



DATADRIVE2030 **ANNUAL REPORT** **2025**

FROM MEASUREMENT TO SYSTEM IMPACT

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This past year has been one of significant expansion, transition, and reflection for DataDrive2030. During 2025, we saw rapid organisational growth – expanding our team, strengthening our systems, and deepening our technical capabilities – alongside extensive piloting, testing, and innovation. Through this work, we refined our tools and approaches and learned from implementation across diverse contexts.

The year also marked the culmination of our first three-year strategy cycle, and we have begun shaping our next five-year strategy – positioning DataDrive2030 at a critical inflection point. We are evolving from a founder-led start-up into a more mature organisation, with a clear focus on deepening our impact, strengthening our partnerships, and expanding our reach in service of young children.

Our growth has not happened in isolation. It has taken place within an ecosystem that is itself evolving in exciting and important ways. Over the past year, we have seen the emergence of major national initiatives, including the Bana Pele Blueprint, the launch of the ECD Outcomes Fund in South Africa, the continued momentum of the Thrive by Five Index, and increased public investment in early childhood development – most notably the R10 billion

allocation over the medium-term expenditure framework. Together, these developments signal a step change in how the sector is understood, resourced, and coordinated.

Yet, even as these enabling conditions strengthen, the urgency of our mission remains clear. Too many young children in South Africa continue to grow up in contexts of profound vulnerability, with limited access to the opportunities they need to thrive. If we are to meaningfully shift life trajectories, we must accelerate the pace of change and work collectively to break persistent cycles of poverty and inequality. All of our efforts, within DataDrive2030 and across the broader ecosystem, are ultimately in service of improving children’s developmental outcomes and expanding their life opportunities. As we look ahead, we do so with a renewed sense of purpose and a commitment to build on the foundations laid in 2025.

We are excited about the journey ahead and the role we can play, alongside our partners, in shaping a more equitable future for South Africa’s children. As you read this report, we invite you to engage with the work, reflect on what resonates, and reach out – whether to collaborate, to share ideas, or to challenge us to think differently.

“ If we are to meaningfully shift life trajectories, we must accelerate the pace of change and work collectively to break persistent cycles of poverty and inequality. ”

Sonja Giese
Executive Director - DataDrive2030



WHAT WE MEASURE SHAPES WHAT WE CHANGE

Across South Africa, thousands of early learning programmes work every day to support the development of young children. Yet the early childhood development sector has long faced a structural challenge: while large amounts of information about children, programmes and services are generated across the system, this data rarely becomes shared evidence that can guide decisions at scale.

DataDrive2030 was established to address this challenge as an independent, child-focused data hub and think tank that generates and mobilises high-quality evidence to improve early childhood outcomes in South Africa.

By building shared measurement tools, strengthening data infrastructure and supporting evidence use across the sector, the organisation helps ensure that data collected in many places can become insights that benefit the entire early learning ecosystem.

Without shared systems and standards, however, evidence can remain fragmented across programmes, research projects and evaluations. This fragmentation limits the sector's ability to answer critical questions: How well are young children developing?

Which interventions are making the greatest difference? Where are the most significant gaps in opportunity? And how can resources be directed where they will have the greatest impact?

This work operates across three interconnected levels. At the **micro** level, data supports programmes and practitioners with timely, actionable feedback to improve practice. At the **meso** level, it enables comparative evidence on programme effectiveness to inform learning, adaptation and funding decisions. At the **macro** level, it contributes to national data infrastructure and accountability through initiatives such as the **Thrive by Five Index**.

In 2025, that infrastructure continued to strengthen. Shared tools were used at scale. A distributed assessor workforce expanded national delivery capacity. Digital systems improved speed and quality. And the release of the **Thrive by Five Index 2024** marked a step-change in national accountability for preschool child development outcomes. Together, these developments moved the sector closer to a future in which decisions affecting young children are increasingly grounded in reliable, shared evidence.



“ DD2030 generates and mobilises high-quality evidence to improve early childhood outcomes in South Africa. ”

2025 AT A GLANCE

2025 was a pivotal year. DataDrive2030 consolidated its role as a core component of South Africa's early learning data infrastructure. It also deliberately prepared for its next phase of scale, focus and sustainability.

Shared measurement tools continued to support programme- and practitioner-level improvement, while national data products strengthened accountability and public dialogue.

702

total number of accredited assessors by year-end

31

organisations using the ELOM suite of tools

R1.7M

in estimated assessor earnings generated in 2025

430+

programme-, school-, and RTO-level reports generated

8,329

digitally captured assessments completed

TURNING MEASUREMENT INTO IMPACT

DataDrive2030's work is organised around a deliberate **Data Value Chain**. The organisation exists to bridge the gap between data generation and real-world action in South Africa's early learning system.

Its model links fit-for-purpose measurement tools, skilled data collection, rigorous processing and analysis, and accessible insights to behaviour change, adaptive programming and system-level decision-making.

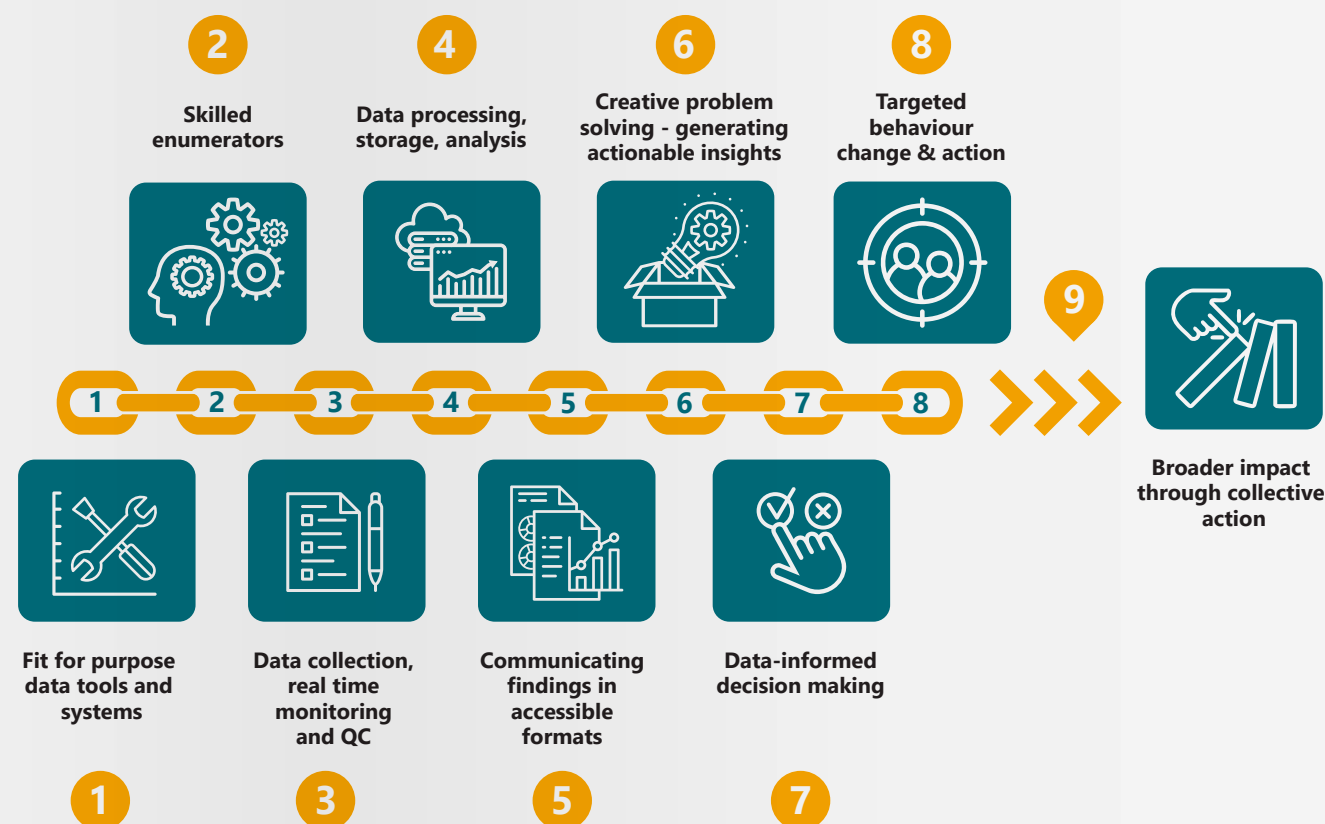
In 2025, the organisation strengthened this value chain by refining internal systems and clarifying how data flows across tools, teams and users. This improved data quality, reduced turnaround times, and strengthened the connection between evidence and action.

The Data Value Chain remains the organisation's core framework for how data is generated, protected and mobilised to drive change across the early learning ecosystem.



Data Value Chain stages

1. Fit-for-purpose tools and systems
2. Skilled data workforce
3. Data collection, real-time monitoring and quality control
4. Data processing, storage and analysis
5. Communicating findings in accessible forms
6. Generating actionable insights
7. Data-informed decision making
8. Targeted behaviour change and action
9. Broader impact through collective action



BUILDING SHARED TOOLS FOR THE SECTOR

Reliable evidence begins with reliable measurement. The ELOM suite has matured into a shared system asset, enabling comparable evidence across programmes, organisations and contexts. In 2025, the focus shifted from building new tools to strengthening the measurement system itself: improving existing tools, ensuring they remain fit for use across diverse settings, and exploring targeted extensions in response to ecosystem demand.

Evidence from longitudinal studies continues to reinforce the value of this measurement system. Research tracking children from early learning into the early grades shows that stronger outcomes measured by ELOM assessments are associated with stronger reading and mathematics performance later in school.

The **Home Learning Environment Tool v2** was developed as a modular tool that allows users to select context-appropriate modules while maintaining a common core focused on opportunities for early learning. This created more responsive data collection without sacrificing comparability.

The **Learning Programme Quality Assessment v2** was operationalised

following enhanced psychometric validation, supported by updated training, manuals and reporting outputs. A full technical manual and practitioner support toolbox were scheduled for release in early 2026.

Two additional areas helped shape future direction: a feasibility study on adapting tools for **disability inclusion**, and exploration of caregiver-reported measures and shared indicators for children aged **birth-to-three**.

The year also brought strategic learning from cross-country work. DD2030 and JET Education Services began work in Eswatini in late 2023. The project supported Eswatini's ECCDE policy goals by co-developing two contextually relevant measures – the ELOM-E and SEF-E – building ministry capacity, and supporting two rounds of fieldwork.

The process highlighted both the value and complexity of cross-country tool development: strong Ministry partnership built internal ownership and advocacy, but persistent engagement, staff turnover, and logistical challenges led DD2030 to decide against developing new tools in other foreign contexts again.

BUILDING A NATIONAL ASSESSOR WORKFORCE

Measurement tools only generate meaningful evidence when they are implemented consistently. In 2025, DataDrive2030 continued investing in a large, decentralised workforce capable of delivering high-quality assessments across provinces. By year-end, there were **702 accredited assessors** on our database, of whom **156** engaged in fieldwork during the year. Across **60 studies** from **31 organisations**, 8,329 assessments were completed.

This distributed workforce model contributes not only to delivery capacity, but also to local livelihoods and technical skills-building. Assessor work generated more than **R1.7 million** in estimated earnings during the year. The highest-earning assessor earned **R63,400**,

while average earnings among active assessors were just over **R11,000**. Training remained a key priority. Eighteen trainings were delivered in 2025, including train-the-trainer and refresher sessions, accrediting an additional **123 assessors** across the ELOM suite. A new **Universal Manual** was rolled out to strengthen foundational skills such as rapport-building, child-centred engagement and ethical assessment practice.

At the same time, growth surfaced operational challenges around utilisation, coordination and quality assurance. These insights are now informing investments in integrated assessor and trainer management systems, as well as an assessor portal planned for rollout in 2026.

702 assessors
accredited

R1.7M assessors
earnings

156 assessors
in field in
2025

18 assessor
trainings



THE SYSTEMS BEHIND THE DATA

As the scale of data collection expanded, investments in digital infrastructure became increasingly important. In 2025, DataDrive2030 made significant progress in strengthening its technical foundations through a transition from licensed software to a **custom-built backend using PostgreSQL**. All new projects now flow through this integrated platform, improving efficiency, scalability and data integrity.

Key gains included **real-time analytics**, with assessment records available for analysis within seconds of submission; and **faster feedback**. In some cases, programme-level reports can now be generated **as fast as 48 hours after fieldwork**, allowing organisations to access insights more quickly and use evidence to inform programme improvement decisions.

Improved quality control through automated QC reports enables rapid identification and resolution of fieldwork issues.

The **Mission Control dashboard** continued to evolve as a central operational and analytical hub. Secure, role-based access now supports internal teams and selected external users to monitor projects, manage quality and engage with findings. Early integration of project management functionality also improved visibility across the full project lifecycle.

For many programmes, faster turnaround meant data could inform immediate decisions about classroom practice, staffing and support – shifting assessment from retrospective evaluation to a live input into programme improvement.

UNDERSTANDING HOW CHILDREN ARE DEVELOPING

As the data infrastructure expanded, DataDrive2030's analytical work generated deeper insight into early childhood development across South Africa.

The most significant milestone was the launch of the Thrive by Five Index 2024, which is South Africa's most comprehensive population-level measure of preschool child development. The Index marked a step-change in national influence. It has been formally adopted through the

Presidential-led Inter-Ministerial Committee on ECD and referenced in the Bana Pele Roadmap, establishing it as a shared national evidence asset.

It also entered a new phase of public visibility and influence following its September 2025 launch.

42%
of 4 year old children enrolled in ELPs are On Track

28%
are Falling Behind

30%
are Falling Far Behind

On Track
Falling Behind
Falling Far Behind

48%
of enrolled girls are On Track, compared to 37% of boys

18% On Track
15% Falling Far Behind
among a sub-study of non-enrolled children

BY AGE 4
stunted children are on average five months behind their non-stunted peers in early learning

Children enrolled in early learning programmes charging **less than R50 per month** were half as likely to be developmentally **On Track** as children enrolled in programmes charging higher fees.

PILOTING POSITIVE DEVIANCE-INFORMED INTERVENTIONS

Large-scale datasets such as the Thrive by Five Index help reveal patterns in children's developmental outcomes across South Africa. However, understanding how stronger outcomes emerge in practice requires closer attention to what successful programmes and practitioners are doing differently. Positive Deviance (PD) analysis provides one way of identifying these patterns by examining cases where children or programmes achieve better-than-expected outcomes despite facing similar constraints.

In 2025, DataDrive2030 advanced its Positive Deviance work from analytical insight to applied testing. Drawing on PD analyses of Thrive by Five and other datasets, the organisation partnered with early learning operators to design and pilot practical, practice-oriented interventions aimed at strengthening programme quality and practitioner practice.

One strand of work focused on recruitment and hiring practices within early learning programmes.

A Positive Deviance-informed recruitment tool and competency framework was developed to help principals identify candidate characteristics associated with stronger practitioner performance. The tool was tested through observation exercises, interviews and scenario-based assessments and was used in training with 122 principals across Johannesburg and Cape Town. The pilot generated learning about feasibility, calibration and the conditions required for fair and reliable implementation. Further real-world testing is planned to strengthen the tool's validity before wider use.

A second pilot explored how Positive Deviance insights could strengthen practitioner-child interactions in early learning settings. Through the Masakane coaching pilots, short video-based feedback loops were used to support reflective practice among practitioners. Across multiple partners, 20 practitioners and teacher assistants received personalised feedback reports supported by video content, enabling them to observe and reflect on

their interactions with children. Early learning suggests promising potential for strengthening reflective practice, while also highlighting the need for further testing before wider scale.

Alongside these pilots, Positive Deviance analyses of Thrive by Five Index 2024 data continued in parallel. These analyses aim to identify protective practices and contextual factors associated with stronger developmental outcomes among children facing similar circumstances. Findings from this work will be released through the DataDrive2030 working paper series, contributing to a deeper understanding of how programmes and practitioners can support improved early learning outcomes.

Together, these pilots represent an important step in translating analytical insight into practical experimentation – testing how evidence can inform real-world improvements in early learning practice.



TURNING EVIDENCE INTO **SHARED** **UNDERSTANDING**

Data alone does not change systems. For evidence to influence practice and policy, it must first be interpreted, discussed and translated into meaning within real-world contexts.

In 2025, DataDrive2030 strengthened this sense-making function in multiple ways. Through the newly established **Insights Lab**, the organisation produced research, technical and communication outputs drawing on its growing datasets and analytical capacity. These included Insights Briefs, updated technical manuals for the ELOM 4&5 and ELOM-R tools, applied case studies, and the full suite of Thrive by Five Index reports. Many of these outputs

were developed in partnership with academic and sector collaborators. Dissemination also expanded. Sector newsletters more than doubled in reach during the year, while LinkedIn content was viewed more than **212,000 times** and attracted more than **1,600 new followers**. These patterns suggested that audiences were not only consuming findings, but actively sharing and discussing them.

The organisation also contributed to national and international convenings, reinforcing its role not only as a data producer, but as a thought partner shaping how evidence is built and used within the early learning ecosystem.

HOW DATA **INFORMED CHANGE**

During 2025, **31 organisations** used the ELOM suite to assess programme quality and child outcomes, completing 8,329 assessments. This work generated more than **430 reports** for early learning programmes, schools and RTO users, alongside a pilot **cohort-level report for a funder spanning multiple grantees** – an early sign of growing demand for portfolio-level learning.

Strategic pilots tested new applications of the tools. In partnership with IMBE, DataDrive2030 piloted the use of the LPQA in **158 early learning programmes** not receiving structured quality support via NGOs or RTOs. Through increased automation, programme-level reports were generated rapidly and used in assessor-facilitated feedback sessions with

principals, testing whether a light-touch model could influence practice and programme quality.

A further pilot tested the use of ELOM tools in **15 public primary schools** in the Western Cape, focusing on Grade R as a bridge into the foundation phase. Schools received customised reports on incoming Grade R and Grade 1 cohorts, supported by follow-up discussions with school leadership and teachers.

The organisation also deepened engagement with experienced ELOM “super-users”, whose feedback shaped support platforms such as the ELOM-in-Practice webinar series, fieldwork management tools and feedback facilitation approaches.

PARTNERSHIP AND SYSTEMS IMPACT

Partnerships across government, funders, NGOs, researchers, and practitioners were central to DataDrive2030's work in 2025, and were particularly evident in the launch and uptake of the **2024 Thrive by Five Index**. The launch was supported by tailored reports, a phased website rollout, and extensive stakeholder briefings at national and provincial levels.

The launch generated substantial public engagement. Between September and December 2025 alone, the Index was featured in **more than 140 media pieces**, significantly increasing public awareness of early childhood development outcomes and inequalities.

Much of this reach was driven by organic and secondary amplification. Government departments, NGOs, funders, business leaders, and sector organisations independently referenced, interpreted, and applied Thrive by Five findings in their own communications, advocacy, and decision-making. This pattern of uptake reflects strong ownership of the Index beyond DataDrive2030 itself and signals its establishment as a **trusted, shared evidence base for the early childhood development sector**.

The year also saw increased investment in sector convening and peer learning.

In August 2025, DataDrive2030 co-hosted an in-person workshop with **The Accelerator**, bringing together **40 researchers and NGOs working in the birth-to-three space** to strengthen collaboration and shared understanding of measurement needs.

User engagement continued through the **ELOM-in-Practice webinar series**, which hosted **five webinars during the year featuring practical insights from ten NGO partners**. Two in-person **user lunches** were also held in Cape Town and Johannesburg, creating opportunities for practitioners and organisations to share experiences of implementing ELOM tools and using data for programme improvement.

In addition, a **Johannesburg-based symposium** brought together representatives from **22 funding organisations** to explore how shared measurement tools and data infrastructure can strengthen funding practice and support better decision-making across the early learning ecosystem.

Together, these partnerships strengthened DataDrive2030's role as both a technical data infrastructure provider and a convening platform for shared learning across the sector.



WHAT 2025 REVEALED ABOUT OUR WORK

2025 surfaced a set of important strategic learnings about how change actually happens in the early learning data ecosystem.

- 01** **The year highlighted the need to reframe how progress is measured.** While initial targets focused on the number of programmes using the tools, 2025 showed that these numbers fail to recognise system-level momentum driven through shared assets such as the Thrive by Five Index, funder portfolio use and government uptake.
- 02** **It reinforced that sense-making is where value is realised.** The organisation's impact increasingly comes from functioning not only as shared data infrastructure, but as a knowledge-producing and sense-making partner.
- 03** **The year confirmed that quality at scale depends on systems.** Rapid growth exposed real pressures on staff, assessors and coordination, and showed that sustaining quality requires stronger platforms, clearer workflows and explicit guardrails.
- 04** **It showed that peer learning accelerates data use.** Strong uptake of ELOM-in-Practice webinars and in-person user lunches demonstrated that practitioners learn effectively from one another when given space to interpret and apply data together.
- 05** **It reinforced that strategic restraint matters.** Pilots and cross-country tool development provided valuable learning, but also clarified the operational and resourcing costs of expansion.

RISKS, DISCIPLINE AND TRANSITION

Alongside these lessons, 2025 also surfaced a set of interlinked risks requiring deliberate choices as the organisation moves into its next phase.

These included:

- **scale and focus**
- **stronger guardrails**
- **fit-for-purpose operating model**

DataDrive2030 responded to these tensions by pausing, reflecting, and initiating a comprehensive **Strategy 2026–2030** process.



Capacity and Pacing Risk as rapid growth and multiple large initiatives create a risk of overextension and delivery slippage



Transformation Risk including the need to sustain trust, belonging and psychological safety as the organisation grows



Systems Build versus Delivery Tension especially while running multiple system builds alongside live projects



Workforce Sustainability Risk including misalignment between trained assessor supply and available work



Role Clarity and Guardrail Pressure as the organisation's positioning creates pull toward implementation and roles beyond its mandate



Reputational and Quality Risk at Scale especially as national influence increases and tolerance for error narrows

STRATEGY 2026–2030

By the end of 2025, DataDrive2030 had reached a clear organisational inflection point. Following four years of rapid growth, experimentation and expanding national influence, the organisation deliberately paused to reflect on what had enabled early success and what might begin to constrain effectiveness in the next phase. This reflection initiated a formal strategy process to support a transition from a founder-led, build-and-learn organisation to a more collectively led, scale-and-focus organisation with clearer priorities, stronger systems and more distributed leadership.

The strategy process brought together facilitated reflection across the team, engagement with the Board, and dialogue with partners, funders and ecosystem actors. It surfaced both the strengths that had enabled progress – including technical excellence, strong partnerships and growing national credibility – and the constraints that needed to be addressed, such as organisational overstretch, centralised decision-making and workforce fragility.

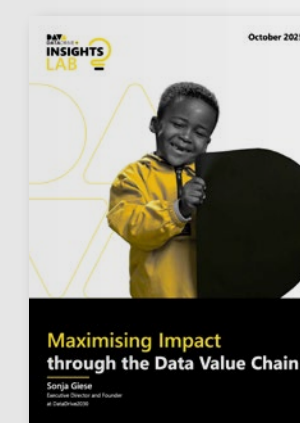
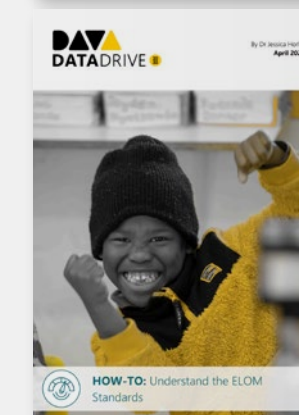
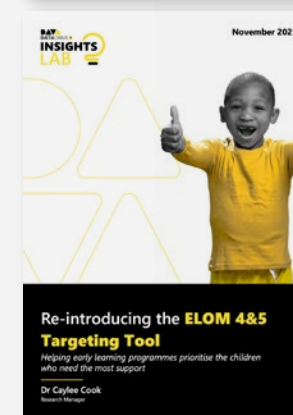
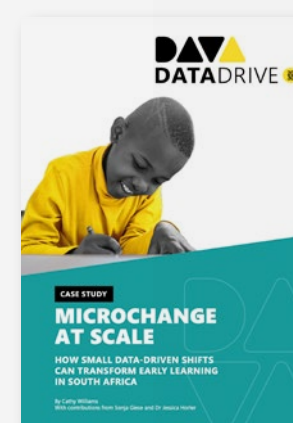
The resulting **Strategy 2026–2030** articulates a shared North Star for the next phase of the organisation’s work, reaffirming the **Data Value Chain** and the organisation’s **Theory of Change** as core organising frameworks. It also introduces explicit strategic guardrails designed to protect focus and execution quality.

A revised **Target Operating Model** will align structure, roles and decision rights with strategic objectives, enabling DataDrive2030 to scale its impact while maintaining quality, credibility and long-term sustainability. Once finalised, the strategy will be shared publicly to foster a shared understanding of our role, strengthen alignment with partners, and support more coordinated action across the early learning ecosystem.

SELECTED OUTPUTS FROM 2025

In 2025, DataDrive2030 produced a wide range of publications and resources, often in partnership with others. These included case studies, insights briefs, how-to guides, technical manuals, ELOM suite materials, and the full suite of Thrive by Five Index outputs.

Selected examples include:





Learn more at datadrive2030.co.za | Follow us on LinkedIn [@DataDrive2030](https://www.linkedin.com/company/datadrive2030)