

Sustainability Intelligence

IVR VS CATI

Lessons From The Field

Programme	Agile Data
October 2026	
Publication Code	SI-CS-001
Version 1.0	



The Agile Data Approaches and Innovations for Monitoring (ADAIM) project tested Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technology in Zimbabwe and Sudan to assess its effectiveness as a data collection tool in comparison with Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). While IVR offers substantial cost advantages, the results from both pilots indicate significantly lower response rates relative to CATI.

Across the two contexts, IVR consistently underperformed despite variation in survey length. In particular survey duration, often considered a key constraint in remote data collection, does not appear to fully explain the low response rates observed. Even relatively short IVR surveys (22 questions) yielded poor completion rates, suggesting that additional factors play a critical role in shaping respondents' engagement with this technology.

Our analysis identifies several individual-level characteristics associated with response behavior. In particular age, years of schooling, and household wealth are significantly correlated with the likelihood of survey completion. Furthermore, respondents' level of prior involvement in the implementation program emerges as a key determinant of participation, pointing to the importance of familiarity and trust in technology-mediated survey modes.

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	IVR	CATI
Sudan (22-question survey)	7% completed	66% completed
Zimbabwe (70-question survey)	0% completed 0 questions 22% 1-15 questions 56% 16-30 questions 7% 31-50 questions 7% 51+ questions 8%	95% completed

The pattern of number of questions answered in Zimbabwe indicates that attrition occurs predominantly at the early stages of the IVR survey, with none of the respondents reaching completion. This distribution suggests that respondent fatigue, limited engagement, or difficulties in interacting with the IVR system may significantly hinder survey completion, particularly for longer questionnaires.

These stark differences highlight the limitations of IVR as a standalone data collection method in these contexts. While IVR may reduce operational costs, its effectiveness is severely constrained by low respondent engagement, particularly among populations with lower levels of education, wealth, or prior exposure to the program intervention.

Overall, the findings suggest that, although IVR can be a cost-efficient tool, its deployment in similar settings should be carefully evaluated against the risk of substantial non-response bias. Hybrid approaches or complementary engagement strategies may be necessary to improve participation and ensure data quality.

Published by



Committee on Sustainability Assessment (COSA)

Editorial and production support

Afronaut Press

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Programme

Agile Data Approaches and Innovations for
Monitoring (ADAIM)

Funding Acknowledgement

**Gates
Foundation**

This publication was developed under the ADAIM
programme, funded by the Gates Foundation.

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