

# SMS surveys in the Global South: Insights from field studies in Tanzania

Johanna Choumert-Nkolo

*Director of Research*



Marie Mallet

*Principal Research Officer*



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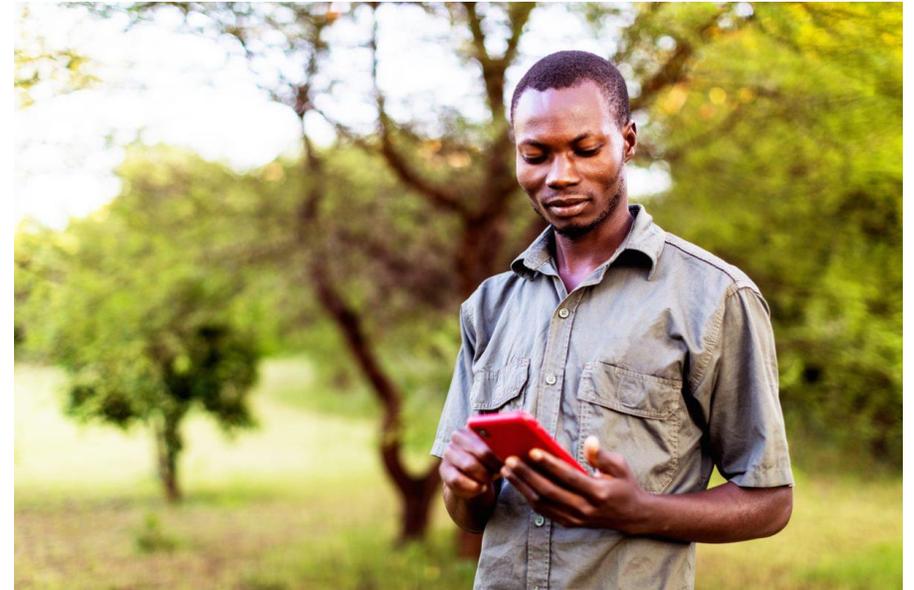
- Research and data collection house with main operations in Tanzania and Uganda
- More than 90 large-scale quantitative surveys over the past 20 years
- Agriculture, health, education, social protection, energy,...
- Numerous longitudinal studies
- Phone surveys and SMS surveys
- Example: "Real-time monitoring of COVID-19 impact on adolescents and young people, their families, and communities in Southern Highlands region in Tanzania" with UNICEF Tanzania and University at Buffalo



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# Aims of the presentation

- Increasing interest in SMS surveys in the Global South
  - High frequency data at a low cost
  - Challenges: Literacy rates, mobile phone penetration rates, network quality
- Best tips and practices for designing and implementing SMS surveys
  - Content, length and timeframe of an SMS survey
  - Programming an SMS survey
  - Engaging with survey participants



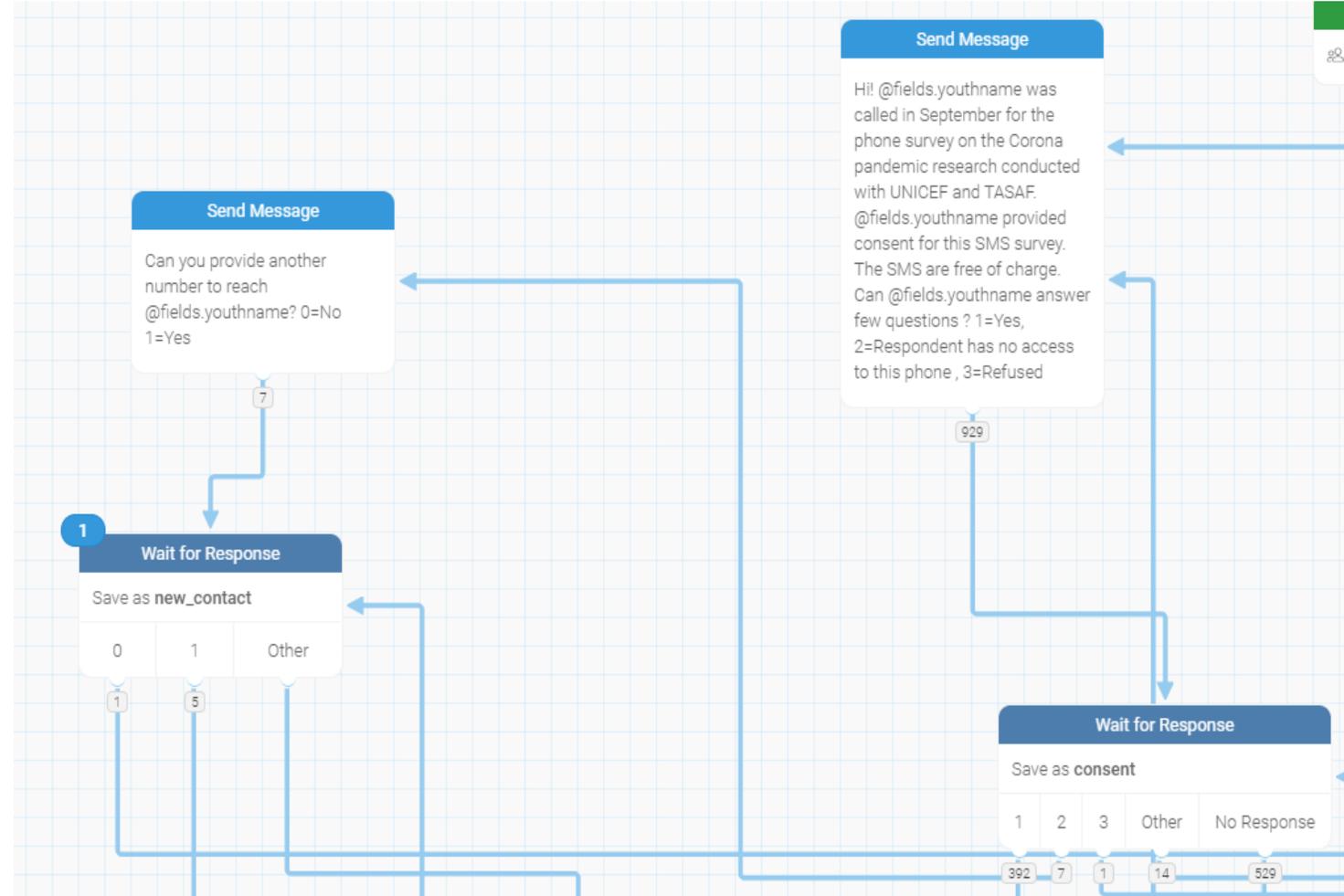
# Content, length and timeframe of an SMS survey

- What types of questions can be asked in an SMS survey?
  - Introduction and consent question
  - Close-ended questions
- What should be the length of an SMS survey?
  - The shorter, the better
  - 5-10 questions (less than 5 minutes)
  - The length of questions matters - the shorter, the better
- What should be the timeframe of an SMS survey?
  - Very short compared to in-person surveys
  - One week can be enough



# Programming an SMS survey

- How to program an SMS survey?
  - Various platforms such as 'TextIt' (<https://textit.com/>)
  - Skips and routings
  - Automated error messages
  - Reminders or follow-up SMS
  - Randomizing the order of questions
  - Pre-populating specific information related to respondents



# Engaging with survey participants

- How to provide compensation/incentives to survey participants?
  - Mobile money, airtime
  - Cost of sending / receiving the transfer must be accounted for in survey implementation costs
- How to deal with situations where several individuals use the same phone?
  - Control questions to check eligibility
  - Prepopulate the name of the targeted respondent, when possible



# Conclusion

- The use of SMS surveys in the Global South is very promising
  - High frequency data
  - Low cost
- More methodological research is needed to understand
  - Coverage bias
  - Sample bias
  - Measurement bias
  - What works to increase response rates
  - What is the optimal length of SMS surveys



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