

# CASE STUDY

TIMELINE & GLOSSARY

BACKGROUND OF THE PARTNERSHIP

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERS

FUNDING BREAKDOWN

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

CHALLENGES & RENEWED MOMENTUM

GUIDANCE FOR SIMILAR GOVERNMENT NON-STATE PARTNERSHIPS

ENDNOTES

## Western Cape Collaboration Schools, South Africa



### Categorisation Framework

Education Components Delivered

School Management

Partnership Type

Delivery Partnership for Running Schools

Funding Modality

Government & Non-State Funding

System Level

Provincial

# CASE STUDY

## TIMELINE & GLOSSARY

### BACKGROUND OF THE PARTNERSHIP

### OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

### ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERS

### FUNDING BREAKDOWN

### KEY SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

### IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

### CHALLENGES & RENEWED MOMENTUM

### GUIDANCE FOR SIMILAR GOVERNMENT NON-STATE PARTNERSHIPS

### ENDNOTES

## WESTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA<sup>1</sup>

~7.2 million population



**1470**  
Number of public schools



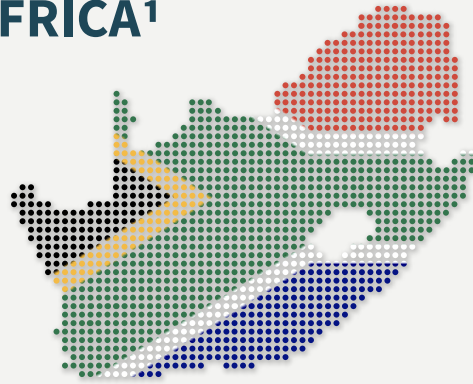
**923**  
Number of no-fee schools<sup>2</sup>



**46072**  
Number of teachers<sup>2</sup>



**1.19 Mn**  
Number of students in public schools<sup>2</sup>



## Glossary

<b>ANC</b>	African National Congress
<b>DGMT</b>	DG Murray Trust
<b>EE</b>	Equal Education
<b>MEC</b>	Member of Executive Council
<b>PSP</b>	Public School Partnerships
<b>SADTU</b>	South African Democratic Teachers Union
<b>SGBs</b>	School Governing Bodies
<b>SOPs</b>	School Operating Partners
<b>WC</b>	Western Cape
<b>WCED</b>	Western Cape Education Department
<b>WCHC</b>	Western Cape High Court

## Timeline of the Partnership Development<sup>345</sup>

**2015**

The WC Member of Executive Council (MEC) for Education signed off on the Collaboration Schools pilot

**2017**

Pilot expanded to seven schools with increase in funding commitment after positive results

**2019**

Teacher union SADTU and Equal Education (EE) took the WC government to court to challenge the provincial law allowing for Collaboration Schools

**2020**

Pilot phase renewed until 2025

**2023**

WC High Court dismissed the applications made by SADTU and EE<sup>6</sup>

**2014-2015**

Members of the WC provincial government and funders visited UK to study the Academy model, which was later adapted for South Africa's public schools

**2016**

Pilot launched in five schools

**2018**

Pilot deemed successful, leading to the WC Provincial School Education Amendment Act 4 of 2018, institutionalising the model now termed Collaboration Schools

**2019-20**

Programme expanded to 11 schools, adapted to tackle challenges

**2022**

First organisations from outside the pilot start adopting the model, while partnering with additional schools

**2024**

SADTU and EE granted leave to appeal the 2023 Western Cape High Court judgement

# CASE STUDY

TIMELINE & GLOSSARY

**BACKGROUND OF THE PARTNERSHIP**

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERS

FUNDING BREAKDOWN

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

CHALLENGES & RENEWED MOMENTUM

GUIDANCE FOR SIMILAR GOVERNMENT NON-STATE PARTNERSHIPS

ENDNOTES

## Background of the Partnership

Despite being among the top spenders on education globally, South Africa struggles with some of the poorest educational outcomes<sup>4</sup>, struggling to manage public schools with limited resources. Even after access to education improved post 1994, issues such as teacher absenteeism, financial mismanagement, and underperforming or unqualified teachers have been rife in the system.<sup>7</sup>

### Issues faced by public schools that persist<sup>8,9,10</sup>

- 1 Overburdened leadership and management**  
Instructional leadership, school culture, and time management issues amid weak institutional functionality and accountability
- 2 Learner deficits**  
Low literacy levels, accumulated learning losses, nutritional stunting, and exposure to trauma
- 3 Teacher capability**  
Limited support, absenteeism, and lack of teachers qualified in the correct language and phase
- 4 School overcrowding and poor infrastructure**  
Overcrowding creates unsafe environments and makes teaching and learning more difficult

In South Africa, school governing bodies (SGBs), which include parent and educator representatives, act as legal entities representing public schools. The legislative framework devolves school governance authority, and some management functions, to these entities.

The legacy of apartheid means that the SGB members in schools that serve low-income communities may be poor themselves and may not have experience in school management or in critical roles of finance and human resources. Mistrust of those from outside the community can be high due to the complex socio-economic legacy of apartheid.<sup>11,12</sup>

**Developed to tackle systemic inequalities inherited from apartheid, the Western Cape government introduced the innovative Collaboration Schools model of school governance and management to improve teaching, learning, and whole school functionality**

The pilot set out to demonstrate effective partnerships, strengthen governance, and capacitate underperforming schools in impoverished communities.



# CASE STUDY

TIMELINE & GLOSSARY

BACKGROUND OF THE PARTNERSHIP

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERS

FUNDING BREAKDOWN

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

CHALLENGES & RENEWED MOMENTUM

GUIDANCE FOR SIMILAR GOVERNMENT NON-STATE PARTNERSHIPS

ENDNOTES

The goal of the Western Collaboration Schools programme is to eventually integrate 10-15% of public schools into this framework and improve the quality of education in underperforming schools.

This was done through pairing schools with education management non-profit organisations that held a 50% vote on SGBs. This allows non-profits the opportunity to be deeply involved in school operations, bringing HR and finance expertise to support school management and governance while also providing skills and development training for staff to ensure sustainability.

While Collaboration Schools model was inspired by aspects of the UK's Academy model (state-funded, self-governing, nonprofit charitable trusts), Collaboration Schools remains distinct, because authority remains vested in SGBs and parents maintain a deciding (majority) vote on contentious issues. The Western Cape Government worked collaboratively with School Operating Partners (SOPs) to improve the performance of schools through Collaboration Schools.



# CASE STUDY

TIMELINE & GLOSSARY

BACKGROUND OF THE PARTNERSHIP

**OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME**  
Implementation Timeline  
Design of the Programme

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERS

FUNDING BREAKDOWN

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

CHALLENGES & RENEWED MOMENTUM

GUIDANCE FOR SIMILAR GOVERNMENT NON-STATE PARTNERSHIPS

ENDNOTES

## Overview of the Programme

### Implementation Timeline

2015

#### WCCS pilot based on Academy model approved

The WC provincial government, including the Premier, and interested funders led by the DG Murray Trust (DGMT) visited the UK to study the Academy model. The model was then adapted for South Africa's public-school context, as a part of which School Operating Partners (SOPs) have a 50% vote on the SGB. The Collaboration Schools pilot was approved for implementation in September 2015, with an aim to address educational challenges in marginalised communities.<sup>3</sup>

2016

#### WCCS pilot implemented

The Western Cape government started the Collaboration Schools Pilot in January 2016 with five schools: three of these schools were existing underperforming public schools, and two were newly built start-up schools. The initial SOPs for the pilot were LEAP Science and Maths School, Mellon Educate, and 2 Oceans Education Foundation. The initial pilot saw positive results for the 2017 academic year, such as increased teaching performance, growing community support, and high demand for enrolment.<sup>2</sup>

2017

#### WCCS pilot expands to 7 schools

Building on initial success, the pilot expanded further. Funders had committed R 75 million of funding towards the project from inception till 2017, further emphasising the commitment of stakeholders towards the project.<sup>3</sup>

# CASE STUDY

TIMELINE & GLOSSARY

BACKGROUND OF THE PARTNERSHIP

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

Implementation Timeline  
Design of the Programme

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERS

FUNDING BREAKDOWN

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

CHALLENGES & RENEWED MOMENTUM

GUIDANCE FOR SIMILAR GOVERNMENT NON-STATE PARTNERSHIPS

ENDNOTES

2018

## Collaboration Schools model institutionalised

Systemic tests<sup>14</sup> and the National Senior Certificate examination (NSC) showed improved results in many Collaboration Schools. The success of the pilot phase led to the Western Cape Provincial School Education Amendment Act 4 of 2018, institutionalising the model termed Collaboration Schools.<sup>4</sup>

2019  
-  
2020

## Overcoming legal hurdles

Collaboration Schools faced hurdles amid growing apprehensions about increased private sector involvement in public education. Legal disputes arose as key stakeholders contested the Western Cape Provincial School Education Amendment Act in court. Teachers' union and activist group, South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) and Equal Education (EE), expressed concerns about potential threats to public education values due to perceptions of increased privatisation.<sup>15</sup>

Despite these challenges, there were positive outcomes, with the programme growing to 11 Collaboration Schools, demonstrating significant improvement in education delivery and community involvement.

2023  
-  
now

## Expansion & adaptation of the programme

Due to positive results from the programme, newer organisations are identifying the merits of the model, and in turn employing it while partnering with additional schools. Several adaptations are developing. For example, SOPs are increasingly focused on relationship building, and capacitation of SGBs and school staff. Government compliance documents are adapted to assist with strategic prioritisation and everyday monitoring. The increased capacity at schools continues to catalyse innovations – particularly reading catchup programmes, and blended (digital) learning models for the public no-fee environment.

In July 2023, the Western Cape High Court dismissed the application by SADTU and EE. In 2024, SADTU and EE were granted leave to appeal the Western Cape High Court's 2023 judgement.

# CASE STUDY

TIMELINE & GLOSSARY

BACKGROUND OF THE PARTNERSHIP

**OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME**

Implementation Timeline  
Design of the Programme

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERS

FUNDING BREAKDOWN

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

CHALLENGES & RENEWED MOMENTUM

GUIDANCE FOR SIMILAR GOVERNMENT NON-STATE PARTNERSHIPS

ENDNOTES

## Design of the Programme

The Collaboration Schools model involves shared responsibility for the management of no-fee public schools, led by the principal and shared by the provincial government, SOPs, and the school community. While the SOPs provide school-level support to teachers and principals, principals retain ultimate responsibility of school operations and management.

SGBs continue to fulfil their governance mandate as outlined in the South African Schools Act, with SOP skills and training to support it. The state continues to provide funding and oversight as it would in ordinary schools, while also maintaining oversight over the Collaboration Schools project. SOPs work closely with schools to determine and meet the school community's needs, which are context dependent.

Integration of support from the WCED and SOPs ensures Collaboration Schools receive necessary funding, infrastructure, and services. Collaboration Schools are given a higher degree of autonomy to foster innovation and improvement in education within the public school system.<sup>3</sup>

### The model includes two kinds of schools <sup>16</sup>



#### Transition schools

Existing schools that need targeted support to improve school management and learning outcomes. The SGBs of these schools partner with SOPs to become Collaboration Schools. Existing educators remain WCED employees, and the schools receive cash transfers for new posts.



#### New schools

Schools established by WCED and governed by SGBs, which partner with SOPs. They receive full funding from WCED to employ all staff.

Overall, this model aims to bring additional education management skills and innovation into the public school system, particularly in no-fee schools, to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

# CASE STUDY

TIMELINE & GLOSSARY

BACKGROUND OF THE PARTNERSHIP

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

Implementation Timeline  
Design of the Programme

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERS

FUNDING BREAKDOWN

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

CHALLENGES & RENEWED MOMENTUM

GUIDANCE FOR SIMILAR GOVERNMENT NON-STATE PARTNERSHIPS

ENDNOTES

To establish a school as a Collaboration School, it is imperative to obtain approval from the School Governing Body (SGB) as stipulated by legislation.<sup>17</sup> Best practices include broad consultations with various stakeholders, including a significant majority of the parent body, staff members, as well as relevant government personnel at the circuit and district levels.

While the Collaboration Schools model concerns the ongoing operation of a school, the building of a new school and a Collaboration model may go hand-in-hand.

**As part of the WCED's Rapid School Build programme to meet the growing demand in the province, communities may take the lead in building their own schools with the department's support. To build a new school, a community must identify the land the school will be built on and raise 60% of the funding for the buildings. The WCED will then supplement the remaining 40%**

Communities that have built schools may want the opportunity to be involved in the school's ongoing and long-term success, and hence have used the Collaboration Schools model to form a trust. This trust then performs the role of an SOP over the lifetime of the school.





# CASE STUDY

TIMELINE & GLOSSARY

BACKGROUND OF THE PARTNERSHIP

**OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME**

Implementation Timeline  
Design of the Programme

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERS

FUNDING BREAKDOWN

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

CHALLENGES & RENEWED MOMENTUM

GUIDANCE FOR SIMILAR GOVERNMENT NON-STATE PARTNERSHIPS

ENDNOTES

Different SOPs offer different models for school improvement in their respective schools, such as teacher development, school leadership support, and HR and finance expertise. Several educational innovations have emanated from SOPs' responsiveness to school communities' needs. These include a digital learning model that responds to the lack of qualified, specialised teachers, physical school capacity, and learners' varying capabilities as well as a three-stream model of education where one school campus provides three different curriculum offerings: technical, vocational, and academic. The technical and academic curriculum are tailored to local industry needs, providing learners with pathways into jobs in their communities after graduating.

Success for Collaboration Schools is measured by a tangible increase in learner outcomes. Because success can look different for each school and takes years to achieve, there are other leading indicators that can be used to measure improved school functionality. Among others, WCED's School Evaluation Authority (SEA) framework identifies objective measures of Leadership and Management, Behaviour and Discipline, Teaching and Learning, and Governance, Parents and Community.

The pilot phase has observed that the timeline for achieving successful learner outcomes can vary.

## Timelines required for different types of school



### Transition schools

May take up to six years to see substantial and sustained improvement results, and the attainment of "quality" may be subject to local contexts and constraints.



### New schools

Can typically aim to achieve measures of quality within three to four years.

# CASE STUDY

TIMELINE & GLOSSARY

BACKGROUND OF THE PARTNERSHIP

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

**ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERS**

FUNDING BREAKDOWN

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

CHALLENGES & RENEWED MOMENTUM

GUIDANCE FOR SIMILAR GOVERNMENT NON-STATE PARTNERSHIPS

ENDNOTES

## Roles & Responsibilities of Partners

The following stakeholders and their responsibilities within the partnership<sup>3</sup> are as follows:

### Government

#### Member of Executive Council for Education & WCED

The responsibilities of the government and associated entities include implementing and overseeing the Collaboration Schools programme. They strengthen public school governance and accountability, and work towards improving education quality in public schools.

Additionally, they provide funding, infrastructure, staff, and services according to policy. They also hold schools and operating partners accountable for outcomes, besides tracking performance of SOPs and providing support to improve learning outcomes.

### Funders

The pilot phase was funded by a consortium of funders who partnered with the Western Cape government to establish and demonstrate the evidence base for Collaboration Schools. The consortium included the DG Murray Trust (acting as lead contracting funder), the Millennium Trust, the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, the Zenex Foundation, FirstRand Foundation, ELMA Philanthropies, Imaginable Futures and the Maitri Trust then joined this group.<sup>18</sup>

While the WCED maintains the standard funding provisions for schools, the funders provide additional funding to support the work and contributions made by the operating partners.

### School Operating Partners (SOPs)

[Common Good Foundation](#), [Mellon Educate](#), [Acorn Education](#), [Education Ally](#), [Axium Education](#), [Bonnievale418](#)

Each SOP partners with one or more schools and offers managerial support in collaboration with the WCED. It provides school-level support to teachers and principals through operational skills, data-driven teaching, teaching resources, professional development, and leadership coaching. SOPs may, through their own fundraising, support the school with additional teaching staff or infrastructure resources.

Besides ensuring school-level expert support, they work side-by-side with SGBs (which they have representatives on) to fulfil the SGB's governance mandate through training and skills.

They present progress to provincial authorities on a quarterly basis and communicate regularly with the education district and circuit managers.

# CASE STUDY

TIMELINE & GLOSSARY

BACKGROUND OF THE PARTNERSHIP

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERS

**FUNDING BREAKDOWN**

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

CHALLENGES & RENEWED MOMENTUM

GUIDANCE FOR SIMILAR GOVERNMENT NON-STATE PARTNERSHIPS

ENDNOTES

## Funding Breakdown

The government provides the same funding that is given to other no-fee public schools,<sup>19</sup> which totals to approximately R20,000 per learner per annum.<sup>20</sup> This is inclusive of educator and other salaries, as well as ‘Norms and Standards’ allocations for stationary, overheads, and basic maintenance.<sup>21</sup>

However, instead of employing educators centrally, the government provides such funding to the SGBs, which then act as the employer of teachers.<sup>22</sup>

Example: SOPs, which are part of SGBs, are funded by the donor group and can cover additional school functionality expenses that a no-fee public school ordinarily would not be able to. For instance, Acorn directly covers security costs by entering into a contract with a security company and making payments directly to them. This is an additional school resource for Apex High School, outside of the government-allocated ‘Norms and Standards’ funding made available to schools.

Apex High School receives approximately R20,000 per child per year from government allocation, and Acorn education fundraises approximately R6,000 per child per year from donors. Their academic results have been among the top in no-fee schools in the province.

## Key Success Factors of the Partnership

### Funding Commitment

Securing long-term investments (5-10 years) from funders who understood the project's nature and who valued sustained impact over quick outcomes was pivotal. Early successes and evidence-based results bolstered ongoing funding support.



# CASE STUDY

TIMELINE & GLOSSARY

BACKGROUND OF THE PARTNERSHIP

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERS

**FUNDING BREAKDOWN**

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

CHALLENGES & RENEWED MOMENTUM

GUIDANCE FOR SIMILAR GOVERNMENT NON-STATE PARTNERSHIPS

ENDNOTES

## **Political Support**



The project benefited significantly from political buy-in from the topmost level in the province. This included support from key government officials for continuity in the programme, ensuring project sustainability and resilience. Most significantly, Collaboration Schools were declared as such in legislation by the government early on.

## **Agile Organisations**



The SOPs have been agile in their ways of working, such as adapting swiftly to the evolving educational and regulatory landscape, which played a crucial role in the programme delivery.

Given the accountability-driven nature of the work, it quickly became apparent that wider familiarisation, consultation, and partnership is necessary with a broad range of stakeholders from the start. These include the broad parent body, as well as the body of educators and staff, and the relevant circuit and district (government) personnel.

## **Strong Relationships & Community Engagement**



Establishing and nurturing robust, long-lasting relationships, particularly with SGBs and principals, proved instrumental in enhancing project outcomes.

## **Leadership Development & Coaching**



Investing in leadership development and providing coaching for principals and training for SGBs emerged as a key success factor. Strengthening leadership capabilities empowered school leaders to cascade positive change through their school management teams, teachers, and then within their communities.



# CASE STUDY

TIMELINE & GLOSSARY

BACKGROUND OF THE PARTNERSHIP

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERS

FUNDING BREAKDOWN

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

**IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME**

CHALLENGES & RENEWED MOMENTUM

GUIDANCE FOR SIMILAR GOVERNMENT NON-STATE PARTNERSHIPS

ENDNOTES

## Impact of the Programme

### 1 Expansion of the Collaboration Schools Programme

The Collaboration Schools project showed promising results, with indications of improved learner outcomes in schools. By 2020, the project had expanded to include 11 schools.<sup>6</sup>

### 2 Improved Academic Achievement

Academic performance, as measured by systemic tests and the National Senior Certificate (NSC) results, notably improved at Collaboration Schools. For instance, Silikamva High School saw **significant progress**, with its NSC pass rate increasing from 40% in 2019 to 93% in 2023 – performance that is equivalent to high-fee-paying school averages.

### 3 WC Provincial School Education Amendment Act Upheld in HC

Despite challenges from Equal Education (EE) and the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), the Western Cape Provincial School Education Amendment Act, which established Collaboration Schools, was upheld by the Western Cape High Court. It was agreed that the Collaboration Schools legislation aligns with constitutional principles and educational improvement goals.<sup>10</sup>

### 4 Government Engagement Led by SOPs

Engagement with the government has transitioned from being donor-driven (i.e. the original donors who engaged with the then-Premier) to being led by the SOPs themselves representing their schools in engagements with government.

### 5 Dedicated Unit to Scale the Programme

The WCED has established a dedicated unit to enhance internal capacity and systems for scaling Collaboration Schools responsibly.<sup>22</sup>

Advocacy efforts at programme level, including influencing legislation and policies, are also currently ongoing.

# CASE STUDY

TIMELINE & GLOSSARY

BACKGROUND OF THE PARTNERSHIP

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERS

FUNDING BREAKDOWN

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

**CHALLENGES & RENEWED MOMENTUM**

GUIDANCE FOR SIMILAR GOVERNMENT NON-STATE PARTNERSHIPS

ENDNOTES

## Challenges & Renewed Momentum

### Challenges to the Partnership

- **Distrust of PPPs**  
Post-apartheid, the influence of unions led to resistance against any performance management of teachers. Some public sentiment has been mistrusting of public-private partnerships, particularly that public schooling may be subjected to non-state interests.
- **Legal Challenges**  
Opposition from advocacy group EE and the SADTU contested the Western Cape Provincial School Education Amendment Act in court, particularly objecting to its provisions regarding Collaboration Schools and donor-funded schools.<sup>5</sup>
- **Lack of Conviction in the Value of External Operators**  
Some government officials did not see the value of external operators in schools and were hesitant to include them in the education department's everyday practices.
- **Impact of SGB turnover on SOPs and Collaboration Schools**  
The composition of SGB parent representatives changes every three years. Different representatives may have different responses to SOPs and the Collaboration Schools model.
- **Government Capacity to Manage Responsible School Transitions**  
The need for standard exit processes and government capacity to manage responsible school transitions was highlighted by a number of terminations – often as the result of disruptive minorities, or SOP underperformance.
- **Context Dependent Scaling**  
Contrary to the Academy School model in the UK, scaling in South Africa required a different approach. Instead of one non-profit supporting large networks of schools, there are many non-profits with varied context-specific offerings supporting a wide range of schools which adds to the complexity of the programme.
- **Slow Progress in Scaling the Programme**  
Building relationships and trust with school communities takes time, which impacts how quickly the programme can scale.

# CASE STUDY

TIMELINE & GLOSSARY

BACKGROUND OF THE PARTNERSHIP

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERS

FUNDING BREAKDOWN

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

CHALLENGES & RENEWED MOMENTUM

GUIDANCE FOR SIMILAR GOVERNMENT NON-STATE PARTNERSHIPS

ENDNOTES

## Renewed Momentum & Prospects

Nine years after the launch of the programme, operating partners face fewer obstacles, leading to increased interest from groups that are willing to fund and support local schools for better outcomes. Increasingly, new partnerships are catalysed by existing local groups that identify a need, and choose to employ the Collaboration Schools Model, serving as the SOP for their school of interest.

SOPs in new schools have been able to make an impact faster than those turning around existing schools. Outside of the Western Cape, the partnership model is growing. Under existing legislation SOPs are “co-opted” onto SGBs rather than given a 50% vote, and drive accountability by working closely with committed government officials to make significant improvements in school functionality and learner results.

“The government has nearly 1,500 schools to manage, the scale is too big for innovation. They said let’s try partnering with the non-profit sector to stimulate innovation, funding and try interventions at a smaller scale. Each Collaboration School has a different model. We now have groups coming to us asking to open Collaboration Schools in their community.”  
*Jana du Plooy, Acorn Education*



# CASE STUDY

TIMELINE & GLOSSARY

BACKGROUND OF THE PARTNERSHIP

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERS

FUNDING BREAKDOWN

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

CHALLENGES & RENEWED MOMENTUM

**GUIDANCE FOR SIMILAR GOVERNMENT NON-STATE PARTNERSHIPS**

ENDNOTES

## Guidance for Governments & Non-state Actors



### Clear Alignment between Operating Partners & the Government

It is imperative to establish a thorough understanding and agreement between operating partners and the government regarding various facets of the collaboration. This includes ensuring alignment on the operating environment, funding structure, and the specific roles, responsibility and accountability of each party involved.

Additionally, clarity is essential concerning matters such as performance management protocols, flexibility in curriculum implementation, and accountability measures, including procedures for exiting the partnership. By achieving such alignment, potential problems or strains on partnership relationships further downstream can be mitigated, ultimately contributing to the success of the project.

### Assess Institutional Capacity

Before embarking on such partnerships, conduct a rigorous evaluation of the involved state entities' institutional capacity to operationalise the programme, including the vetting, commissioning, and oversight of SOPs, as well as the oversight of onboarding and exits.

### Selection of Operating Partners

A thorough analysis of potential operating partners' capacity, relevant experience, and willingness to engage with school communities is necessary during the selection process to ensure commitment and success later.

### Outline Detailed Framework & Selection Criteria

Establishing a detailed framework for state partnerships is essential, accompanied by clear and transparent selection criteria for SOPs. These criteria should encompass considerations of contextual relevance and adherence to effective educational practices.

### Adopting a Relevant Approach & Process

During the recruitment of operating partners, it is important to avoid imposing excessive restrictions on the organisation's proposed model. Instead, emphasis should be placed on adopting contextually relevant and effective approaches that facilitate meaningful collaboration and achieve desired outcomes.



# CASE STUDY

TIMELINE & GLOSSARY

BACKGROUND OF THE PARTNERSHIP

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERS

FUNDING BREAKDOWN

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

CHALLENGES & RENEWED MOMENTUM

GUIDANCE FOR SIMILAR GOVERNMENT NON-STATE PARTNERSHIPS

ENDNOTES

## Endnotes

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# CASE STUDY

## TIMELINE & GLOSSARY

## BACKGROUND OF THE PARTNERSHIP

## OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME

## ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTNERS

## FUNDING BREAKDOWN

## KEY SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

## IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

## CHALLENGES & RENEWED MOMENTUM

## GUIDANCE FOR SIMILAR GOVERNMENT NON-STATE PARTNERSHIPS

## ENDNOTES

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