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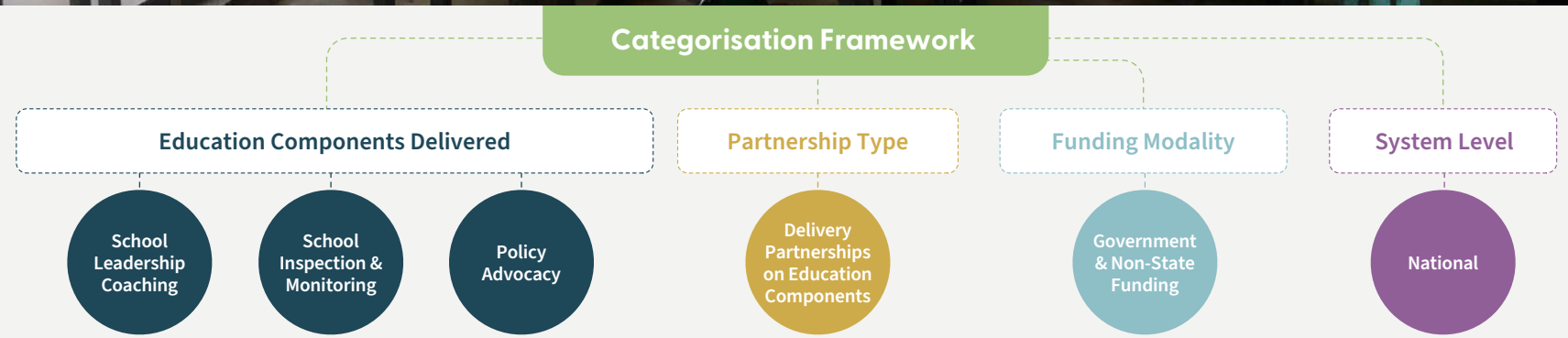
# Inspect & Improve Programme, Uganda



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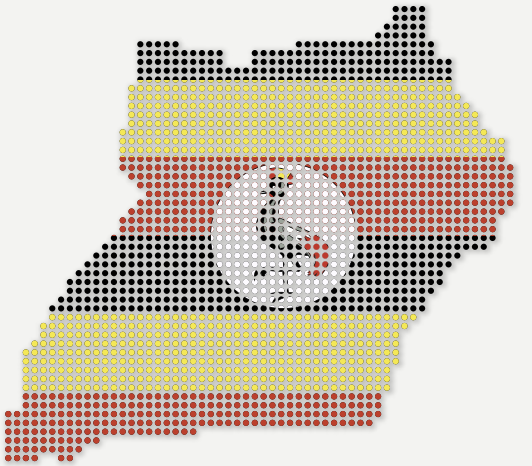
## UGANDA

**~49 million**
population (2023)



**Number of public schools**
**12,481** primary schools
**1,329** secondary schools

**Number of private schools**
**32,969** primary schools
**5,960** secondary schools

**Number of teachers in public schools**
**167,454** primary schools
**47,895** secondary schools

Private schools make up over **80%** of secondary education, with the government overseeing both public and private schools.

## Glossary

| | |
|---|---|
| **COP** | Communities of Practice |
| **DES** | Directorate of Education Standards |
| **EPG** | Education Partnerships Group |
| **I&I** | Inspect & Improve |
| **NFER** | National Foundation for Education Research |
| **PEAS** | Promoting Equality in African Schools |
| **MoES** | Ministry of Education and Sports |
| **MEL** | Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning |
| **SIP** | School Improvement Plan |

## Timeline of the Partnership Development

**2008**
PEAS began working in Uganda, setting up the country's first low-cost secondary school and engaging with the government and local communities

**2018**
DES updated the National School Inspection Framework

**2019**
PEAS and DES designed and piloted I&I for improvement and inspections in ten schools in Teso sub-region, Eastern Uganda

**2021**
I&I expanded to 50 public schools in all four regions in Uganda

**2022-24**
I&I expanded to 200 public schools in 69 districts, and 15 private schools. Digital inspection tools were co-created and tested by PEAS and the Ugandan government

**2026**
Anticipated year of handover to the government

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## Background of the Partnership

In Uganda, the Directorate of Education Standards (DES), which is one of the three Directorates under the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), and Promoting Equality in African Schools (PEAS) have developed the Inspect & Improve (I&I) programme. The collaborative programme is now operational in over 200 secondary schools in the country.

> **The key driving factor for the I & I programme was DES' intent to address how best to support school leaders to respond to and use inspection findings and recommendations to improve education quality in Ugandan schools**

Back in 2018, DES and partners worked together to update and reform the National School Inspection Framework at secondary level to increase the focus on quality of education. DES identified a need to strengthen capacity and expertise in school leaders. This was done to ensure that the updated framework was implemented effectively to drive accountability and quality improvements in schools.

PEAS brought to the table its key strengths in the areas of school inspection and improvement planning, built over 15 years of implementation. Independent research by the University of Sussex[1] found that PEAS schools are substantially better managed than other school types in Uganda and perform correspondingly better in terms of student value-add. PEAS students come from poorer households and make faster learning progress, and its female students are more confident and better equipped for life after school. Drawing on practical experience, PEAS works together with governments to improve the wider education system, so that entire national education systems can deliver better secondary education to everyone.[2]

> **PEAS builds and runs one of the largest, fastest-growing, not-for-profit secondary school networks in Sub-Saharan Africa. Over 19,000 students are enrolled at their 36 schools in rural communities across Uganda and Zambia each year.**

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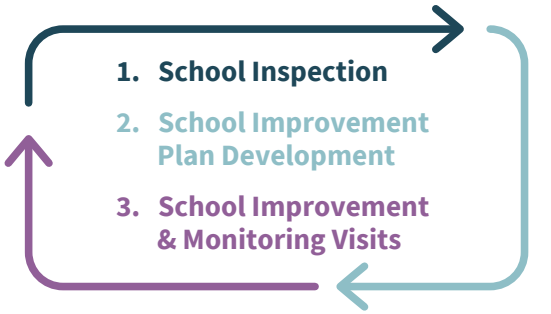
# Overview of the Programme

## Design of the Programme

Inspect & Improve focuses on developing school leadership and empowering school managers to drive positive evidence-based change with the resources available. Its overarching aim is to improve learning and create safe, high-quality educational environments through a cycle of continuous improvement.




*Inspect & Improve Programme Cycle*

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 **Joint inspections** | Inspection process focuses on seven school practice areas, including teaching quality and learner achievement. Detailed reports are created for each school, giving stakeholders a thorough understanding of strengths and areas of improvement and the findings are shared with the school leadership team. |
| 2 **Developing SIPs** | School Improvement Plans (SIPs) are a roadmap for school leaders to follow, allowing each school to target their efforts and resources on specific areas of improvement. School Improvement Plans are not a standard tool in the Ugandan education system. PEAS and DES conduct workshops where school leaders develop SIPs. They plan how to share these with the wider school community and get buy-in from the school staff. |
| 3 **Ongoing support to school leaders** | School leaders are supported to implement their SIPs and track their progress through regular monitoring and support visits and phone calls. School visits include a focus on reviewing SIP implementation, lesson observation and coaching school leaders to overcome key challenges in driving school improvement. Peer communities of practice are also established using WhatsApp groups and direct peer-to-peer engagement for those schools that need the most support. External evidence shows that government school leaders highly value this as an opportunity to “learn by example”[3]. To ensure scalability, PEAS established Communities of Practice (CoPs) over WhatsApp, for government school leaders to share challenges and solutions. |

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## Implementation Timeline

During inspection reform, PEAS shared its school inspection and improvement approach from its large secondary school network. Its reputation for sustainable programming and strong stakeholder relationships with the MoES enabled exploration of the programme's potential.

**2019**

### Co-designing & implementing the I&I pilot

The partners co-designed the pilot to generate evidence to improve quality of education in Ugandan schools. They brought together the National School Inspection Framework and PEAS' school improvement tools in ten Government Secondary Schools to generate evidence.

PEAS' tools were adapted to align with the new inspection framework and an implementation cycle prioritising continuous improvement and scalability was developed. They worked with the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) to conduct a pilot evaluation, and a mid-project review. The latter involved senior officials from DES visiting the pilot schools for data collection and stakeholder interviews.

**2019 - 2022**

### Evidence review & scaling up for national change

Promising internal and external evidence from the pilot demonstrated effective support for school leaders, leading to improvement in their leadership and management skills.[3] Both partners then worked to scale up nationally, reaching 200 government secondary schools by 2022.

PEAS, DES, and NFER continued working together in a Learning Partnership to assess impact and adapt the programme. PEAS focused on integrating data systems and promoting engagement with data. This included developing reporting tools and a real-time monitor to help staff at all levels utilise the data.

The two primary partners also developed digitised inspection and school improvement planning tools to increase efficiency and quality of the programme. PEAS' theory of change includes expectations for change at both the school level and district level, emphasising on local ownership and adaptation. The partners are now integrating the digitised tools into the national digital system for a nationwide roll-out.

**2023 - present**

**Integrating non-state schools**

As a result of the partners' broader engagement with the Ministry, PEAS was requested to expand the I&I programme to include private schools, which constitute over 80% of secondary schools in Uganda. A pilot in 15 low-cost private schools was initiated.

PEAS' long-term goal is to generate evidence in over 250 schools, and hand over the programme to the government by 2026, while providing technical support.

## Roles & Responsibilities of Partners

Both the government and PEAS are equal partners in the I&I programme. The day-to-day engagement of PEAS with the government involves regular interaction at the local and national levels, as well as project board meetings to formally review data.

Both partners have committed to contributing resources, such as personnel or funding, to fully reflect the nature of the partnership. The intention of the MoES is to embed successful elements of the programme into a long-term national programme for wider impact in the country.

**Combined responsibilities of DES & PEAS**

- Jointly conduct inspections, SIP workshops, and provide ongoing support to school leaders
- Co-design, develop, and adapt support and supervision tools, such as the School Improvement Handbook, for government schools
- Conduct and engage in data and quality assurance monitoring of the programme
- Engage in strategic discussions and plan for scaling up at a national level
- Identify peer mentors for struggling school leaders to enhance peer-to-peer learning and establish virtual Communities of Practice
- Fundraise where possible and appropriate, for programme expansion or innovation

Proactively share learnings with secondary schools' key stakeholders and with the national and international education sector to encourage wider adoption of practices

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## Responsibilities of All Stakeholders

Besides DES and PEAS, this programme has several other partners such as NFER, government and private schools, school inspectors and school leaders.

### DES

In addition to the combined responsibilities, DES allocates staff time for joint inspections and SIP training. It also identifies opportunities for cost-sharing (such as training venues), reviews evidence for programme improvement and identifies capacity gaps for additional training to ensure long-term implementation.

### PEAS

PEAS allocates staff time for joint inspections and training, and designs additional needs-based virtual training for DES staff, to address capacity gaps. It supports and shares evidence generation through external partnerships or internal Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) processes.

### School leaders

School leaders, including those from high-performing schools, act as peer support for teachers and school leaders in the schools under the I&I programme.

### School inspectors

School inspectors engage in joint inspections and trainings alongside PEAS staff, and in report-writing and programme implementation. They provide follow-up support, monitoring, and feedback on the inspection process and tools, besides taking part in trainings for capacity building.

### Government & private schools

Government and private schools allocate headteacher or deputy headteacher the time to engage in trainings, and development and implementation of SIPs. They also engage the wider school community and provide in-person or virtual peer support.

### NFER (Pilot & Phase 2)

NFER acts as a learning partner, providing robust evidence on programme impact, and designing tools to enable evidence generation. It provides actionable recommendations, and proactively shares learnings with the Ugandan education sector.

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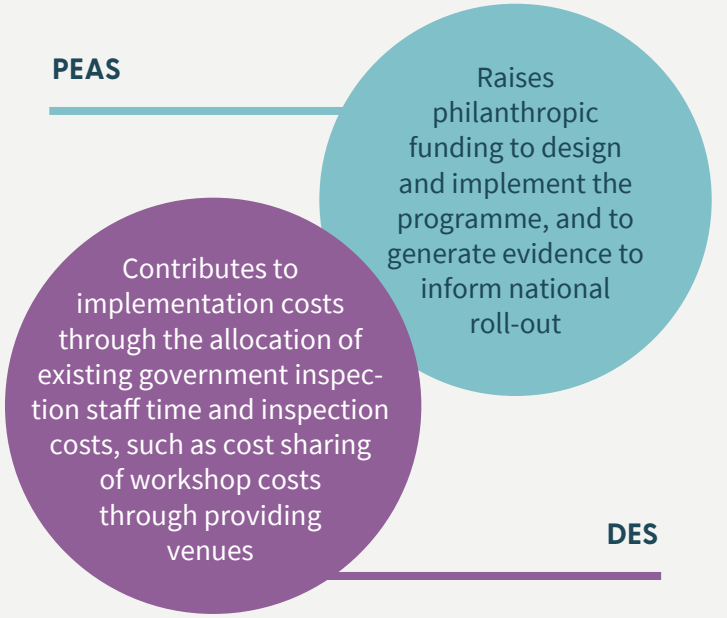
## Funding Breakdown

For the Inspect & Improve (I&I) programme, key learnings from the exemplary PEAS school network have been used to inform programme design and adaptations. The revenue generated by PEAS schools covers their running costs and will ultimately pay for support and supervision from the central office teams.

Strong external evidence indicates that PEAS schools are more cost-effective than comparison schools[4], demonstrating that the PEAS network is a financially sustainable source of innovations.




**How PEAS and DES support the goal of a cost-effective, scalable, and sustainable programme**

Leveraging existing government interest and resources available to them on inspections, the I&I programme is designed to be cost-effective and low-cost. This is to ensure that it can be realistically integrated into the National Inspection System in the long term. There is already a willingness to invest more by the Ministry, and inspection can be supported by traditional development partners, such as the World Bank and Global Partnership for Education.

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## Key Success Factors of the Partnership

PEAS and DES have effectively played their roles in this successful partnership, contributing to the improvement of the country's education system. Here are key factors that have contributed to their success:

### PEAS' Contribution to the Partnership

**Strong relationship with the government:** PEAS has established a strong relationship with the government, based on a rigorous understanding of the local context. External findings show that "the credibility of the I&I partnership facilitated change" with stakeholders, noting that PEAS schools have a reputation for high performance.[3]

**System strengthening:** PEAS' system-strengthening approach focuses on two key principles — listening to stakeholder needs and relying on evidence-based methods. If a strategy contradicts the evidence, both parties are open to re-evaluating.

**Seamless integration:** PEAS has also ensured that all team members fully understand the programme, making changes in school leadership more seamless. Emphasising engagement and collaborations across the Ministry, capacity-building, and the integration of appropriate tools have led to impactful results.

### DES' Contribution to the Partnership

**Finding strategic partners:** At the government end, DES has proactively sought out strategic partners to improve the school inspection and improvement process through innovative practices.

**Being a champion for change:** DES has been a champion for change within the government, having been involved in the programme since its inception. DES' critical role as a duty-bearer in school improvement has been highlighted in external findings. [7]

**Taking the lead with school improvements:** DES has taken ownership of the School Improvement Agenda and is driving this forward through the I&I programme and by identifying how successful components of the programme can be embedded long-term in Uganda's education sector.

## Impact of the Programme

The long-term goal of both the partners is for components of the Inspect & Improve (I&I) programme to be government-led at scale. Several examples demonstrate progress towards this goal.

- **External and internal evidence has demonstrated the positive impact of the I&I programme on school leadership and management.** Wider improvements are observed across the school community as well.

**After one year on the I&I programme,**

**88%** of school leaders report improvements in their leadership and management skills

**>80%** report positive improvements in all other areas of school operations including student attendance, student safety, and teacher attendance[5]

**97%** reduction in the time taken to compile and submit reports[5]

- **PEAS recommended the inclusion of safeguarding indicators in the inspection tool to increase the focus on child safety, which has since been taken up by DES.** Teachers have since reported a reduction in corporal punishment in schools, and gender-sensitive teaching was observed to result in a positive impact on girls' enrolment, attendance, and confidence.[5]
- **PEAS has supported DES to digitise the National Inspection Tool to improve efficiency.** It is working with DES to embed I&I's school improve -ment planning approach in line with the National Digital Framework. The partners have worked together to develop and test the digitised inspec -tion and school improvement planning tool.
- **DES has now incorporated learnings from the digitised inspection tool into an updated tool, as part of the national digital platform.** The partners are working together to incorporate this into the government's digital platform.
- **Following requests, PEAS has provided training to all DES inspectors on how to support leaders to develop and implement School Improvement Plans (SIPs).** This builds on evidence from the pilot, which identifies SIPs as the most effective form of support and has now become a key management tool for leaders to track progress.[3]

# Challenges & Mitigation Measures

There were a few challenges that the programme faced along the way, which both the partners helped overcome in their respective ways.

## Challenges to the Programme

- **School closures due to COVID-19:** Ugandan schools experienced the longest closures in the world (22 months) during the COVID-19 pandemic. This posed a significant challenge to implementation during the pilot and initial scale-up phases.
- **Government timelines and staffing:** During their partnerships with Ministries of Education, PEAS has seen personnel, timelines, and priorities change. This created hurdles that can challenge continued joint implementation and long-term goals.
- **Changes in school leadership:** Similarly, Ugandan school leaders can be regularly transferred between schools, causing disruption in programme delivery. It also introduces the need to then induct new leaders effectively into the programme.

## Mitigation Measures Implemented by the Partners

- **Use of virtual platforms:** The partners engaged school leaders, and provided them with support during a challenging time. It helped them to prepare for reopening through WhatsApp groups, virtual training, and creating an online bank of resources and tools.
- **Maintaining flexibility:** PEAS adapted to the government's timelines and shifting schedules, such as those of joint inspections.
- **Responsiveness to government's priorities:** PEAS seized opportunities as they arose. It recognises the need for sustainable, long-term implementation and for incorporating this into the programme design and budgeting.
- **Clear and regular communication:** DES has ensured effective collaboration with PEAS by promptly sharing developments. They also share priorities and provide expertise on government processes.

# Guidance for Similar Government-Non-State Partnerships

## Guidance for Non-State Actors

- Understand and align with government goals, and co-create solutions to reach them
- Combine what you know works with a demand-driven approach. Integrate your established effective practices with a strategy that responds directly to the needs, preferences, and pain points of the government
- Be responsive partners and remain flexible
- Build strong relationships across a department or ministry and be prepared for changes in personnel
- Keep the 'endgame' in mind from the start, and focus on sustainable solutions
- Work in collaboration with others to maximise impact and find synergies

Inspect & Improve aims to support schools to improve student learning outcomes over time, based on existing evidence of a positive relationship between strengthening school management practices and improved learning outcomes. PEAS aims to assess this in future evaluations.

## Endnotes

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