

CASE STUDY

Human Sciences Research Council – Project Masihambisane



Providing a platform for real-time data collection in rural clinics using standard mobile phones.

Organisation Profile

The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) of South Africa, a statutory body, supports development nationally, in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and in Africa. It primarily conducts large-scale, policy-relevant, social-scientific projects for public-sector users, non-governmental organisations and international development agencies, in partnership with researchers globally, but specifically in Africa.

Project Scope

Project Masihambisane, a clinic-based effectiveness trial, attempts to address an important aspect of the evidence gap which exists on how best to improve the standard Prevention-of-mother-to-child-transmission (PMTCT) programme. A mentor mother support intervention, which supplements the standard PMTCT programme has been implemented in eight primary health care clinics in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and will be assessed over 12 – 18 months. A sample of approximately 1,600 participants will be evaluated during this period as well as a number of indicators relating to uptake, attendance and participation.

The project entails the collection of data from participants by means of face-to-face interviews at several points during the assessment period with over a thousand data elements captured per participant in total. In addition to interviews, information from other clinic sources is captured as well as clinic and session attendance indicators.

Mobile Researcher Implementation

A team of eighteen female fieldworkers was assembled to collect data daily across the eight clinics using standard Nokia handsets loaded with the Mobile Researcher application. The team received basic training and between August and November 2008, captured over 110,000 data elements.

The intuitive method in which Mobile Researcher guides fieldworkers, question by question, through the conduction of a survey – using a device they are intimately familiar with – allowed complex questionnaires equivalent to 20 condensed printed pages to be captured.

Within hours of surveys being conducted, supervisors, project administrators and researchers had access to the captured data as well as reports on fieldworker activity via the web-based console which forms part of the standard Mobile Researcher service offering.

Using Mobile Researcher's integrated support for multi-language scenarios, surveys could be designed and conducted in English or isiZulu with data seamlessly merged for reporting and export purposes.

Lasting Impact

Mobile Researcher has become a self-service tool empowering Project Masihambisane staff to alter, deploy and even design entirely new surveys unassisted. The on-demand availability of collected information, coupled with tighter controls over data quality, provides a solid base from which the HSRC's dedicated team can pursue the project's objectives.