

## IN BRIEF

### THE SECOND ELOM IN PRACTICE WEBINAR – USING DATA TOOLS FOR THE FIRST TIME

The second “ELOM in Practice” webinar hosted by DataDrive2030 - *Using Data Tools for the First Time* - was held on 23 April 2025. The webinar series aims to provide a forum for ELOM users to learn from each other’s experiences and share their findings. This webinar focused on the experiences of two South African early childhood development (ECD) organisations, [Breadline Africa](#) and [Lulamaphiko](#), as first-time users of the ELOM suite of tools. What follows is a summary of the main themes and key takeaways from the presentations and discussions.

#### Main themes and important ideas

##### 1. The value of comprehensive assessment approaches:

Using the full suite of ELOM tools provided Breadline Africa with a *“comprehensive picture”* and a *“reality check”* from multiple perspectives - parents, practitioners, children, and the learning environment. This holistic approach allowed their organisation to gain deeper insights into programme effectiveness and areas needing improvement. As Nyaradzo Mutanha explained: *“Using tools like ELOM allowed us to evaluate and enhance the quality of learning for young children in the sites.”*

##### 2. Time and capacity requirements:

Both presenting organisations emphasised the substantial time and resources required for ELOM study design and implementation. Lynn Stefano from Lulamaphiko noted: *“It’s a project. It takes time. This is not a rushed process.”* Nyaradzo specifically highlighted the need to *“build enough project management capacity”* and acknowledged that the team *“underestimated how admin heavy”* the process would be. Nyaradzo suggested that users should attempt to understand the tools before using them for the first time. As Lynn pointed out, the tools are *“very nuanced... and there’s a lot to take on board.”* For example, the Lulamaphiko team shared their difficulty in accurately determining age ranges for the assessment, despite using the ELOM age calculator (on the DataDrive2030 website under “Plan for Data Collection” here: <https://datadrive2030.co.za/timeline/>), and the availability and guidance from the DataDrive2030 team.

##### 3. The importance of proper assessor selection and management:

Selecting assessors who understand the culture, the local language and the area proved crucial for effective fieldwork. The Breadline Africa team found that pairing external assessors with local workers helped *“break the ice, especially with small children.”* Lynn stressed the importance of having an assessor she felt confident in who understood children and who understood the tools.

##### 4. Community engagement and preparation:

Pre-assessment planning workshops with ECD principals and practitioners helped to clarify the purpose of the studies and allay any fears about them being scrutinised. Creating a supportive environment where ECD staff understood the goals of the assessment improved the process significantly.

Strong relationships with implementing partners were identified as crucial for support and smoother implementation. *"Partner buy-in is crucial,"* noted Nyaradzo. Sharing data with partners is important to avoid research fatigue and ensure coordinated efforts. Collective work is needed to *"strengthen systems and respond to what is needed on the ground."* Lynn spoke to the power of dedicated funding and support from partners like the [Do More Foundation](#) which buttressed their preparation phase.

#### 5. The importance of sharing and using findings effectively:

Both presenters emphasised that findings should be used to drive change rather than being *"shelved."* Nyaradzo advised: *"When you start working on ELOM, make sure that you've got a clear learning agenda and make sure that you actually understand what your objectives are and what you want to achieve."*

Both presenters spoke about the importance of framing when presenting data to stakeholders and partners: acknowledging what people are doing well and framing challenges as systemic rather than assigning individual blame.

Nyaradzo spoke about the importance of being *"ready to listen and act on tough feedback"*, while Lynn shared: *"what was exciting for us was to hear from some practitioners what they do in those other domains. I think that to me, one of the exciting developments is creating space for the practitioners to share."*

#### 6. Adapting to challenges:

Learning to *"adapt quickly in the field and build internal systems for rapid feedback loops"* was highlighted as important by Nyaradzo. Problem-solving and effective communication channels, such as WhatsApp, proved valuable for remote management and addressing issues as they arose.

#### 7. Cost considerations for smaller organisations:

For smaller NGOs like Lulamaphiko, using external assessors, especially in remote areas, can be quite a costly exercise as there are travel and accommodation requirements. This highlights the need for careful budgeting and resource planning when implementing ELOM assessments.

#### 8. ELOM as a contextually relevant and valuable assessment tool:

Both Breadline Africa and Lulamaphiko highlighted the significant value of ELOM as a *"locally relevant, reliable tool"* that serves as the gold standard for assessing early learning progress in South Africa. Nyaradzo noted that ELOM allows them to understand what happens *"inside that building or that classroom"* beyond just infrastructure inputs and support. The alignment of ELOM tools with the South African curriculum framework was noted as a significant advantage. Lynn found it *"really helpful to have the comparisons"* to the Thrive by Five Index benchmarks, as it provided context for interpreting results: *"Looking at the other results from different parts of the country also from other rural areas that were similar to ours, it was actually somewhat reassuring that our results weren't so terrible."*

## Recommendations for future first time users

1. Clearly define learning objectives and align tool selection accordingly.
2. Allocate sufficient time and human resources for project management, logistical coordination, and data analysis.
3. Prioritise careful assessor selection, considering cultural fit, local language skills, and travel and accommodation needs.
4. Implement robust support systems to support assessors in the field, including resources and communication channels.
5. Engage with DataDrive2030 resources and personnel to understand the nuances of the tools and processes.
6. Develop a clear plan for repackaging and sharing findings with various stakeholders in an accessible and sensitive manner.
7. Foster strong relationships with implementing partners and collaborate on data sharing to avoid research fatigue.
8. Be prepared for challenges and be adaptable in the field.
9. Utilise the findings to inform adaptive management and programme improvements.

## Conclusion

The second ELOM in Practice webinar highlighted the practical challenges and valuable insights gained by two ECD organisations in South Africa as first-time users of the ELOM suite of tools. Both Breadline Africa and Lulamaphiko demonstrated how, despite the administrative and logistical challenges, ELOM provides rich data that can drive meaningful programme improvements and better developmental outcomes for young children. The discussions underscored the importance of thorough planning, strong partnerships, cultural sensitivity in assessor selection, and effective results communication to maximise the value of ELOM assessments. Most importantly, both organisations emphasised that the real value comes from using the findings to inform adaptive management and drive positive change in early childhood development programmes.

