

DataDrive2030

NGO Community of Practice

October 2024



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Introduction

On 16 October 2024, Early Learning Measurement (ELOM) users from various early learning organisations gathered in Cape Town for a Community of Practice (CoP) workshop hosted by DataDrive2030 and facilitated by DataDrive2030's Deputy Director, Sibongile Khumalo. The event aimed to foster collaboration among ELOM tool users, and broadly explore various facets of intentional data usage for decision-making.

A wide collection of organisations participated: Nal'ibali, Breadline Africa RSA (NPC), Early Care Foundation, South African Education Project (SAEP), Ikamva Labantu Charitable Trust, Impande, ATKV, The Custoda Trust, Impande Yotshani, Lulamaphiko, Early Learning Research Unit (ELRU), The Do More Foundation, Training and Resources in Early Education (TREE), True North, Knysna Education Trust, Wordworks, Cotlands, Grow ECD, Thanda After School, Foundation for Community work, and Sikhula Sonke Early Childhood Development.


Throughout the day, participants engaged in practical exercises and rich discussions that emphasised the critical role of data in driving programme and sectoral improvements.

This report offers a comprehensive overview of the workshop's key sessions, insights, and reflections, and intends to communicate the collective ideas that were shared by participants. Together with the day's [slides](#), it aims to serve as a resource for continuous reference and learning for the workshop attendees, and for the DataDrive2030 team.



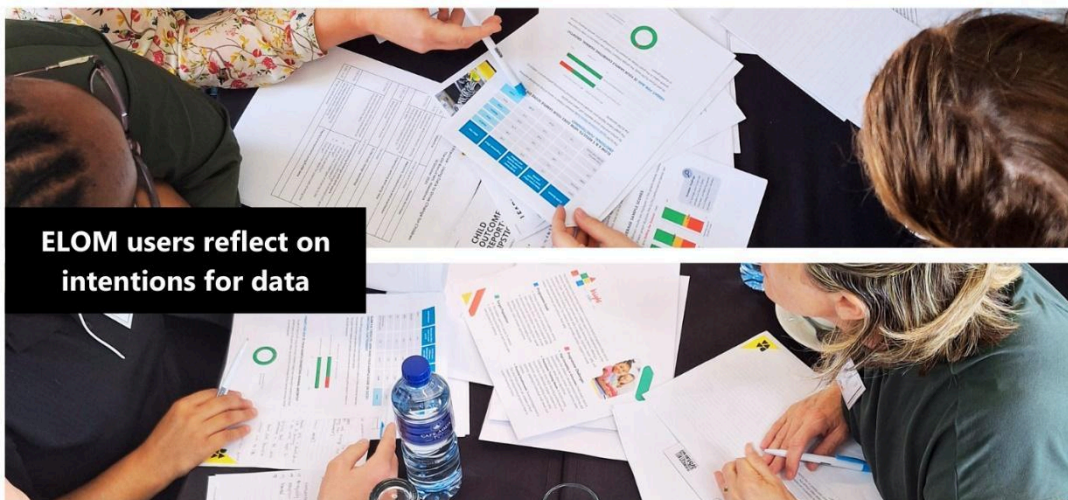
Intention-setting

One of the workshop's key sessions was intention-setting. This session focused on the importance of setting deliberate, collective intentions with all team members when setting out to use the ELOM tools. Workshop participants were encouraged to think about how intentional planning can help guide study design, data collection, analysis, and data dissemination.

DataDrive2030 is currently launching an *intention-setting survey* that provides reflective questions to ELOM users planning a study. The questions aim to guide users toward more deliberate planning and decision-making around the ELOM data to be collected. 

Working in groups, participants engaged in an activity in which they experimented with DataDrive2030's new approach to [intention-setting](#) among ELOM users. Groups were tasked with setting intentions for using the data, creating an action plan based on the findings, and establishing a dissemination/communication strategy for key stakeholders.

Participants reflected on the diversity of perspectives within their teams and how this influenced discussions around data use. A number of challenges and insights were fed back during plenary and are summarised on the next page with different areas of focus,



Key insights from intention-setting for ELOM users and the DataDrive2030 team:

For ELOM Users	For DataDrive2030
Dedicate time at the beginning of planning to ensure that the whole team understands and inputs into the study's purpose and goals and have agreed on the study questions.	Intention-setting was a useful exercise for the NGO teams and this process should be actively supported by DataDrive2030.
Actively seek further information or guidance on how to fully leverage the tools and recognise their limitations. Using a combination of ELOM tools may yield more comprehensive insights than using them individually.	More resources to help users understand the strengths and limitations of the different ELOM tools should be provided. Ensure that users are better equipped to select the appropriate tools for their specific context.
Be realistic about resource constraints. Planning should account for what can realistically be achieved within the available budget and timeframe, including provision for disseminating findings.	Explore ways to provide accessible financial planning tools, guidance on costing studies, or even advocate for increased funding for ELOM studies.
Collaborate more closely with peers to share insights, challenges, and solutions to common problems, especially around implementation timelines and study design.	Support formal and informal opportunities for users to share findings with each other, helping build a community of practice where common challenges can be discussed and addressed collaboratively.
Focus on developing a clear communication strategy, ensuring that key stakeholders understand the data in a manageable and meaningful way. When communicating difficult or negative findings, it is important to frame them constructively to avoid demotivating stakeholders.	Provide guidance on how to translate complex data into manageable, meaningful formats that stakeholders can easily understand and use for decision-making.

Study design

This session focused on the practical aspects of designing studies using the ELOM tools. DataDrive2030 team members presented information on six key aspects of ELOM study designs, and then answered technical questions from participants.

1. **Choosing ELOM tools:** Elizabeth Girdwood introduced the ELOM suite of tools, including their target group and what they measure. Jessica Horler then explained how to combine ELOM tools (such as ELOM 4&5, social-emotional functioning (SEF), and height-for-age measurements), and how they can be integrated into an organisation's monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) framework.
2. **Sampling:** Caylee Cook introduced key technical aspects of sampling strategies for ELOM studies, and explained the importance of random sampling techniques to ensure that findings are representative and to avoid bias.
3. **Costing studies:** Grant Edmond presented key considerations and guidelines for costing ELOM studies and explained the prominent cost drivers, as well as decisions that need to be made when budgeting for using ELOM tools.
4. **Recruiting and training assessors:** Aimee Hare walked participants through the assessor training journey, outlining considerations for users regarding training internal assessors, or outsourcing assessments to external assessors.
5. **Managing fieldwork:** Tawanda Madamombe described how the online ELOM portal is set up to manage fieldwork, and how to use the portal during data collection for real-time monitoring of data quality.

Disseminating ELOM data

In the afternoon, the focus shifted to how findings from ELOM studies can be shared with key stakeholders. This session centred on ways to democratise ELOM data and share it with those who provide and make use of the data.

Using a World Café format, participants rotated between tables to discuss four questions. These questions, and the participants' insights, are summarised below.

1. Who should ELOM findings be shared with, and why?

Several key groups were identified as essential recipients of child data, including internal/organisational stakeholders and external stakeholders. Internally, project and implementation teams use the data to identify gaps, make informed changes, and ensure programme effectiveness. Fundraising teams leverage results for securing future funding, while support staff and Exco/board members need insights for acknowledging the data's importance and guiding strategic direction. The MEL team ensures the data aligns with the programme's Theory of Change for continuous improvement. Externally, funders, government, principals, and practitioners use the findings to support policy, practice, and curriculum improvements. Sharing with parents promotes engagement, while NGOs, advocacy groups, and researchers benefit from data for collaboration, public awareness, and further research.

A guiding principle discussed was "Nothing about us without us", which emphasises the importance of ensuring that those most affected by the data are involved in discussions about it.

2. What are the benefits of sharing ELOM findings?

The benefits of sharing ELOM findings, and data more broadly, with stakeholders primarily focused on creating a shared vision in the ECD ecosystem, empowering stakeholders, supporting advocacy, and ensuring data-driven decisions. Data sharing was discussed as a way to use trends to unite the sector by highlighting gaps and creating shared responsibility among government, NGOs, donors, and practitioners. Additionally, sharing data among NGOs promotes collective learning, helping them to learn from each other and avoid duplicating efforts.

Sharing the data internally enables programme teams to identify areas for improvement, while allowing teams to reflect on tangible evidence and actively contribute to programme improvement. Sharing data with parents was specifically discussed, with regard to promoting transparency and collaboration between home and school environments.

3. What are the challenges of sharing ELOM findings?

A number of challenges with the process of data dissemination were discussed. Many funders underestimate the costs associated with planning, conducting and communicating studies, and then concretely implementing their findings which requires significant time and investment. Moreover, funders can be prescriptive in terms of what is assessed, which can create a rigid measurement framework. Another challenge is making complex data accessible to different audiences, especially those with low data literacy. Participants also expressed concern about how to present less favourable findings in a way that is constructive and actionable as opposed to demoralising.

4. How can findings be practically shared with stakeholders?

Several practical ideas were proposed for communicating data with important stakeholders, emphasising the importance of tailoring dissemination to the audience. Media platforms like radio and press releases are suitable for widespread sharing, while face-to-face presentations or one-on-one meetings work better for more direct engagement with principals and practitioners. Newsletters, webinars, and community engagement initiatives (e.g., workshops) were suggested to maintain ongoing communication with stakeholders. The use of visuals, such as photos and videos, alongside infographics, were noted as key to making the data more accessible. Sharing success stories and challenges helps stakeholders relate to the findings. It was discussed that parents should be engaged through meetings, WhatsApp groups, and visual reports to better understand their children's development. Additionally, reports, policy briefs, case studies, and academic publications were highlighted as effective methods for detailed dissemination, especially for donors, researchers, and policymakers.

Creative problem-solving for decision-making

The final session of the day focused on using creative problem-solving techniques to address challenges identified in ELOM data. Sonja Giese introduced the [data value chain](#), describing the journey taken toward using data for broad-level impacts.

Focusing on step 6 of the data value chain, workshop participants engaged in a group activity using a deck of *playful provocation* cards. Each card contained a prompt, based on Edward de Bono's creative problem-solving techniques, to innovate creative solutions to issues identified in ELOM data.



Participants were encouraged to work their way through the deck of cards, engaging with as many prompts as possible while freely brainstorming ideas that came to mind from the prompts. Thereafter, groups used these ideas to generate a single innovative solution to a chosen issue (e.g., low gross motor scores).

The session was high-energy and brought humour and creative thinking into the space between interpreting data and making decisions on a way forward. Participants noted that using playful prompts proved to be a refreshing way to generate fresh new perspectives and generate diverse viewpoints among team members.

Playful provocation card examples



Closing reflections

The day concluded with a reflection session, where participants shared their closing thoughts and suggestions for future CoP workshops.

Participants expressed an interest in replicating the intention-setting process within their own organisations, and to think through the data collection and communication processes from the onset of planning. There was a clear sense of appreciation for the collaborative environment and the opportunity to learn from each other's experiences.

Suggestions for future CoP workshops included providing more technical support for new users of ELOM tools, offering updates on the latest developments in the ELOM community, and continuing to foster spaces for sharing experiences and challenges. Specific content areas worth exploring included the technical scoring for ELOM tools, input on new tools (e.g., GSED), and behaviour change.

A heartfelt thank you to all participants for your invaluable contributions during the ELOM CoP. Your insights and engagement are greatly appreciated, and we look forward to continuing this journey together to drive meaningful change.

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