

PROJECT BRIEF

# Data Must Speak

## Positive Deviance Research

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Office of Research-Innocenti



What are the practices and behaviors that make some schools perform better than others and how do we scale them up?

## Overview

Even in the most difficult contexts, some schools outperform others in terms of learning, gender equality and retention. Many of these ‘positive deviant’ schools thrive within similar context and with comparable resources as those that do less well. In theory, this phenomenon must be closely linked to practices, behaviors, attitudes and social norms in schools. Unfortunately, positive deviant schools are rarely identified, and little is known about what is working and how we can scale their success.

The Data Must Speak initiative provides capacity strengthening to educators for more effective and transparent data use to improve students’ learning including foundational literacy and numeracy skills. It is based on a growing body of evidence that demonstrates that using data, especially from service delivery at district, school and community levels, can positively impact learning conditions and outcomes.

Since 2019, Data Must Speak has an innovative mixed-methods ‘positive deviance’ research component that aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the local practices and behaviors that make some schools achieve better results than others even though they operate in a similar context and with comparable resources?
2. What are actionable system, school and community levers to optimally scale those practices and behaviors to lower-performing schools?

## Approach

The research – undertaken in Brazil, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Lao PDR, Madagascar, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Tanzania, Togo, and Zambia – uses a country-level mixed-method approach combining quantitative, qualitative and participatory implementation research as well as behavioral and scaling science. At each stage of the research five guiding principles are applied: demand-driven; national ownership; learning by doing; peer-to-peer learning; and sustainability.

Data Must Speak research aims at improving education systems from the bottom-up and to empower in-country stakeholders to generate and use education data to inform policy and practice.

## Goal

This research aims to (1) strengthen country-level capacity to use data; (2) identify grassroots positive deviant practices and behaviors in classrooms and communities; and (3) identify levers for scaling them up to improve schools’ and students’ performances.

## Contact Info

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## Project Highlights

### National and Regional implementation and reports (2021–2023)

In partnership with national stakeholders in participating countries, the team is co-creating and co-implementing the Data Must Speak research.

National and Regional level reports, including cross-country comparative analyses, providing concrete recommendations, are in development as well as policy-oriented activities – to ensure high research uptake – organized with all partners.