

## Research Article

# Impact of Private Sector Involvement in Collaborative Governance to Address Stunting: A Systematic Bibliometric Review

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**Abstract.**

Stunting continues to represent a significant public health dilemma, especially within low- and middle-income nations, where it detrimentally influences the growth and cognitive advancement of children. The concept of collaborative governance, characterized by the active involvement of diverse stakeholders, has garnered increasing acknowledgment as a feasible strategy to tackle this pressing concern. This investigation conducts a systematic review of the influence exerted by private sector participation in collaborative governance initiatives aimed at alleviating stunting. Employing a bibliometric analysis framework, we scrutinized a collection of scholarly articles sourced from Scopus-indexed journals to discern prevailing trends, pivotal themes, and existing voids within the literature. The objectives of our research encompass charting the progression of academic dialogue surrounding this issue, evaluating the degree of private sector engagement, and assessing its ramifications across various governance frameworks. The review adheres to a PRISMA methodology, thereby guaranteeing thorough coverage and methodological integrity. Our results elucidate an expanding repository of evidence that underscores the beneficial roles of private sector involvement in collaborative governance, particularly regarding resource mobilization, innovation, and program execution. Nevertheless, the review simultaneously uncovers obstacles such as misalignment of objectives, power disparities, and sustainability challenges that could potentially compromise these initiatives. The study concludes by proposing avenues for future research and implications for policy designed to augment the efficacy of public-private partnerships in combating stunting. This systematic bibliometric review enhances the comprehension of collaborative governance within the realm of public health and yields critical insights for policymakers and practitioners dedicated to the struggle against stunting.

**Keywords:** stunting, collaborative governance, private sector, public-private partnerships

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## 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of stunting, characterized as a persistent nutritional deficiency that obstructs both physical growth and cognitive advancement(1), has evolved into an urgent global health concern, especially in nations classified as low- and middle-income(2). Tackling this intricate issue necessitates not solely interventions from the public sector but also proactive engagement from the private sector(3). Collaborative governance frameworks have surfaced as a strategic methodology(4), accentuating the synergy among governmental bodies(5), private enterprises, and civil society in addressing complex societal challenges such as stunting(6). Nevertheless, despite the growing recognition of collaborative governance structures, the contributions and implications of private sector involvement within these frameworks remain insufficiently examined(7).

Numerous contemporary investigations have elucidated the prospective advantages of private sector engagement in public health endeavors(8). For instance, collaborations between commercial entities and governmental bodies in nutrition-centered initiatives have evidenced favorable results in enhancing access to essential resources and services within affected populations(9). A bibliometric examination conducted by Botero et al. (2020) (10) indicated a proliferation of scholarly discourse pertaining to public-private alliances within the healthcare domain; however, the predominant emphasis persists on infectious diseases, as opposed to chronic conditions such as stunting. This deficiency in scholarly inquiry accentuates the necessity for a holistic comprehension of how private sector involvement can augment collaborative governance, particularly in the context of mitigating stunting(11).

Although the potential benefits are considerable, obstacles remain in the effective integration of the private sector within governance frameworks designed to tackle stunting(12). Concerns such as divergent interests, insufficient accountability, and disproportionate allocation of resources between public and private entities are frequently discussed in the prevailing scholarly discourse(13). Furthermore, notable deficiencies in research persist regarding the long-term viability of these partnerships and their tangible effects on the mitigation of stunting(14). These challenges underscore the intricacies involved in cultivating successful public-private collaborations within governance structures(15).

The primary aim of this investigation is to conduct a comprehensive review of the extant literature to evaluate the influence of private sector participation in collaborative

governance initiatives focused on addressing stunting. Through the application of bibliometric analysis, this research endeavor will delineate significant trends, deficiencies, and patterns present in the existing body of work, while also examining the evolution of private sector involvement within the framework of public health governance. Furthermore, this systematic review will assess the integration of private sector contributions within diverse governance models and analyze the resultant outcomes of these partnerships concerning the alleviation of stunting.

The results of this investigation hold significant ramifications for both government officials and private sector stakeholders. By elucidating the efficacy of collaborative governance frameworks, this analysis will guide forthcoming strategies aimed at incorporating private sector initiatives into stunting prevention programs. Furthermore, the bibliometric assessment will yield crucial perspectives on the research terrain, underscoring domains where additional inquiry is necessary to enhance the influence of such collaborations on global health outcomes.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Prevalence of Stunting

Stunting represents a pervasive public health concern, impacting millions of children globally, especially in nations classified as low- and middle-income(2). As reported by the World Health Organization (WHO), in the year 2020, an estimated 149 million children below the age of five experienced stunting, with notable prevalence in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. This condition, which arises from chronic malnutrition, is defined by hindered physical growth and cognitive development, resulting in enduring repercussions on educational achievements and prospective productivity(16). Research has indicated that children who are stunted are more inclined to encounter academic challenges, diminished earning capacity, and a heightened susceptibility to chronic illnesses in later stages of life(17).

The enduring prevalence of elevated stunting rates is frequently associated with systemic inequalities, encompassing poverty, inadequate maternal health, and restricted access to healthcare, potable water, and sanitation facilities(18). As elucidated by UNICEF (2021), these socio-economic determinants are instrumental in the intergenerational continuation of stunting(19). In numerous nations, governmental initiatives have been aimed at enhancing nutritional and health services; however, stunting persists

as a formidable challenge owing to the intricate interrelations of these factors(20). Consequently, the resolution of stunting necessitates comprehensive, multi-sectoral strategies that address not only immediate nutritional inadequacies but also the wider social determinants of health(21).

## 2.2. Collaborative Governance in Handling Stunting

Collaborative governance is increasingly acknowledged as an essential methodology for tackling intricate social issues such as stunting(1). This paradigm facilitates collaboration among governmental entities, civil society organizations, and the private sector, promoting synergistic efforts to devise efficacious and comprehensive interventions. As articulated by Ansell and Gash (2008), collaborative governance engenders a sense of shared responsibility and accountability among stakeholders, thereby guaranteeing that interventions are both inclusive and sustainable(22). Within the framework of stunting, this methodology is particularly significant due to the multifaceted nature of the problem, which encompasses various sectors, including health, nutrition, education, and infrastructure(4).

Empirical studies have elucidated that efficacious programs aimed at diminishing stunting frequently necessitate the establishment of multi-sectoral collaborations(23). For example, initiatives in nations such as Peru and Ethiopia have embraced cooperative governance models that amalgamate the endeavors of public health entities, municipal authorities, and global organizations(24). These programs have yielded encouraging outcomes, as evidenced by the findings (25), wherein synchronized strategies resulted in a notable decrease in stunting prevalence. The orchestration of resources and expertise across various sectors facilitates a more streamlined and efficacious approach to combating stunting, thereby ensuring that interventions effectively tackle both the immediate determinants and the fundamental socio-economic elements that contribute to malnutrition.

## 2.3. Private Sector Factors in Stunting Reduction

The private sector assumes an increasingly pivotal function in public health endeavors designed to mitigate stunting(16). Enterprises within sectors such as food and agriculture, healthcare, and pharmaceuticals possess the capacity to furnish essential resources, innovative solutions, and specialized knowledge to the initiatives aimed at stunting

reduction(26). For instance, the advancement of fortified food products and nutrient-dense offerings represents a significant input from the food industry, targeting the nutritional inadequacies that contribute to stunting among at-risk populations. Research, including that conducted by Savoia et al. (2020), underscores the manner in which engagement from the private sector can amplify the efficacy and longevity of stunting interventions, especially when corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives are synchronized with public health objectives(27).

Nevertheless, the incorporation of private sector stakeholders into collaborative governance frameworks aimed at stunting reduction is fraught with challenges. Issues related to conflicting interests, profit-driven motives, and accountability concerns may emerge, potentially compromising the overarching public health goals(28). Consequently, it is imperative that partnerships formed between the public and private sectors are anchored in principles of transparency, reciprocal accountability, and collective responsibility(29). Empirical evidence indicates that the presence of these foundational elements can substantially augment the efficacy of stunting interventions when private sector engagement is involved(3). A comprehensive governance structure that explicitly defines roles and responsibilities is vital to ensuring that the contributions of the private sector yield significant enhancements in child nutrition and health outcomes(30).

### 3. Methods

This research employs an integrative approach combining bibliometric analysis and systematic literature review (SLR) to examine the influence of private sector engagement in collaborative governance frameworks designed to mitigate stunting. The investigation initiates with the systematic identification of pertinent academic literature through a comprehensive search of the Scopus database, utilizing keywords such as “stunting,” “private sector engagement,” and “collaborative governance.” Specific filters are applied to refine the search parameters, concentrating on peer-reviewed publications released from 2019 onwards. Explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria are established to ascertain the relevance of the selected studies, with a particular emphasis on those that directly address the role of the private sector in stunting mitigation via governance frameworks. Following an initial screening of abstracts and titles, thorough full-text reviews and a quality evaluation are conducted to ensure the incorporation of high-impact studies. Bibliometric tools such as VOSviewer or Bibliometrix are employed to analyze citation patterns, co-citation networks, and keyword frequency, thereby delineating key research

trends and contributors. The systematic literature review further enhances this analysis by rigorously evaluating the content of each study, synthesizing findings regarding the private sector's involvement in collaborative governance frameworks, and identifying existing gaps within the current research landscape. This amalgamation of bibliometric and systematic review methodologies guarantees a thorough, data-driven assessment of the literature, yielding significant insights into the private sector's role in tackling stunting through collaborative initiatives.

## 4. Result and Discussion

The bibliometric examination and systematic literature review yielded an extensive synthesis of the extant research pertaining to the participation of the private sector in collaborative governance aimed at mitigating stunting. A total of 1233 pertinent studies were extracted from the Scopus database. The bibliometric assessment indicated a notable escalation in research output concerning this subject over the preceding decade, signifying an augmented interest in public-private partnerships within the realm of health governance. Significantly, the literature predominantly addressed regions where stunting is most endemic, namely Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, with preeminent research institutions from these areas making substantial contributions to the domain. Moreover, the analysis underscored pivotal authors and seminal publications, including the works of Savoia et al. (2020) and Lundsgaard-Hansen et al. (2018), which recurrently examined the role of private sector involvement in health-related governance.

In the context of thematic clusters, the bibliometric examination delineated three prevailing domains: (1) the contribution of food and nutrition enterprises in the formulation of fortified foods; (2) the engagement of private healthcare entities in the provision of essential services to populations experiencing malnutrition; and (3) public-private collaborations that concentrate on the formulation and execution of policies aimed at mitigating stunting. A co-citation analysis revealed that scholarly inquiries pertaining to nutritional interventions and governance frameworks were among the most frequently cited, implying that the role of the private sector in enhancing food security and nutritional outcomes has been extensively acknowledged as a pivotal element in the reduction of stunting.

4.1. Mapping global publication trends: Year of publication, country and subject area.

Mapping global publication trends is a crucial aspect of this research, which focuses analysis on the year of publication, country and subject area related to impact of private sector involvement in collaborative governance to address stunting . This information provides a comprehensive picture of the volution of research and the geographic distribution and expertise of authors contributing to the impact of private sector adress stunting literature.

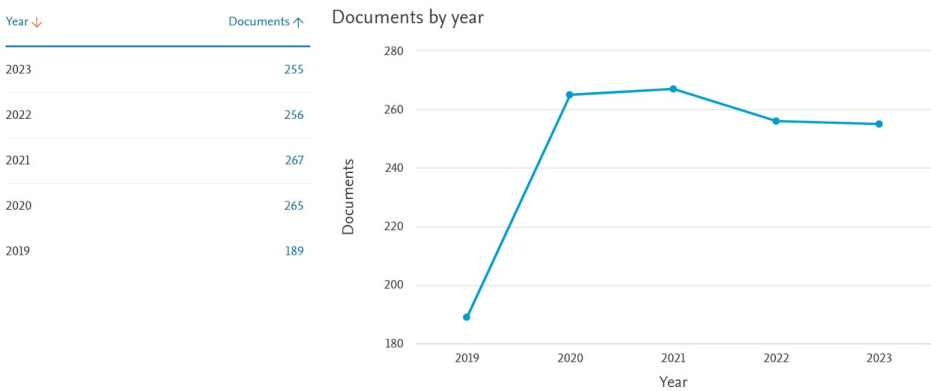


Figure 1: Document by year. Source:Scopus Database.

The volume of scholarly publications experienced a notable escalation from the year 2019 (189 documents) to the year 2020 (265 documents), followed by a modest increase in 2021 (267 documents). This escalation signifies an intensifying academic engagement and cognizance pertaining to the involvement of the private sector in combating stunting, plausibly motivated by the proliferation of public-private partnerships (PPPs) within global health initiatives, with a particular emphasis on nutrition and public health. The participation of the private sector, particularly in interventions focused on nutrition, food security, and healthcare, appears to have attracted heightened scrutiny during this timeframe.

The zenith of publication activity was recorded in the year 2021, with a total of 267 documents. This apex indicates that considerable scholarly endeavors and dialogues regarding the contribution of the private sector to the mitigation of stunting were actively taking place. The observed increase may also be attributable to global health emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which likely underscored the necessity for intensified cooperation between the public and private sectors in health governance, thereby catalyzing an augmented research output in this domain. Subsequent to the

peak observed in 2021, there was a slight decrement in the number of documents published in 2022 (256) and 2023 (255). Although this reduction is marginal, it may imply that the research landscape has either stabilized or become increasingly specialized, with scholars concentrating on particular facets of private sector involvement, such as long-term sustainability or innovative approaches to stunting reduction. This pattern may also signify a transition in research priorities as preceding investigations commenced to tackle pivotal inquiries, consequently necessitating more intricate or supplementary studies

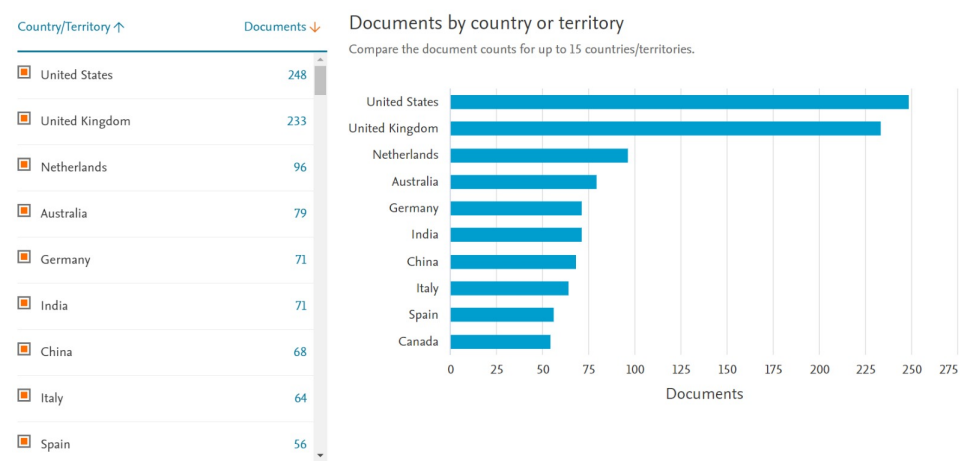


Figure 2: Documents by country. Source : Scopus Database.

The analysis of research output categorized by nation elucidates that the United States (248 documents) and the United Kingdom (233 documents) are at the forefront in scholarly investigations concerning the role of private sector participation in mitigating stunting. This preeminence is indicative of their robust research infrastructures, substantial influence on global health, and proactive involvement in international development endeavors, particularly with regard to nutrition and public-private partnerships. The private sectors within both nations, notably in the domains of food production and healthcare, are instrumental in combatting stunting through innovative initiatives and efforts pertaining to corporate social responsibility (CSR). European nations such as the Netherlands (96), Germany (71), Italy (64), and Spain (56) also make considerable contributions, emphasizing global health initiatives and partnerships driven by sustainability, especially within public-private collaboration frameworks. Furthermore, India (71) and China (68), both grappling with considerable stunting challenges, are progressively generating research that investigates how their private sectors can aid in



addressing local malnutrition dilemmas, with a particular emphasis on nutrition, access to healthcare, and food security.

This phenomenon indicates that the United States and the United Kingdom are predominant in global discourse, whereas European nations provide significant input through scholarly investigations on sustainable governance frameworks. India and China, where the prevalence of stunting constitutes a significant public health issue, are emerging as influential actors, with research initiatives focused on mitigating local challenges via private sector involvement. Conversely, Australia (79 documents) assumes a pivotal position within the Asia-Pacific region, concentrating on combating stunting through regional development initiatives. Subsequent research endeavors should prioritize cross-national analyses and scrutinize sector-specific contributions, such as food fortification, healthcare, and technological advancements, to enhance the comprehension of how private sector engagement can effectively and sustainably diminish stunting across diverse socio-economic contexts.

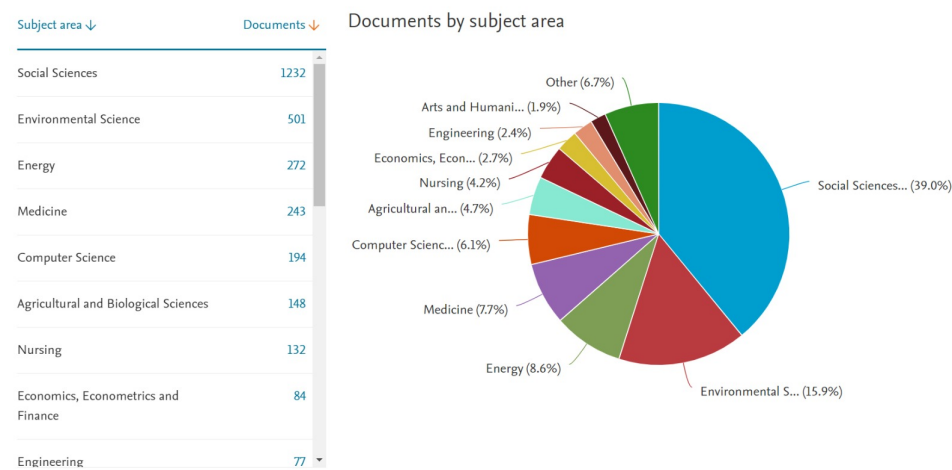


Figure 3: Documents by subject area. Source by Scopus database.

The allocation of scholarly articles by thematic area signifies the interdisciplinary character of investigations concerning the influence of the private sector in mitigating stunting. The findings indicate that a predominant portion of the scholarly output resides within the realm of social sciences (39%), underscoring the critical importance of governance, public policy, and collaborative frameworks in the endeavor to combat stunting. This emphasis implies that a substantial fraction of the research scrutinizes the interactions between the private sector and public as well as non-governmental entities through collaborative governance models, public-private partnerships, and the formulation of policies aimed at addressing malnutrition and enhancing child health

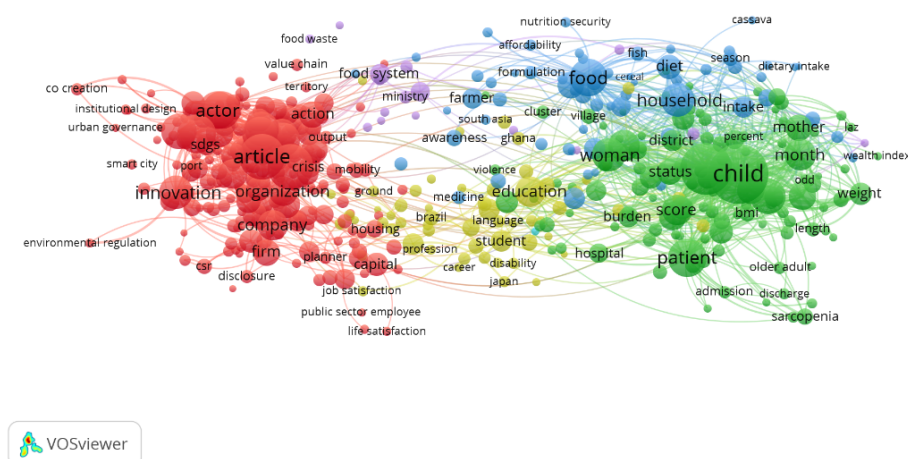
outcomes. Research within the social sciences likely encompasses the examination of corporate social responsibility (CSR), stakeholder engagement, and the socio-economic repercussions of initiatives designed to reduce stunting.

Following the realm of social sciences, environmental science (15.9%) and energy (8.6%) underscore the significance of the broader contextual factors influencing stunting, particularly with respect to the availability of clean water, sanitation, and sustainable energy resources, which are imperative for fostering healthier environments conducive to the alleviation of malnutrition. Furthermore, medicine (7.7%) and agriculture (4.7%) emphasize the pivotal roles of the private sector in the domains of healthcare provision and food production, respectively. These disciplines are essential as they investigate how advancements in nutrition, the development of fortified foods, and healthcare interventions—propelled by private sector involvement—can effectively combat stunting. The inclusion of computer science (6.1%) and engineering (2.4%) signifies the increasing importance of technological innovations, encompassing digital health platforms, mobile health applications, and data analytics, in enhancing access to maternal and child healthcare services, monitoring nutritional programs, and evaluating the efficacy of stunting mitigation strategies.

This multidisciplinary research methodology underscores the intricacies associated with addressing stunting, wherein disciplines such as economics (2.7%) scrutinize the financial viability and economic ramifications of private sector engagement, while art and humanities (1.9%) may concentrate on the cultural and societal ramifications of initiatives aimed at reducing stunting. The category designated as “other” (6.7%) presumably encompasses a convergence of additional pertinent fields that further elucidate the broader ramifications of private sector participation in combatting stunting. Collectively, this data intimates that the resolution of stunting necessitates a comprehensive approach, with the private sector playing a pivotal role across various domains including policy formulation, environmental considerations, technological advancements, health-care delivery, and food security enhancement. Subsequent inquiries should persist in examining these interdisciplinary interrelations to formulate more holistic strategies for the mitigation of stunting.

## 4.2. Mapping research themes & identifying gaps

The network visualization underscores the critical significance of the private sector in combating stunting, emphasizing elements such as innovation, food systems, and



**Figure 4:** The map research about impact private sectors against stunting.

organizational initiatives. The crimson cluster, populated with terminology such as “organization,” “company,” and “capital,” indicates the private sector’s substantial impact on the construction of food systems and the advancement of technologies capable of enhancing nutritional outcomes. The interconnections between these terms and those in the green and blue clusters imply that the participation of the private sector in ensuring food affordability, security, and innovation is vital for the mitigation of stunting, particularly through its influence on dietary consumption and access to nutritious food.

The green and blue clusters underscore the populations that are most susceptible to the adverse effects of stunting, with a particular focus on children and mothers. Terminology such as “child,” “household,” and “education” suggests that factors at the household level, along with access to healthcare, are paramount in the prevention of stunting. The synergy between innovations in the private sector and initiatives in public health has the potential to significantly bolster efforts aimed at reducing stunting. In summary, this visualization elucidates the imperative for cross-sectoral collaboration, whereby the contributions of the private sector in food systems, nutrition, and education operate in conjunction with public health initiatives to effectively combat stunting.

### 4.3. Discussion

The investigation delineates an extensive bibliometric assessment and systematic review regarding the engagement of the private sector in combating stunting through

collaborative governance frameworks. The assessment uncovered 1233 pertinent studies, indicating a notable escalation in research output throughout the preceding decade, particularly in regions where stunting is endemic, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. This ascending trajectory accentuates the increasing acknowledgment of public-private partnerships within the context of global health governance. Preeminent research institutions and seminal contributions, including those by Savoia et al. (2020) and Lundsgaard-Hansen et al. (2018), have significantly influenced the discourse, underscoring the criticality of private sector involvement in health governance. The pronounced surge in publications from 2019 to 2021 signifies an intensified emphasis on these partnerships, partially propelled by global health emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which underscored the imperative for collaborative endeavors between public and private sectors in alleviating health risks, inclusive of malnutrition and stunting.

The thematic clusters delineated in the analysis elucidated three principal domains of engagement by the private sector in the mitigation of stunting. Initially, enterprises specializing in food and nutrition have been instrumental in the formulation of fortified food products to rectify nutritional inadequacies, an essential element in the prevention of stunting. Subsequently, private healthcare practitioners are progressively partaking in the provision of vital services to populations experiencing malnutrition, particularly in regions where public healthcare infrastructure may be insufficient. Lastly, public-private partnerships (PPPs) play a pivotal role in the conceptualization and execution of policies designed to combat stunting, synergizing resources, expertise, and innovations from both sectors to foster sustainable interventions. These thematic clusters highlight the diverse yet synergistic contributions that the private sector makes in addressing stunting, encompassing aspects such as food production, healthcare provision, and governance alongside policy formulation..

Within the scope of global research dynamics, examining output by country reveals the prevailing positions of the United States and the United Kingdom, as both maintain excellent research capabilities and significantly influence global health landscapes. In these territories, prominent food and healthcare corporations have been vigorously involved in addressing stunting by launching corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects and collaborating with both government and non-government organizations (NGOs). Additionally, European nations, along with emerging economies such as India and China, have made substantial contributions by emphasizing the role of local private sectors in combating stunting, particularly through advancements in nutrition and food

security. This spatial distribution of research indicates the international character of the stunting issue and underscores the imperative for cross-national cooperation to develop effective and scalable interventions.

The interdisciplinary characteristics of the research, as evidenced by the categorization of documents according to subject area, underscore the intricacies involved in addressing the phenomenon of stunting. The field is predominantly dominated by social sciences, which emphasize governance, public policy, and models of collaboration, while environmental sciences, medicine, agriculture, and engineering contribute significantly to the comprehension of the broader context and the technical solutions pertinent to stunting mitigation. The engagement of disciplines such as economics and computer science, which investigate financial sustainability and innovations in digital health, further accentuates the imperative for a comprehensive strategy in combating stunting. This heterogeneity in research disciplines implies that the involvement of the private sector must be multifaceted, addressing not only the immediate causes of stunting such as malnutrition but also the systemic challenges associated with healthcare accessibility, food systems, and sustainable development.

## 5. Conclusion

In summary, the engagement of the private sector in mitigating stunting via collaborative governance has garnered considerable scholarly interest over the preceding decade, especially in areas where stunting is most pronounced. The bibliometric assessment indicates a significant uptick in research output, signifying an increasing acknowledgment of public-private partnerships within global health endeavors. Prominent research institutions in the United States, United Kingdom, and rapidly developing economies such as India and China have made considerable contributions, concentrating on domains such as fortified food innovation, healthcare service provision, and policy formulation. These investigations underscore the vital function of the private sector in influencing food systems, administering healthcare, and collaborating with governmental and non-governmental organizations to execute effective strategies for stunting reduction.

The investigation also accentuates the interdisciplinary character of the issue, with input from social sciences, medicine, agriculture, and environmental studies. This comprehensive perspective highlights the intricacies involved in tackling stunting, which necessitates not only nutritional and healthcare interventions but also advancements in

governance, technology, and policy frameworks. The role of the private sector is perceived as critical in fostering sustainable solutions, particularly through the advancement of fortified food products, enhanced healthcare accessibility, and technology-driven innovations such as digital health platforms. In conclusion, the analysis demonstrates that a multifaceted, cross-sectoral methodology is essential for diminishing stunting, with the private sector assuming a central role in augmenting public health initiatives.

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