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The implications of long term community involvement for the production and circulation of population knowledge

Sangeetha Madhavan
Mark Collinson
Nicholas W. Townsend
Kathleen Kahn
Stephen Tollman

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Abstract

Demographic surveillance systems (DSS) depend on community acceptance and involvement to produce high quality longitudinal data. Ensuring community support also exposes power relations usually concealed in the research process. We discuss the Agincourt Health and Demographic Surveillance System in South Africa to argue that: 1) long-term presence and community involvement contribute to high response rates and data quality, 2) to maintain community support the project must demonstrate its usefulness, 3) reporting to community members provides valuable checks on the local relevance and comprehension of questions, and 4) community opinion can modify both wording and content of research questions.

Author's affiliation

[Sangeetha Madhavan](#)
University of Maryland College Park, United States of America
[Mark Collinson](#)
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
[Nicholas W. Townsend](#)
Brown University, United States of America
[Kathleen Kahn](#)
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
[Stephen Tollman](#)
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

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