



USINGA Engages Umlazi Wards 79 and 82 with Insightful Research Results

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The USINGA Health and Demographic Surveillance System (HDSS) has been actively engaging community members in Umlazi. Two rounds of result dissemination meetings took place on 15 September in ward 82 at Umlazi Cinema and 5 October in ward 79 at Mbalenhle Community Hall. Over 270 community members were in attendance.

The two-and-a-half-hour meetings aimed to share baseline results and key insights from the ongoing HDSS work in the area and provide an opportunity for community feedback.

The baseline results presented by Community Engagement Coordinator, Zandile Msimango, revealed a wealth of information, including household demographics, employment status, childcare arrangements, education levels, and pregnancy trends. The findings were creatively displayed using a results dissemination booklet filled with eye-catching graphs, infographics, and narratives in IsiZulu and English.



USINGA deployed a team of fieldworkers who are collecting data from households and individuals in Umlazi ward 79 and 82. During the HDSS Baseline round, from 2 December 2023 to 17 May 2024, they successfully enumerated 37,505 individuals in 10,588 households within these two wards.

Ward 82 Meeting – 15 September 2024

The ward 82 meeting buzzed with excitement as approximately 140 community members gathered to hear about the latest insights from the HDSS. Local leaders, including ward 82 Councillor Mr. Sbusiso Cele and ward 79 Councillor Mr. Khumbulani Cele, and the Community Advisory Board (CAB) were present to show their support.

The meeting led to a vibrant discussion, with attendees eager to learn how findings on critical issues like unemployment would be shared with relevant stakeholders to drive change, how their personal data would be



shared with relevant stakeholders to drive change, how their personal data would be kept confidential, and what measures the HDSS takes to ensure reliable data collection.

USINGA's team expertly responded by outlining their comprehensive quality control measures. First, field workers undergo intensive training to ensure accurate data collection, while fieldwork supervisors conduct thorough checks and validations. A dedicated Quality Control team then meticulously reviews the data electronically to uphold high standards. Additionally, methods such as duplicate household visits and regular supervisory meetings further enhance data reliability and confidentiality.

Overall, this inaugural result dissemination meeting fostered trust between the community and the research team, as participants gained an understanding of USINGA's commitment to conducting community-engaged research and empowering the community with a sense of ownership over the data and its implications.

Ward 79 Meeting – 5 October 2024

Just a few weeks later, the excitement carried over to Ward 79's Mbalenhle Community Hall, where about 130 people gathered on a Saturday morning. The event featured esteemed guests such as Dr. Nolwazi Dlamini, Director of Population and Development at the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Department of Social Development, along with Ward Councillor Khumbulani Cele and CAB members.

The community's curiosity about the baseline HDSS results sparked a lively Q&A session. Community members inquired about job opportunities, fieldworker recruitment, and how they could stay updated on future employment opportunities. Others sought information about how the research tackles issues like drug abuse. There was also a heartfelt call for the CAB to be more actively involved in field activities and suggestions on how to support children who are not in preschool.

USINGA responded, explaining that job vacancies are regularly posted on the University of KwaZulu-Natal's (UKZN) website and shared via WhatsApp groups. On drug abuse issues, the team pointed to the ARISE project, which is nested within the USINGA HDSS infrastructure and focuses on the health and substance use challenges facing adolescents. Dr. Nolwazi Dlamini also addressed the province's lag in early childhood education and the challenges around crèche attendance, igniting a conversation on how the community can work together to address these issues.

A Shared Vision for Change

The highlight of both meetings was the overwhelming sense of community appreciation. Attendees expressed gratitude for the opportunity to learn more about USINGA's work, with many noting that they felt more connected to the project as a result. This sense of ownership over the research was a recurring theme, with many pledging to support the project in the future.

Reflecting on the success of these engagements, Dr Nompumelelo Nzimande-Mbhele, USINGA's Nodal Director, shared, "We deeply appreciate how the community has embraced this project. We will continue to work together to discuss findings and engage relevant stakeholders such as government and civil society."

Project Manager Palesa Mataboge echoed this sentiment, adding, "This meeting gives community members a sense of ownership over the data and a bird's eye view of their community. Instead of seeing themselves as individuals with isolated challenges, the results highlight that these issues are part of larger systemic problems."

As the respective meetings concluded, it was clear that the partnership between the USINGA team and the community had grown stronger, with a shared commitment to creating lasting impact. The communities walked away with not only new knowledge but also a renewed sense of purpose and determination to work alongside USINGA to address the challenges highlighted by the research.

Both wards are now poised to continue their collaboration with USINGA HDSS, making these meetings a key milestone in the journey towards meaningful change in the community.

