



## Applying behavioural principles to improve the adoption of data management guidelines: Insights from South Africa's MMC programme

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# If you make it simpler, they will use it!



## Define . What was our challenge?

Since the inception of South Africa's National Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision (VMMC) programme, over five million men have been circumcised. This has contributed to averting 80,000 HIV infections. The programme has achieved success but requires continued support to achieve scale and sustainability.

A major challenge within the programme has been **low compliance with the programme's data management standards**, particularly among government officials. This threatens the availability of accurate data needed for operational and strategic decision-making.

Through a technical assistance programme, known as MMC SUSTAIN, we provide support to the National Department of Health's (NDoH) VMMC Unit to improve the quality of programme data.



## Diagnose . What heuristics & biases were at play?

We gathered insights to understand barriers to VMMC data management and found that:



**Cognitive overload** due to the volume and scope of related policies, guidelines, and tasks.



**Present bias** as officials prioritise familiar and simple tasks (data reporting) above the more difficult or tedious tasks (data verification).

Our insights-gathering methods:

1. Desktop research to mine behavioural insights and identify best practices
2. Qualitative KII with government officials at the NDoH
3. Focus group discussions and a behavioural mapping workshop with MMC SUSTAIN district programme managers



## Design . How did we address it?

We applied these behavioural techniques and:

- ↳ **Extracted** the most relevant information and steps from diverse sources
- ↳ **Compiled** and validated these into practical tips and promising practices
- ↳ **Packaged** it into user-friendly materials (infographics, tools, checklists)
- ↳ **Socialised** users on the materials through peers and targeted communication

### Behavioural techniques employed

- Simplification** of text to improve readability
- Reduced (document access) hassle factors** through the centralised VMMC KnowledgeHub and incorporated into the national induction pack
- Chunking** to make information more memorable and easier to process
- Checklists** to break down tasks into simple action steps
- Social desirability** to improve uptake and follow-through



## Evaluate . Did it work?

An independent programme review (2021) showed that our interventions improved government officials' compliance. This has also been observed in programme management and governance as evidenced by the **institutionalisation of routine data verification exercises** in the eight target districts.

## Take-home message

**Simple behavioural interventions** to institutionalise desired tasks in low-resource settings, work. As global efforts towards **sustainability and local capacity building** gain momentum, our experience can serve as an example for implementing partners seeking evidence-based methods to inform their transition planning.

### Respondent comments

*...made life easier!*  
*...strengthened oversight...*

Learn more about  
**MMC SUSTAIN**



MMC SUSTAIN is a technical assistance programme that empowers government officials to lead a locally coordinated and implemented MMC programme in eight high HIV-burden South African districts in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and Mpumalanga. The aim of this programme is to build resilient local systems that successfully plan, effectively manage, and efficiently execute the MMC programme at scale. We acknowledge and thank all those involved in the activities related to this work.

