older boys or male teachers as this might expose them to punishment or victimisation in the future" (Leach, 2006, p. 11). The authors observe that not enlisting any of the teachers as interviewers helped, as students did not seem to trust teachers and even admitted to experiencing abuse at their hands (Leach, 2006). In addition, differences in identity characteristics can shape openness. Leach reflects:

“The girls were not particularly relaxed or expansive interviewees. Boys were usually more frank and informative, perhaps because they were used to dominating verbal space in the classroom and girls were likely to be more fearful of the consequences of what they said. It was often only after two or three interviews that some girls felt able to speak relatively freely about their experiences at school and at home”

(Leach, 2006, p. 13).

Space, identity and power therefore influence the social dynamics of classroom spaces and need careful navigation in order to help all participants to speak freely and feel comfortable.

The consequences of free expression in child-centred methods must also be considered. While group interviews have been frequently utilised, they can deepen social divisions between more and less advantaged children if these divisions are discussed openly (Crivello, Camfield and Woodhead, 2009). Moreover, participants might reveal information against their best interests. Swartz (2011) divulges that her participants became so used to her presence that they forgot that she was a researcher. She had to remind them not to tell her about any illegal activities. This helped protect herself and her participants from becoming liable to testify against them in court in case they were sentenced for criminal activity. Such data suggests the high stakes of youth self-expression in settings of precarity.

Methodological innovation must also be tempered by caution around youth wellbeing. A lack of literacy or familiarity with creative or participatory tasks may make some children feel embarrassed, ill-at-ease or inadequate (Mayaba and Wood, 2015). While exercises such as body mapping can be stimulating and engaging, some children may also find them embarrassing (Crivello, Camfield and Woodhead, 2009). Concerningly, discussions of ethics remain scarce even in child-centred studies. For example, in one study using photovoice, orphaned children were asked to use photographs to construct their family history (Kendrick and Kakuru, 2012). The authors note that children had to recall their life history without any family present to tell them stories, but do not include ethics-based reflection on how this exercise may have affected participants' mental health. Having protocols and plans in place to build wellbeing-

conducive relationships, as well as transparent reflections on this process in publication outputs, thus seem necessary.

7.6 Authenticity and accuracy

Seeking marginalised children's voices raises the question of how best to listen. A benefit of utilising visual, creative and participatory methods such as drawing and storytelling is their capacity to elicit insights on marginalised identity characteristics. For example, one study showed schoolchildren making drawings on the same theme (HIV-affected students) but representations of suffering depended on whether the cartoon figure was a boy or a girl (LeRoux-Rutledge et al, 2015). In children's drawings, HIV-affected boys were more materially and socially deprived than HIV-affected girls and HIV-affected girls had more support from teachers. This elicited useful insights for the authors around the different levels and types of vulnerability children faced.

However, working with children's representations as sources of data also raises complex questions around accuracy and truth. In the same study just mentioned, the researchers noted that they were unsure whether the children's perceptions were accurate (LeRoux-Rutledge et al, 2015). In the children's drawings, HIV-affected girls appeared to be doing better than the HIV-affected boys. The researchers note that if this is true, then they recommend that greater attention and funding be given to male pupils. However, if this is not true, then children's perceptions could be reflecting the gender inequality of a society where female suffering goes unnoticed - in which case the researchers recommend that girls be given equal support (LeRoux-Rutledge et al, 2015). This case study suggests how the degree to which researchers judge children's creations accurate reflections of reality, and the way they interpret divergences in children's representations, can affect the conclusions drawn and subsequent policy recommendations for the most marginalised learners.

Further insight into the question of how researchers decide what is exaggerated or "true" may be drawn from Campbell et al's (2015) study, which used draw-and-talk with Zimbabwean schoolchildren. The authors note that participants' accounts matched the realities portrayed in existing literature and matched other sources of information gathered from teachers, older children, and other local community

members. This suggests the value of complementing participatory tools with other sources of data collection and checking children's narratives against existing literature/regional knowledge/other stakeholder and community accounts.

7.7 Aftermath of research

The necessity of leaving participants behind deepens the ethical complexity of researcher-participant relationships. In Kendrick and Kakuru's (2012) study of child-led households in Uganda, a research assistant called Debbie provided care to child-participants. Debbie began to answer the children's questions about preparing food and gradually became a source of crucial guidance to the children as they strove to survive. The researchers disclose this outcome as part of their data analysis, commenting on children's resourcefulness in reaching out for social support. However, they do not disclose what happened to this relationship post the research. Did Debbie continue to help the children? Did the researchers leave the area? If not, how did Debbie's departure or withdrawal of support affect the children? The ethical complexities of such researcher-participant relationships need to be more closely examined.

A promising suggestion by Abebe and Bessell (2014) is to maintain an ethic of care *after* the researchers leave the site, as well as during data collection. Abebe and Bessell draw on their work with children in Ethiopia to suggest clarifying to the children the date of departure and whether future communication will be forthcoming, and to seek and secure community sources of support for children post their departure if the research was undertaken over a significant period of time. Remaining "mindful about the implications of the research encounter for children's lives and the legacy left" is crucial given that sub-Saharan African child-participants may have experienced abandonment and the loss of primary caregivers (Abebe and Bessell, 2014, p. 130).

In the hope of encouraging sustained support for child-participants and reflecting on the issues discussed in these research papers, we deliberately use the word "relationship" rather than "rapport" throughout this report. "Rapport"-building has typically been used in research literature to signify the short-term trust-building that occurs for the purpose of extracting data. By contrast, we conceptualise "relationship"-building as developing and deepening through all stages of the research cycle. We

thereby emphasise that ethical practice is not confined to fieldwork or data collection alone, but is holistic, iterative and long-term (Cremin et al, 2021; Nyambedha, 2008).

7.8 Representation

Innovation may lie not only in tangible tools but also in the assumptions and mindsets underlying these tools. Some studies pointed out the need to disrupt the narrative of the “lost generation” surrounding sub-Saharan African youth (e.g., Langevang, 2007). Kendrick and Kakuru’s (2012) study of Ugandan child-led households endeavours to work with an “asset-based” child-centred approach on the grounds that most research on sub-Saharan Africa focuses on children’s risks and vulnerabilities. They argue that more research should focus on children’s capacities to harness social and intellectual resources to navigate settings of adversity and marginalisation. Langevang and Gough’s (2009) Ghana-based work makes a similar argument for recognising children’s capabilities and including questions that affirm their hopes and aspirations for the future. Qualitative data may be a fitting route to this agency-centred approach; in their work in Lesotho, Tanzania and Zimbabwe against the backdrop of the HIV/AIDs crisis, Robson et al (2006) conclude that the in-depth accounts produced through qualitative data lead to a more respectful and asset-driven understanding of young participants. After reflecting on participants’ capabilities and meaning-making, the authors state that they “deliberately highlight this perspective here in order to challenge the general tendency to treat children as victims” and to fulfil the principle of child-centred research “which is to reveal children’s agency” (p. 106).

However, this approach is not without complexity. Campbell et al (2013) point out the ethical problems with the language of “children’s agency”. They acknowledge that the turn towards children’s agency as competent social actors was important for childhood studies in the 1990s but argue that this is not necessarily appropriate in the sub-Saharan African context where structural constraints on children’s agency desperately need to be recognised because of the severe hardships children face. Campbell et al note that “even two analyses of a single set of drawings by the very same researchers might lead to very different conclusions, depending on their starting assumptions about what constitutes agency” (p. 62). These researchers recommend Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach (Sen, 1999) as a contextually sensitive and socially just means to interrogate whether children have agency to pursue outcomes they value. A balance

might thus be needed between honouring youth-participants' agency and assets and not diminishing the reality of the structural constraints they face.

A summary of these ethical considerations is presented below in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Some ethical considerations throughout the research cycle



Conclusion

Overall, this report has aimed to present lessons learned from existing research with sub-Saharan African children/young people. Methodologically, the review found value in child-centred approaches that utilised qualitative and mixed-methods designs and creative and participatory tools. Despite the new challenges that these approaches bring, we take the position that child-centred research is necessary and important.

Ethically, the review explored multiple concerns and possibilities for working with marginalised youth. While locally contextualised research is crucial, there is a need to go beyond “an essentialised and static notion of culture” to recognise the deeper social and economic inequalities that can shape the production and dissemination of knowledge (Robinson-Pant and Singal, 2013b, p. 449).

It is hoped that the findings of this systematic review can help stimulate dialogue and debate about foregrounding youth voice and foster rigorous, ethical and collaborative research with young people in sub-Saharan Africa.

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Appendix A: Protocol for electronic database search

Protocol for electronic database search

(Asterisk used as a symbol for the 'wild-card' function, to use distinctive word stems to retrieve variations of a term in the search results. e.g. "teach*" yields results including 'teachers' 'teaching' and 'teacher' and "learn*" covers "learner", "learners" and "learning".)

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| Population | "child*" or "young people*" or "student*" or "learner*" or "pupil*" or "adolescen*" or "youth" |
| AND | |
| Geographical region | ("Sub-Saharan Africa*") OR (Angola OR Benin OR Botswana OR Brazil OR Brasil [PL24] OR "Burkina Faso" OR "Burkina Fasso" OR Burundi OR Cameroon OR Cameroons OR "Cape Verde" OR "Cabo Verde" OR "Central African Republic" OR Chad OR Comoros OR "Comoro Islands" OR Comores OR Congo OR "Côte d'Ivoire" OR Eritrea OR Eswatini OR Ethiopia OR Gabon OR Gambia OR "The Gambia" OR Ghana OR Guinea OR Guinea-Bissau OR Kenya OR Lesotho OR Liberia OR Madagascar OR Malawi OR Mali OR Mauritania OR Mauritius OR Mozambique OR Namibia OR Niger OR Nigeria OR Rwanda OR "Sao Tome and Principe" OR "São Tomé and Príncipe" OR Senegal OR Seychelles OR "Sierra Leone" OR Somalia OR "South Africa" OR "South Sudan" OR Sudan OR Tanzania OR Togo OR Uganda OR Zambia OR Zimbabwe) |
| AND | |
| Educational research | To be used if databases are not education-specific "education" or "learn*" or "secondary school*" or "secondary education" or "secondary teach*" or "secondary classroom*" or "high school*" or "compulsory education" or "basic education" or "K12" or "home education" or "non-formal education" or "non-formal learning" or "non-formal school*" or "out-of-school children" or "inclusive education" or "special educational needs" or "SEND" or "children with disabilities" |
| Publication date | Only articles published after/in 2000 |

Relevant databases

ERIC, British Education Index (BEI), 3ie Impact Evaluation, Web of Science, UNICEF and UNESCO report database, World Bank publications database, BRAC Research and Evaluation Division (RED) Archive, African Educational Research Database.

Appendix B: Studies using child-centred tools/activities

The following table lists the articles providing in-depth descriptions of, or reflections on, innovative child-centred tools and activities discussed in the review. Note: this does not include all 51 studies, as some of the studies reviewed focused on other aspects of methodology (eg. ethics).

Table 3: Studies using child-centred tools/activities

| Child-centred tools/activities | Studies utilising these tools/activities |
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| Draw-and-talk and collage-making | <p>Mayaba, N., and Wood, L. (2015). Using drawings and collages as data generation methods with children: Definitely not child's play. <i>International Journal of Qualitative Methods</i>, 14(5).</p> <p>Tekola, B., Griffin, C., and Camfield, L. (2009). Using qualitative methods with poor children in urban Ethiopia: Opportunities and challenges. <i>Social Indicators Research</i>, 90(1), 73-87.</p> <p>Crivello, G., Camfield, L., and Woodhead, M. (2009). How can children tell us about their wellbeing? Exploring the potential of participatory research approaches within young lives. <i>Social Indicators Research</i>, 90(1), 51-72.</p> <p>Kendrick, M., and Kakuru, D. (2012). Funds of knowledge in child-headed households: A Ugandan case study. <i>Childhood</i>, 19(3), 397-413.</p> <p>Campbell, C., Skovdal, M., Mupambireyi, Z., and Gregson, S. (2010). Exploring children's stigmatisation of AIDS-affected children in Zimbabwe through drawings and stories. <i>Social Science and Medicine</i>, 71(5), 975-985.</p> <p>Theron, L., Cockcroft, K., and Wood, L. (2017). The resilience-enabling value of African folktales: The read-me-to-resilience intervention. <i>School Psychology</i></p> |

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| | <p><i>International</i>, 38(5), 491-506.</p> <p>Leach, F. (2006). Researching gender violence in schools: Methodological and ethical considerations. <i>World Development</i>, 34(6), 1129-1147.</p> <p>LeRoux-Rutledge, E., Guerlain, M. A., Andersen, L. B., Madanhire, C., Mutsikiwa, A., Nyamukapa, C., Skovdal, M., Gregson, S., and Campbell, C. (2015). It's harder for boys? Children's representations of their HIV/AIDS-affected peers in Zimbabwe. <i>AIDS Care</i>, 27(11), 1367-1374.</p> <p>Campbell, C., Andersen, L., Mutsikiwa, A., Madanhire, C., Skovdal, M., Nyamukapa, C., and Gregson, S. (2015). Re-thinking children's agency in extreme hardship: Zimbabwean children's draw-and-write about their HIV-affected peers. <i>Health and Place</i>, 31, 54-64.</p> <p>Mampane, R., Ebersöhn, L., Cherrington, A., and Moen, M. (2014). Adolescents' views on the power of violence in a rural school in South Africa. <i>Journal of Asian and African Studies</i>, 49(6), 733-745.</p> |
| Photovoice | <p>Zuch, M., Mathews, C., De Koker, P., Mtshizana, Y., and Mason-Jones, A. (2013). Evaluation of a Photovoice pilot project for school safety in South Africa. <i>Children Youth and Environments</i>, 23(1), 180-197.</p> <p>Suffla, S., Seedat, M., and Bawa, U. (2015). Reflexivity as enactment of critical community psychologies: Dilemmas of voice and positionality in a multi-country photovoice study. <i>Journal of Community Psychology</i>, 43(1), 9-21.</p> <p>Kendrick, M., and Kakuru, D. (2012). Funds of knowledge in child-headed households: A Ugandan case study. <i>Childhood</i>, 19(3), 397-413.</p> <p>Motha, K. C., Swartz, S., and Makgamatha, M. M. (2019).</p> |

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| | <p>Towards emancipatory research methodologies with children in the African context: Practical possibilities and overcoming challenges. <i>HTS: Theological Studies</i>, 75(1), 1-9.</p> <p>Benninger, E. and Savahl, S. (2016) The use of visual methods to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the “self” within two urban communities in the Western Cape, South Africa. <i>International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Wellbeing</i>, 11:1, 31251.</p> <p>Ngidi, N. D., and Moletsane, R. (2019). Using photovoice to engage orphans to explore sexual violence in and around a township secondary school in South Africa. <i>Sex Education</i>, 19(4), 501-517.</p> <p>Adams, S., Savahl, S., and Fattore, T. (2017). Children’s representations of nature using photovoice and community mapping: Perspectives from South Africa. <i>International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being</i>, 12(1), 1333900.</p> <p>Langevang, T. (2007). Movements in time and space: using multiple methods in research with young people in Accra, Ghana. <i>Children's Geographies</i>, 5(3), 267-282.</p> |
| Children as researchers | <p>Porter, G., Hampshire, K., Bourdillon, M., Robson, E., Munthali, A., Albane, A., and Mashiri, M. (2010). Children as research collaborators: Issues and reflections from a mobility study in sub-Saharan Africa. <i>American Journal of Community Psychology</i>, 46(1), 215-227.</p> <p>Porter, G., and Abane, A. (2008). Increasing children's participation in African transport planning: reflections on methodological issues in a child-centred research project. <i>Children's Geographies</i>, 6(2), 151-167.</p> |

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| | <p>Robson, E., Porter, G., Hampshire, K., and Bourdillon, M. (2009). <u>'Doing it right?': working with young researchers in Malawi to investigate children, transport and mobility.</u> <i>Children's Geographies</i>, 7(4), 467-480.</p> |
| Diaries | <p>Tekola, B., Griffin, C., and Camfield, L. (2009). <u>Using qualitative methods with poor children in urban Ethiopia: Opportunities and challenges.</u> <i>Social Indicators Research</i>, 90(1), 73-87.</p> |
| Life course timeline and life history interviews | <p>Crivello, G., Camfield, L., and Woodhead, M. (2009). <u>How can children tell us about their wellbeing? Exploring the potential of participatory research approaches within young lives.</u> <i>Social Indicators Research</i>, 90(1), 51-72.</p> <p>Camfield, L. (2011). <u>'A girl never finishes her journey': Mixing methods to understand female experiences of education in contemporary Ethiopia.</u> <i>Research Papers in Education</i>, 26(4), 393-412.</p> <p>Langevang, T., and Gough, K. V. (2009). <u>Surviving through movement: the mobility of urban youth in Ghana.</u> <i>Social and Cultural Geography</i>, 10(7), 741-756.</p> <p>Langevang, T. (2007). <u>Movements in time and space: using multiple methods in research with young people in Accra, Ghana.</u> <i>Children's Geographies</i>, 5(3), 267-282.</p> |
| Body mapping | <p>Crivello, G., Camfield, L., and Woodhead, M. (2009). <u>How can children tell us about their wellbeing? Exploring the potential of participatory research approaches within young lives.</u> <i>Social Indicators Research</i>, 90(1), 51-72.</p> |
| Ethnography | <p>Kendrick, M., and Kakuru, D. (2012). <u>Funds of knowledge in child-headed households: A Ugandan case study.</u> <i>Childhood</i>, 19(3), 397-413.</p> <p>Swartz, S. (2011). <u>'Going deep' and 'giving back': strategies for exceeding ethical expectations when researching</u></p> |

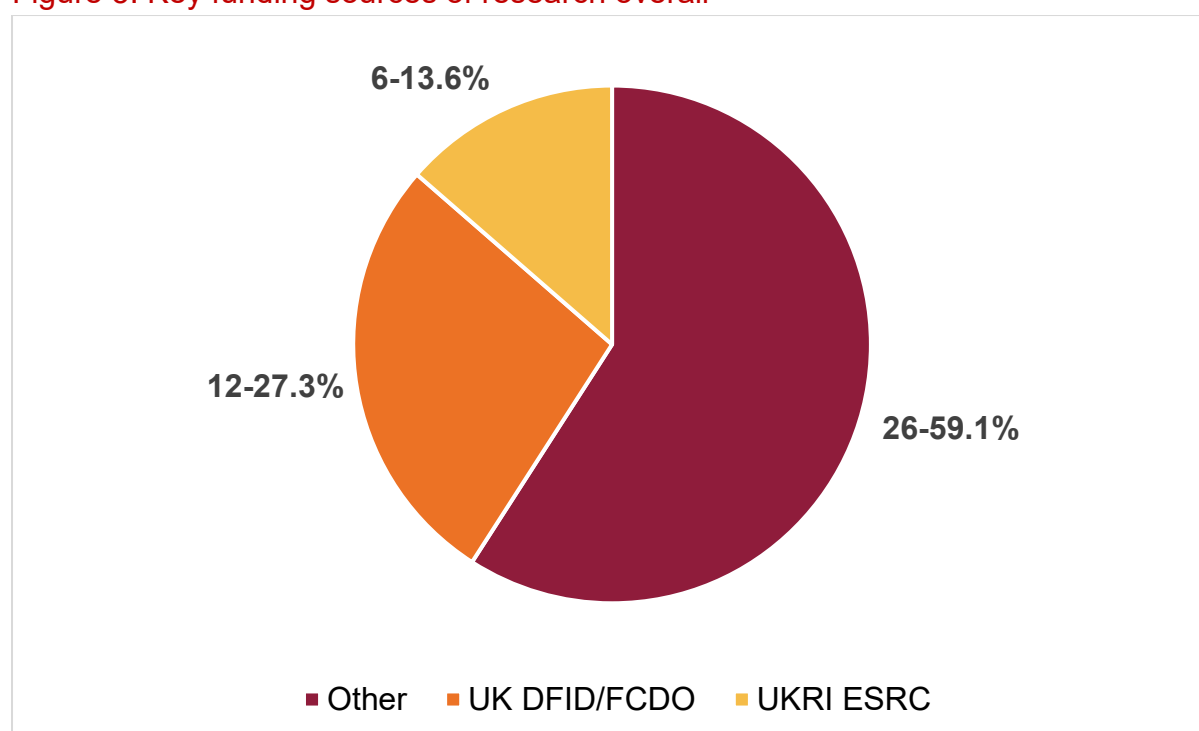
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| | <p>amongst vulnerable youth. <i>Qualitative Research</i>, 11(1), 47-68.</p> <p>Abebe, T. (2009). Multiple methods, complex dilemmas: negotiating socio-ethical spaces in participatory research with disadvantaged children. <i>Children's Geographies</i>, 7(4), 451-465.</p> <p>Nyambetha, E. O. (2008). Ethical dilemmas of social science research on AIDS and orphanhood in Western Kenya. <i>Social Science and Medicine</i>, 67(5), 771-779.</p> <p>Dungey, C. E., and Ansell, N. (2020). ‘I go to school to survive’: Facing physical, moral and economic uncertainties in rural Lesotho. <i>Children's Geographies</i>, 18(6), 614-628.</p> <p>Hansen, K.T. (2005) Getting stuck in the compound: Some odds against social adulthood in Lusaka, Zambia. <i>Africa Today</i>, 51(4), 3–16.</p> <p>Porter, G. (2011). ‘I think a woman who travels a lot is befriending other men and that's why she travels’: mobility constraints and their implications for rural women and girls in sub-Saharan Africa. <i>Gender, Place and Culture</i>, 18(01), 65-81.</p> |
| Community mapping | <p>Benninger, E. and Savahl, S. (2016) The use of visual methods to explore how children construct and assign meaning to the “self” within two urban communities in the Western Cape, South Africa. <i>International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Wellbeing</i>, 11(1), 31251</p> <p>Adams, S., Savahl, S., and Fattore, T. (2017). Children's representations of nature using photovoice and community mapping: Perspectives from South Africa. <i>International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being</i>, 12(1), 1333900.</p> |
| Story-writing | <p>Campbell, C., Andersen, L., Mutsikiwa, A., Madanhire, C.,</p> |

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| | <p>Skovdal, M., Nyamukapa, C., and Gregson, S. (2014). Children's representations of school support for HIV-affected peers in rural Zimbabwe. <i>BMC Public Health</i>, 14(1), 1-13.</p> <p>LeRoux-Rutledge, E., Guerlain, M. A., Andersen, L. B., Madanhire, C., Mutsikiwa, A., Nyamukapa, C., Skovdal, M., Gregson, S., and Campbell, C. (2015). It's harder for boys? Children's representations of their HIV/AIDS-affected peers in Zimbabwe. <i>AIDS Care</i>, 27(11), 1367-1374.</p> |
| Surveys | <p>Clacherty, G., and Donald, D. (2007). Child participation in research: Reflections on ethical challenges in the southern African context. <i>African Journal of AIDS Research</i>, 6(2), 147-156.</p> |

Appendix C: Funding and institutional patterns

We examined the geographical and demographic trends in funding and institutional partnerships. Seven studies did not disclose their funding source. However, amongst the 44 studies that did disclose their sources of funding, the most frequent source was the UK Department of International Development (DFID), which was named as a funder in 12 studies. The second most frequent source identified was the UK Research and Innovation's Economic and Social Research Council (UKRI-ESRC). This data is summarised in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Key funding sources of research overall

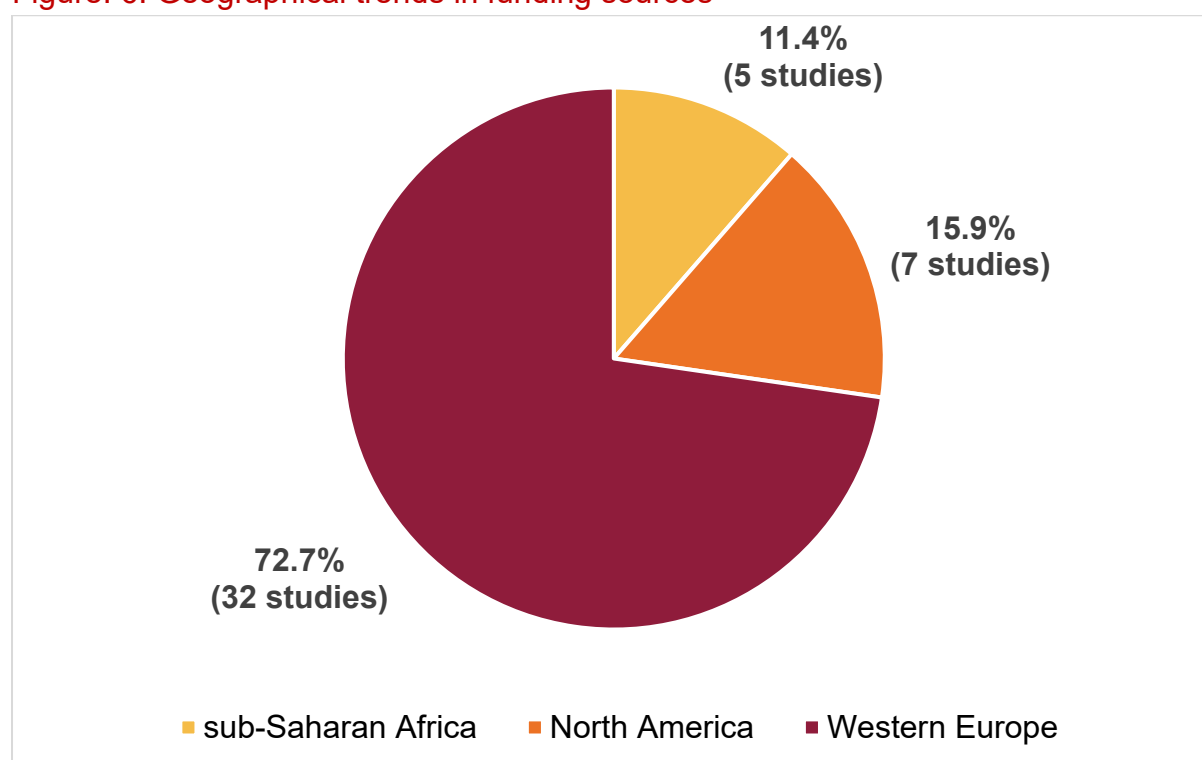


In geographical terms, institutions in Western Europe appeared to be the most common source of grants, making up 32 out of the 44 funding sources disclosed across all studies (approximately 73%). In addition to DFID and ESRC, funding sources from Western Europe included the Wellcome Trust, the Nuffield Foundation, European Commission Health Programme, the Danish Agency for International Development, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Research Council of Norway, University of Copenhagen and the UK Royal Geographic Society.

The second-most frequent source of funding appeared to be institutions based in North America, making up seven out of the 44 funding sources. and included USAID, the US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, the Canadian International Development Research Centre, Rotary International, the University of British Columbia, New York University and the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Meanwhile, funding from institutions based within sub-Saharan Africa accounted for five of the 44 funding sources or approximately 11%. This data is summarised in Figure 6 below.

Figure. 6: Geographical trends in funding sources

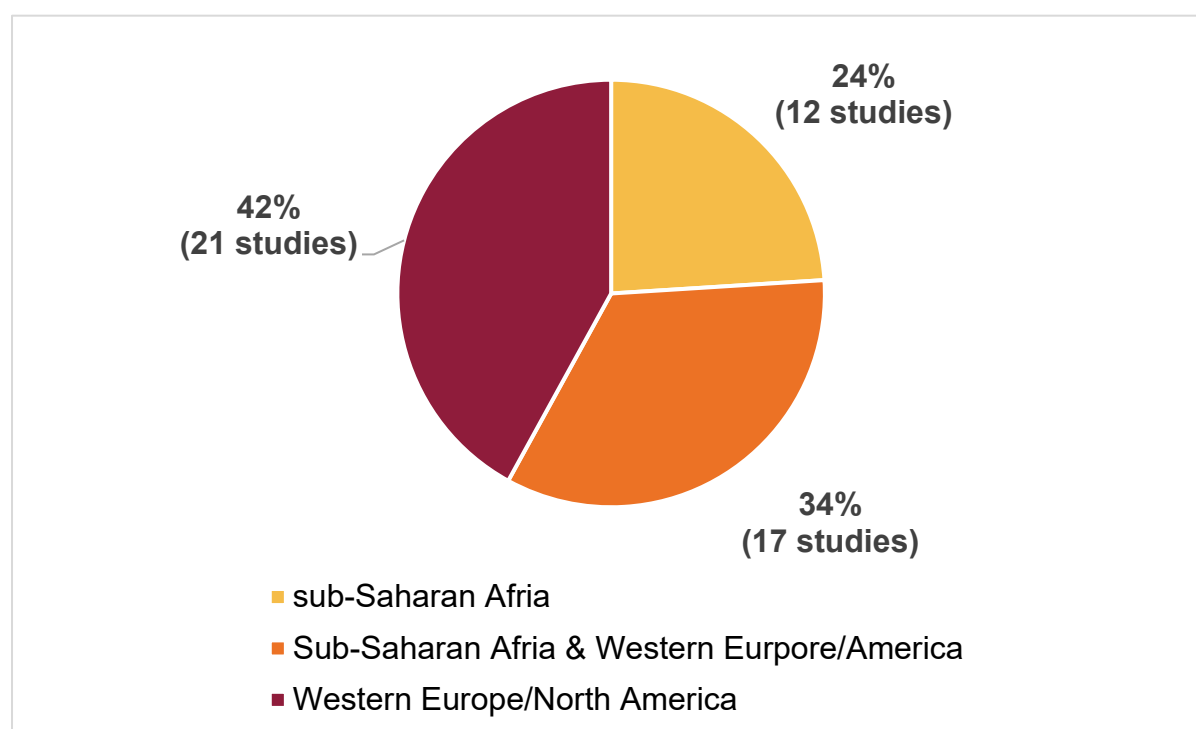


Within the five funding sources based in sub-Saharan Africa, grants based in South Africa made up a significant proportion (4 out of 5 funding sources, or 80%). These South African grants emerged from the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences, the National Research Foundation, the Harry Crossley Foundation, University of KwaZulu Natal, and the South African Medical Research Council. Only one study was funded by a sub-Saharan Africa-based institution that was *not* in South

Africa; this funding source was the Government of Botswana's Department of Social Protection.

In terms of demographic trends in institutional affiliations amongst the studies reviewed, 21 of the 51 articles (approximately 42%) were written exclusively by authors affiliated with institutions in Europe and/or North America^v. 17 of the 51 articles (approximately 33%) represented collaborations between authors affiliated with European or North American institutions *and* authors affiliated with sub-Saharan African institutions. 12 of the 51 articles (approximately 24%) were written exclusively by authors affiliated with sub-Saharan African institutions. This data is summarised in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7: Demographic trends in authors' institutional affiliations



These trends are not necessarily representative of educational literature in sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, given that this review did not focus on grey literature and non-peer reviewed journals. Moreover, nuance is needed in interpreting official records of affiliations and funding sources. For example, although the Young Lives project is based at Oxford University, a Northern institution, the fieldwork foregrounds cross-country collaboration and is largely led by Southern researchers and local communities on the ground (Morrow, 2013). Overall, the literature suggests the

potential for encouraging more cross-country and cross-cultural collaborations and amplifying the voices of researchers based within the local context.

Endnotes


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- ⁱ We use the words children/ young people throughout the report and as these terms were used in different research papers we reviewed. SSA-based researchers note that “a wide age range is the norm for African countries where the category ‘youth’ is generally used to cover young people between the ages of 15 and 3” (Langevang & Gough, 2009, p. 744). Crivello and van der Gaag’s (2016) study of Ethiopian boys further observes that the increase of formal schooling has expanded the period between “childhood” and “adulthood” and that their own participants explained this in-between phase as “wottat” (an Amharic term for youth). Gender can complicate this experience, as some girls who were married as 15-year-olds took on adult responsibilities (Crivello & van der Gaag, 2016)
- ⁱⁱ 3 Malawi-based publications are counted as 1 as they originate from the same Durham University-based study on children, transport and mobility in sub-Saharan Africa (see <https://www.dur.ac.uk/child.mobility/>).
- ⁱⁱⁱ Since some studies employed multiple tools simultaneously, the number and percentage will not add up to 51 or 100% exactly.
- ^{iv} The UK Department for international Development (DFID) merged with the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) on the 2nd September 2020 to become the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)
- ^v This includes both solo-authored and co-authored articles. For example, an article written by a single author affiliated with a sub-Saharan Africa-based institution was counted as an example of research affiliated exclusively with a sub-Saharan Africa-based institution.



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