SASSA's USSD-First SRD Grant Application — Free Phone Channels That Reached 9.5 Million Applicants but Skewed Urban and Educated

Digital Inclusion · Good practice · South Africa

Quality score: 92/100

Evidence strength: Strong

Summary

South Africa's COVID-19 SRD grant took applications only via free USSD, WhatsApp, web and email: 9.5M applied in 2020, 80% by USSD. A DSD assessment found an urban, younger, better-educated applicant profile, and later research shows heavy wrongful exclusion.

Key dimensions

Dimension	Score
Innovation level	3/5
Sustainability (ongoing)	1/1
Evaluation evidence	1/1
Demonstrated reach	1/1
Documented learning	1/1

Evaluated by C-NAPSE

Data sources

C-NAPSE web research — accessed 2026-11-12

South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) — accessed 2026-11-12

DSD — Rapid Assessment of the Special COVID-19 SRD Grant (July 2021) — accessed 2026-11-12

Context (Thomson Reuters Foundation) — How is South Africa's welfare algorithm failing the poor? (2025) — accessed 2026-11-12

Mail & Guardian — SASSA system ignores digital divide (2020) — accessed 2026-11-12

Cite this — Evidoria. *SASSA's USSD-First SRD Grant Application — Free Phone Channels That Reached 9.5 Million Applicants but Skewed Urban and Educated*. Persistent ID: 9b7c7231-41de-475a-bb38-7e09b2b99bf3.