



Funder Data Symposium

Insights from 14 October 2025

The purpose of the gathering



The event brought together a small group of funders to build a collective understanding of how data can be used to drive change for young children in South Africa, and to identify potential levers for greater impact.

There were two objectives:

1. **To build a shared understanding of how data can strengthen funding practices** - Equipping funders with insights from the *Thrive by Five Index 2024* and other data sources; enabling them to interpret findings responsibly and to apply them in ways that balance accountability, learning and responsiveness to context.
2. **To co-create principles for data-driven grantmaking and impact reporting** - Facilitating dialogue among funders to distill practical, shared principles that support grantees to use data for continuous learning and programme improvement, rather than only for compliance.

Agenda

Time	Agenda
8.30-09.00	Arrival, tea and coffee
9.00-9:45	Welcome, introductions and orientation
9.45-10.45	Presentation: A deep dive into Thrive by Five Index findings of particular relevance to funders
10.45-11.00	Tea / Coffee Break
11.00- 12.30	Facilitated discussion: To help funders interpret Thrive findings for their funding priorities, balance data-driven decision-making with context, and identify additional Thrive products to support their practice.
12.30-13.30	Lunch Break
13.30-14:45	Presentation: Leveraging data tools to measure programme impact in ways that foster continuous learning rather than mere compliance.
14.45 - 15.00	Tea / Coffee Break
15.00 - 16.15	Facilitated discussion: Practical ideas for supporting funders and grantees in data-driven action
16.15 - 16.30	Wrap up and closure
17.00-19.00	Cocktails / networking

Insights from the Thrive by Five Index, to help shape funding practices & priorities in South Africa

The objectives of this presentation were to synthesise the results of the Thrive by Five Index 2024 with a focus on programme quality and home learning environments, to share findings with funders in ways that support practical and principled responses, and to engage in questions of clarity.

Sonja Giese



Translating Thrive findings into practical implications

Core Findings:

- **Only 42% of four year old children attending an early learning programme are on track** in key areas of development.
- For the sub-study of **non-enrolled children**, **only 18% were developmentally on track**. An estimated 350,000 four year old children are not enrolled in any early learning programme, missing out on crucial access to education and ancillary services, such as nutrition and health outreach.

Key Actions for Funders:

1. **Support teaching quality** - invest in practical in-service training and coaching focused on effective teaching strategies as central in driving outcomes.
2. **Fund learning materials** - provide a minimum package of materials for all programmes, with resources linked to each domain, accompanied by practice guidelines.
3. **Elevate emotional functioning** - support interventions that promote the healthy social and emotional development of young children. Good emotional functioning is a predictor of good learning outcomes.
4. **Enable access** - help eliminate enrollment barriers for the 350k unserved children, and leverage the protection enrollment provides through access to nutrition/health services.
5. **Support caregivers** - invest in parental engagement and intervention programmes (framed as building on existing knowledge, not deficits). Parents are not aware of child delays; or even what to do about them at home.

Strategic Coordination Needed:

- **The sector is severely under-resourced** - funders should identify shared goals and crowd-in around coordinated efforts rather than trying to do everything
- **Unlock the full R10B government allocation** - most ELPs don't qualify for the subsidy because they do not meet the requirements for "Silver Registration" - a prerequisite for Govt funding. *We have to unblock the flow of funding.*

Using the ELOM tools to support programme measurement & learning among grantees

The presentation aimed to reflect on grantees' experiences using data tools with funders, and to introduce the full ELOM suite. Information included: how and when to use data tools (and the limitations thereof); how to interpret data; how to combine ELOM data and other data sources to measure programme impact; and how to use data to support learning rather than mere compliance.

Jessica Horler



In summary

The themes of the afternoon's discussion focused around four key areas:

1. **Barriers and enablers** to using and sharing data effectively
2. **Power dynamics** between funders and grantees
3. **Creating a culture of learning and reflection**, rather than compliance-driven reporting.
Building a culture of trust and safety is essential to genuine learning. Funders play a critical role as conveners and framers of learning. They can normalise sharing and reduce competition. This reflection and learning can be light-touch and habitual (short voice notes after meetings to record lessons), not cumbersome or punitive. The goal is a shift from a compliance mindset to a continuous learning ecosystem, supported by funders, grantees, and intermediaries alike.
4. **The role of convening and neutral organisations** (like DD2030) in facilitating these conversations. Participants see DD2030 as having a potential convening and knowledge-sharing role in the sector. Webinars and peer-learning spaces are emerging tools for safe and accessible sharing, and there is recognition that DD2030 already shares insights via LinkedIn and its website. The Bana Pele Data Observatory could help structure and contain collective learning.

Detailed overleaf

Barriers, Enablers and Power Dynamics

Structural and Capacity Constraints

- Static funding strategies & rigid funding models limit innovation.
- Limited expertise and resources in both funder & grantee organisations to analyse & act on data.
- A lack of integrated understanding of how different data measures (eg. LPQA, ELOM 4&5) fit together to tell a coherent story.

Cultural and Relational Barriers

- Uninformed boards or trustees can constrain progress.
- Data collection is often viewed through a compliance lens rather than a learning one.
- Grantees fear punitive consequences or loss of funding if results are poor.
- Competition for funding discourages open sharing of failures or lessons learned.
- Absence of a strong learning culture in many organisations.

Practical and Procedural Barriers

- Red tape & bureaucracy hinder data-driven changes.
- Many grantees are unsure what exactly to change based on data insights.
- Poorly designed M&E reporting questions feel extractive rather than developmental.
- Lack of communication channels or forums for peer learning.

Proposed Solutions

Facilitated Interaction and Learning

- Organise independently facilitated sessions between funders & grantees to address power imbalances.
- Funders should invest in operational & people capacity, not just programme delivery.
- Encourage Communities of Practice among grantees – both with & without funders present.
- Use board engagements & site visits to expose trustees to field realities.

Improving Data Use and Interpretation

- Demystify data for funders & grantees (e.g. differences between summative & formative data).
- Create a “cheat sheet” or checklist for organisations before they start data collection.
- Support interpreting & acting on data, not just collecting it.

Funder Collaboration and Role Reimagining

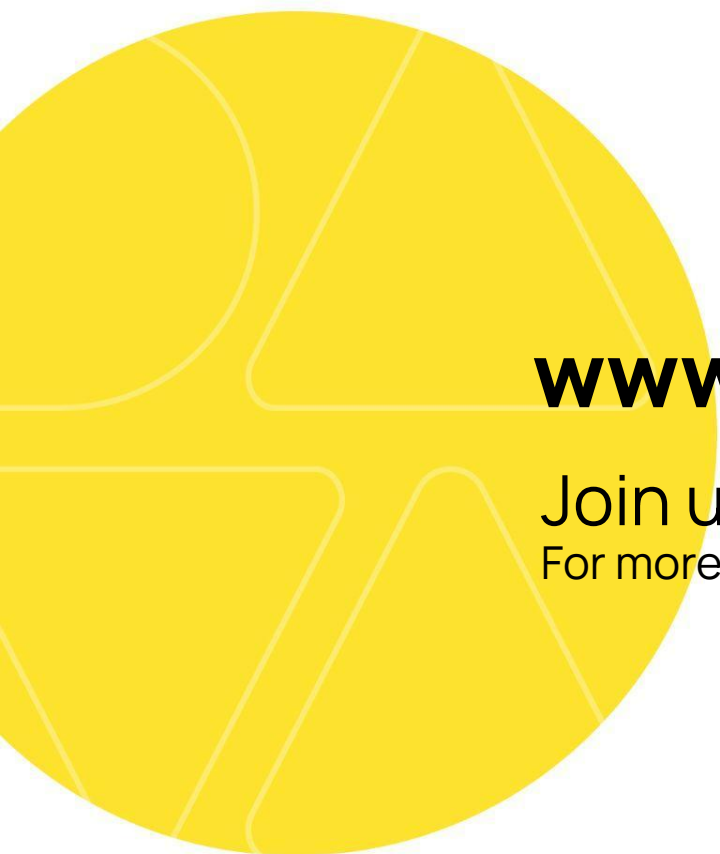
- Funders should also build their own capacity for learning & reflection.
- Collaborate across funders to align reporting & learning approaches, reducing duplication.
- Shift M&E away from compliance toward co-created learning and feedback loops.

Supporting Data-Driven Action: Core principles

Participants explored practical approaches to help funders support grantees in taking data-driven action. The session focused on how funders can be responsive rather than prescriptive, while co-creating principles for effective grant making and impact reporting.



- **Reimagine the funder-grantee relationship.** Move from a supervisor-implementer dynamic to Ubuntu-based partnerships built on curiosity, trust and courage. Elevate grantees as thinking partners, not just implementing partners.
- **Fund flexibility and experimentation.** Accept that initial grant assumptions may need to change. Enable grantees to scale back ambitious targets when data demands it. Remove the stigma of failure and encourage experimentation. Consider providing unrestricted funding.
- **Build sectoral capacity, not silos.** Fund technical expertise for data use as a shared sector resource rather than requiring each organisation to build capacity independently.
- **Practice self-reflection.** Acknowledge problematic power dynamics. Recognise that funder behaviour can damage impact. Be willing to evolve practices based on bottom-up feedback from grantees.
- **Respond with urgency.** Fund as if facing a crisis-level emergency—with speed, adaptability and no-strings support that enables rapid, effective action.
- **Frame learning as an outcome.** Shape learning requirements around grantees' strategic focus. Treat learning itself as a valuable outcome, not merely a process requirement.
- **Model vulnerability.** Demonstrate data-driven decision-making within funding organisations. Show willingness to course-correct and be transparent about risk appetite with boards and stakeholders.



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Join us in using data to drive change!
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