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Cross-Country Comparative Analysis: Strategic Lessons from Unity Foundation's Internal Stakeholder Groups in the "Preparation for Social Action" Program in Uganda and Colombia

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I Abstract

This comparative case study examines how local dynamics and NGO internal stakeholder structures shape program implementation. Analyzing Unity Foundation's “Preparation for Social Action” program in Uganda and Colombia reveals contrasting institutional contexts: Uganda's centralized system constrains NGOs to institutional alignment and upward accountability, while Colombia's fragmented governance enables autonomous community coordination. The study demonstrates that NGO effectiveness depends on context-specific governance strategies, institutional diplomacy in restrictive environments, and community infrastructure in contexts of limited state capacity. These findings challenge standardized approaches to scaling educational innovations in the “Global South,” arguing instead for governance-informed adaptation.

II Keywords

- “Preparation for Social Action” program
- Cross Country Comparative Case Study
- Local Dynamics
- Uganda
- Colombia
- Stakeholder governance in NGO education programs
- Educational innovations
- Program replication

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Given that English is not the author’s native language, artificial intelligence tools were used to support the research process in the following capacities:

- Transcription of interview audio recordings;
- Translation of interview transcripts from Spanish, German, and local languages into English;
- Linguistic improvements for grammar, spelling, and phrasing to ensure academic clarity and readability.

All AI-generated outputs were reviewed, edited, and verified by the author to preserve the integrity of participants’ original meanings and to ensure fidelity to the qualitative data. No substantive analytical content was generated by AI. All interpretations, theoretical framing, and conclusions remain the author’s own.

V List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
DEO	District Education Officer
FUNDAEC	Fundación para la Aplicación y Enseñanza de las Ciencias
JAC	Junta de Acción Comunal
KN	Kimanya-Ngeyo
LC1	Local Council 1
MDSD	Most Different Systems Design
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
MFEA	Luxembourg's Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PSA	Preparation for Social Action
RELI	Regional Education Learning Initiative
SAT	Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial
ToC	Theory of Change
UF	Unity Foundation
USE	Universal Secondary Education
BIDO	Bahá'í International Development Organization

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have become central actors in international development since the 1980s (Edwards & Hulme, 1996). Since then, NGOs became increasingly involved in various fields of development economics across lower- and middle-income countries, commonly termed the "Global South" to describe regions with institutional capacity constraints rather than solely geographical location (Datos & Connell, 2012). Today, NGOs operate at a scale comparable to bilateral and multilateral donors: World Vision International operates with annual budgets reaching USD 3.15 billion (World Vision International, 2022), while BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), the largest "Southern-based" NGO, manages annual budgets exceeding USD 1.6 billion (BRAC International Holdings, 2020). This scale reflects what scholars' term "pluralized governance," the emergence of non-state actors not merely as passive implementers of donor directives, but as active political agents shaping donor priorities, policy frameworks, evaluation metrics, and accountability norms (Cho, 2024).

In projects initiated by NGO's in the field of education, a critical paradox emerges as NGOs have become indispensable actors filling state capacity gaps, yet their programs rarely embed into national systems or catalysing sustainable reform (Bano, 2020; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). This lack of cooperation between governmental programs and NGO's could be reduced through the substantial budgets and the technical expertise from the NGO's. Especially since NGO's exercise significant power by defining what counts as educational success, determine which priorities receive funding, shape development agendas, and establish accountability standards (Cho, 2024). This power-wielding makes them active political agents, not merely service providers, enabling them to expand educational access in areas where governments do not reach vulnerable populations. However, this dual role reveals a structural fragility as most educational

programs disappear when external funding ends (Bano, 2020; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). This fragility emerges because most of the NGO programs exist parallel to government systems, not within them. Without federal integration and the institutional infrastructure to sustain programs, they keep unsustainable (Bano, 2020; UNESCO, 2023). Despite decades of investment efforts of public and private funded NGOs and international commitments, more than 250 million children worldwide remain without access to schooling (World Bank, 2018). Disparities are concentrated where federal organized education systems face institutional capacity constraints, weak policy implementation mechanisms, and coordination failures across governance levels.

Beyond their political role, NGOs are operating increasingly as innovators with educational methods that are vastly different from conventional instructions. While some NGOs expand access through formal infrastructure (schools, classrooms), others implement alternative educational models emphasizing peer learning and community participation (Uwezo, 2020; Colbert & Mogollón, 1997).

Critically, which educational approach NGOs can implement is not simply a matter of choice, it depends fundamentally on the governance context in which they operate. Understanding if and how alternative educational methods function, therefore it requires examining the local dynamics and government structures, as well as stakeholder arrangements across different institutional contexts, since these can enable or constrain program implementation and sustainability. In this context, local dynamics denote the evolving configuration of local actors, power relations, and institutional arrangements that shape governance processes and program implementation (Pike et al., 2006).

Uganda and Colombia provide the comparative contexts for such examination. Both countries face persistent education inequality and operate extensively together with NGOs to expand educational access and increase the secondary educational system's quality. Critically, they operate within vastly different governance architectures, where Uganda has a centralized state

system, characterized by limited local administrative capacity (e.g., limited budgets and staff at district level) and patron-client networks (where political connections determine resource access) (Golooba-Mutebi, 2008), whereas in contrast Colombia's decentralized education governance system (constitutional reform 1991; Law 715 2001) has more distributed institutional infrastructure.

Although, Uganda and Colombia differ substantially in context and are geographically distant, the “Preparation for Social Action” (“PSA”) program is implemented in both settings through UF and its local partner organizations. “PSA” is an educational approach designed to build youth agency and community engagement through structured study circles, service-oriented projects, and participatory learning activities that enable young people to take collective action in their local communities (Belle, 2013).

In both countries, Luxembourg based NGO “Unity Foundation” (“UF”) acts as partner organization to the local partners, providing knowledge and funding resources to the local organizations to secure funding mechanisms and long-term implementation measures. This comparative context allows an examination of how the “PSA” educational program operates within contrasting local dynamics in Uganda and Colombia giving insights on the impact of local dynamics on the program outcomes. Understanding how local dynamics and internal stakeholder arrangements can enable NGOs to achieve systemic and sustainable impact with clear long-term strategies is the motivation of this study.

1.2 Problem Statement and Relevance

Most educational programs fail to scale beyond initial implementation or getting embedded into national education systems (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014; Brass et al., 2018), despite billions of dollars invested globally. NGOs often design partnerships and programs around assumptions about what works short term. Yet it is their internal dynamics, operating at national, regional, and local levels, that ultimately determine whether programs drive systemic change and secure

lasting implementation, or remain and disconnected from national education policy (Provan & Kenis, 2008; Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Fisher, 1998). “PSA” in Uganda shows this pattern clearly: the program operates independently of district structures, funded entirely by external donors rather than government budgets, with no formal connection to national education policy (Lample, 2018).

Most research evaluates NGOs led education programs at the project level, assessing immediate outputs instead of examining the institutional conditions that determine long-term success (Ebrahim, 2003). This creates a concrete problem in practice as effective programs remain marginal to government systems rather than transforming them, creating a cycle where innovations exist only as external projects rather than becoming part of how education is delivered (Bano, 2020; Provan & Kenis, 2008). Yet educational outcomes involve more than what quantitative outputs might capture. Long-term changes at the community level are typically missed by standardized metrics, as their impact is more difficult to measure (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014; Bano, 2020).

Another challenge is that NGOs rarely report systematically on long-term outcomes since these are no formal reporting requirements (Burger & Owens, 2010; Pratt & Myhrman, 2009). Self-reported data is often inconsistent and incomplete, focusing on short term outputs, making it impossible for governments, researchers, or other stakeholders to understand why some programs successfully integrate into national systems while others remain isolated. This lack of comparable data across contexts leaves the local dynamics that enable or constrain embedding unclear (World Bank, 2022). Yet, few studies systematically examine how government structures at national, regional and local level shape the implementation and outcomes of educational innovative NGO programs across different institutional contexts. This gap is particularly visible in cross-country comparative research, where the same program produces different outcomes across different governance contexts. This requires moving beyond the

binary question of whether NGOs make a difference, towards an understanding of how the specific conditions under which they operate are making a lasting impact.

Addressing this problem matters both for scholarship and operational practice. Academically, this research pushes the debate beyond framing of NGOs as either service providers or advocates (Najam, 1996), situating them instead within multi-level governance frameworks that explain variation in outcomes across different institutional contexts (Provan & Kenis, 2008). This approach allows examination of why the same educational innovation embeds successfully in some institutional contexts but not others.

Operationally, this study offers strategic lessons on how governments, donors, and NGOs can better understand partnerships and take local dynamics into account that enhance accountability, foster meaningful collaboration with federal institutions, and strengthen long-term systemic impact of the program. For governments, understanding how NGO governance structures either support or undermine integration into national education systems is critical for designing policies that strengthen collaboration rather than create parallel programs. In general, for donors, evidence on which partnership approaches produce lasting embedding versus temporary gains directly reshapes funding priorities by understanding what enables strategic investments rather than short-term grants. Moreover, for NGOs, these insights about internal decision-making structures and local dynamics shape concrete guidance for strengthening governance practices. Organizations can use this understanding to enhance accountability, foster collaboration with government, and build long-term sustainability. Ultimately, without understanding these dynamics, billions invested in education produce temporary gains rather than transforming how education systems operate. This research bridges that critical gap.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

This study pursues three interconnected objectives. First, advance scholarly understanding of how local and internal organizational dynamics influence NGO effectiveness in scaling

educational innovations across different institutional contexts. Second, identify the specific governance conditions that enable programs to implement systemically and achieve lasting local embedding versus remaining isolated, project-based interventions. Third, to generate actionable insights for international NGOs and their partners on designing governance-informed collaboration models that enhance systemic impact.

The research questions guiding this study are therefore:

RQ1: "How do Unity Foundation's internal stakeholder groups and local dynamics influence the implementation outcomes of the "Preparation for Social Action" (PSA) program in Uganda and Colombia?"

RQ 2: "What strategic lessons can be drawn for NGOs replicating the program in cross-country operations?"

To address these questions, the study employs a qualitative comparative case study design precisely to understand how local dynamics function across multiple levels within the NGO and the local authorities (Provan & Kenis, 2008). The study investigates locally rooted organizations, the Kimanya-Ngeyo Foundation for Science and Education (KN) in Uganda and the Foundation for the Application and Teaching of the Sciences (FUNDAEC) in Colombia. Here, "locally rooted" refers to organizations that are established and governed within the national context, embedded in local communities and institutions, and primarily accountable to local stakeholders. The applied model in this thesis positions "UF" as a meta-organizational actor that must simultaneously navigate its own internal stakeholder dynamics (international funder priorities, headquarters strategy, field-level realities) and the distinct local dynamics of its partner organizations.

Governance in this thesis is understood as part of local dynamics and is not a fixed institutional structure, but is instead practiced, negotiated, and experienced differently by international donors, headquarters strategists, local NGO leaders, program implementers, and community

participants (Rhodes, 1996). To avoid the bias of capturing only top-level organizational narratives or official policy texts (Creswell & Poth, 2018), this research deliberately engages stakeholders across multiple levels, ensuring that governance is understood as the lived reality of how decisions are made, contested, and adapted across organizations and contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

By comparing how the same program operates within Uganda's and Colombia's different local dynamics, this research can isolate how governance structures specifically, rather than internal factors like program design or organizational capacity, shape effectiveness and embedding prospects (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The analysis examines both formal arrangements (e.g., policies, decision-making structures, accountability mechanisms) and informal dynamics (e.g., stakeholder relationships, power negotiations, contextual constraints) that produce different outcomes from the same program across contexts. This research draws on three complementary theoretical frameworks: 1) Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) for examining how diverse interests shape organizational outcomes, 2) the Network Governance Theory (Provan & Kenis, 2008) for understanding how multi-level decision-making interacts with governance environments, 3) and Theory of Change (Weiss, 1995) for tracing how governance structures condition implementation pathways and actual outcomes. These frameworks are elaborated in detail in the literature review.

2. Literature Review

This literature review responds to the gap identified in the previous chapter by examining how scholarship explains implementation and systematic impact of NGO-led education programs. Rather than treating institutional contexts as fixed, it consolidates debates on stakeholder arrangements and how decisions are made across different levels to develop a framework for understanding why the same program produces different outcomes in Uganda and Colombia.

This framework will then guide the analysis of how local dynamics shape program effectiveness in the following chapters.

2.1 Analytical Framework

The framework integrates three theoretical models: Stakeholder Theory, Network Governance, and Theory of Change, to examine how stakeholder dynamics and decision-making arrangements shape NGO program outcomes across local dynamics. These are complemented by three cross-cutting tensions that structure stakeholder engagement and decision-making across all levels.

The Stakeholder Theory provides the first analytical lens. Freeman's foundational work (1984) posits that organizations have obligations to all parties affected by their operations, fundamentally challenging the premise that firms exist solely to serve shareholders (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). This insight has been expanded and refined by later scholars. Clarkson (1995) distinguished between primary stakeholders (essential to organizational survival) and secondary stakeholders (those who influence or are influenced by the organization), establishing a critical framework for prioritization. More recently, Post, Preston, and Sachs (2002) and Harrison, Bosse, and Phillips (2010) have applied stakeholder theory to complex multi-stakeholder contexts, emphasizing that organizations create value through relationships with multiple constituencies rather than through hierarchical control.

For NGOs, this raises the question to which stakeholders are they accountable? Najam (1996) identifies four stakeholder constituencies: the state (government), the market (donors and service users), civil society (beneficiary communities), and the organization itself with its internal structures. Whereas, Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997) distinguish stakeholders by three analytical dimensions: 1) power, defined as the capacity to influence organizational decisions, 2) legitimacy, the social recognized right to make claims, and 3) urgency, the time-sensitivity of demands. These dimensions determine stakeholder salience, the degree to which

organizations prioritize attending to stakeholder claims. Stakeholders possessing all three dimensions (high power, legitimacy, and urgency) therefore achieve the highest salience.

However, critical scholarship challenges the static treatment this stakeholder theory. Damak-Ayadi (2005) notes that salience may be treated as fixed rather than dynamic. More recent scholarship on stakeholder theory emphasizes that stakeholder interests are contested and fluid, shifting across time and context as power relations evolve (Mitchell et al., 2017). Eesley and Lenox (2006) demonstrate that salience depends not only on stakeholder attributes but also on organizational requests and context, a dynamic especially important in complex institutional environments where competing pressures reshape stakeholder voice (Schiffling & Piecyk, 2014). Contemporary developments emphasize that organizational purpose emerges from the goals, needs, and interests of stakeholders, and that organizations function as tools through which enfranchised stakeholders pursue shared aims, raising critical questions about which stakeholders are included in decision-making and how value is distributed across different stakeholder groups (McGahan, 2023).

Critically, power imbalances between "Global North" and "Global South" organizations, driven by funding dependencies and resource control, create structural barriers to balanced stakeholder engagement (Bradley, 2017; Lister, 1999; Thrandardottir, 2017). NGOs from the "Global North" and international donors, accumulate disproportionate power to define organizational priorities, evaluation metrics, and acceptable implementation approaches. By contrast, locally rooted NGOs and community stakeholders in the "Global South" possess greater legitimacy and contextual knowledge yet face asymmetrical power relations that constrain their ability to shape program design and adaptation (Bradley, 2017). Recent empirical research on international and local NGO collaboration demonstrates that stakeholder pressure (e.g., funding conditions, reporting requirements), particularly from donors, significantly shapes how partnerships balance international oversight with local autonomy (Moshtari, 2024). This

research shows that effective collaboration requires acknowledging local partners' complementary roles and building genuine partnership capacity rather than hierarchical command-and-control relationships, a finding directly relevant to understanding how international NGOs can function as accompaniment partners rather than directive leaders.

Network Governance Theory provides the second analytical lens for understanding how organizations coordinate stakeholder engagement and adapt decision-making across different local dynamics (Provan & Kenis, 2008; Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; Sorensen & Torfing, 2009). In this thesis, the national level refers to policy frameworks and macro-institutional arrangements. The regional level captures intermediate coordination structures that mediate between national directives and local delivery. The local level refers to community-based decision-making and the operational sites where programs are implemented.

Local dynamics are understood as the formal and informal systems through which decisions are made, resources allocated, and accountability ensured across organizational networks, shaped by power relations and contextual constraints (Rhodes, 1996; Pike et al., 2006; Tamtik & Colorado, 2022). These operate within network governance structures that coordinate action across organizational levels (Provan & Kenis, 2008). These governance levels are interdependent, whereas national policies shape regional options, regional coordination determines local implementation possibilities, and local feedback can trigger adaptation at higher levels, though power asymmetries often severely limit upward influence from peripheral actors (Rhodes, 1996; Tamtik & Colorado, 2022; Schakel, 2020). Critics of network governance theory note that Provan and Kenis's three governance modes can oversimplify coordination in practice. Networks often operate in messier, hybrid arrangements that shift fluidly rather than fitting neatly into predefined categories (Hermansson, 2016; Wang et al., 2023). Recent scholarship on hybrid network governance demonstrates that organizations operating across multiple levels must navigate complex coordination dilemmas where different institutional

logics and stakeholder interests compete (Schuster, 2025). Moreover, multi-level dynamics face inherent “coordination dilemmas” where shared norms break down and interjurisdictional blockages constrain joint action (Hooghe & Marks, 2020). Institutional contexts that prioritize efficiency often conflict with those that prioritize democratic accountability and inclusivity. This tension arises because efficiency relies on streamlined, rapid decision-making, which often necessitates bypassing the time-consuming consultation and consensus-building processes that inclusivity requires (Faludi, 2011). Consequently, local decision-making systems must often choose between responsiveness (speed) and representativeness (voice), a trade-off that defines the contrast between Uganda’s rigid centralization and Colombia’s adaptive autonomy.

NGO education programs operate within networks linking government actors, schools, communities, and funders. Provan and Kenis (2008) identify three distinct modes through which these are coordinated. 1) Participant-governed networks rely on collective coordination through consensus-based mechanisms. In these mechanisms, shared decision-making depends on the involvement and commitment of member organizations. 2) Lead-organization networks designate one principal actor as the central coordinator, creating centralized decision-making with asymmetrical power distribution. 3) Network administrative organizations employ a dedicated entity to manage coordination across the network, a model increasingly used for complex multi-sectoral issues requiring sustained coordination infrastructure (van Oord et al., 2023). Recent scholarship confirms that these three modes remain foundational, though local dynamics often require networks to combine different coordination modes, shifting between hierarchical control and participatory decision-making depending on context and available resources (van den Oord et al., 2023). Complexity arises because jurisdiction and authority are distributed across multiple centers of decision-making, where hierarchical and horizontal power relations coexist simultaneously (Tamtik & Colorado, 2022). As a result of the interconnection

between the dynamics of decision-making, choices at one level can reshape coordination efforts at others (Bayeni, 2018).

Theory of Change (ToC) provides the third analytical lens for understanding how program activities, embedded within specific local dynamics and institutional contexts, connect to intended outcomes (Weiss, 1995). It makes explicit the assumptions and steps connecting program activities to outcomes, requiring examination of whether national policies align with program approaches, whether regional governance structures support implementation and what assumptions the program makes about community participation and stakeholder engagement (Weiss, 1995; Patton, 2011; Funnell & Rogers, 2011). Program theories are rarely simply structured. They involve various actors, nested assumptions about behavior change, and expectations about institutional support and community participation.

Recent scholarship stresses that developing a ToC should be a participatory act, where stakeholders themselves shape the pathways, not just external experts (Belcher et al., 2024; Pasanen & Barnett, 2019). The rationale is that a ToC imposed from the outside often lacks validity. By involving local stakeholders, the ToC captures the complex, hidden causal mechanisms that drive change in that specific context, thereby preventing the “logic gaps” that lead to a lack of success of the program. However, scholars caution against “confusing accountability with hope,“ ,“ as frameworks can become donor compliance boxes rather than genuine tools for reflection and adaptation, when not properly considered (Vogel, 2012).

Moreover, critics claim that ToCs documents rarely capture the reality of program implementation. More precise, the rigid logic models often fail when assumptions prove unfounded in local contexts (Innovation Network, 2010). Recent scholars advocate for “adaptive” ToCs that stakeholders can iteratively revise as they learn and encounter unanticipated implementation barriers (Patton, 2011). This adaptive approach is particularly critical in NGO education programs operating across multiple government contexts, where

local dynamics create fluid and sometimes contradictory implementation conditions (Walden, 2013; Carrier, 2020). Participatory ToC development is particularly important for NGO education programs where beneficiary communities are often excluded from designing the program. Their absence from ToC development itself signals a governance failure that undermines program legitimacy (Brummel et al., 2025; Low, 2020) and long-term systemic impact. Fundamentally, whether theorized pathways produce change depends on three conditions: local contexts must support the proposed changes, stakeholders must actively engage and commit to implementation, and institutional systems must reinforce rather than contradict program approaches (Pellegrini et al., 2025; Gaventa & Barrett, 2010).

However, strong participatory and adaptive ToC design alone cannot guarantee implementation success. Rather, implementation depends on whether local dynamics and institutional conditions support the planned change pathways. ToC development creates assumptions that must be tested in specific contexts. When stakeholders are excluded, these assumptions remain untested until implementation failure reveals the gaps (Weiss, 1995; Patton, 2011). When institutional policies contradict program approaches, actors face competing mandates that can lead to reluctance, delayed adoption, or incomplete embedding of change (Coburn, 2004; Anderson, 2018). Research demonstrates that interconnections between program activities, prerequisite conditions, and intended outcomes in complex interventions are often underestimated when context and stakeholder barriers are not considered, making it essential to understand both the design of the ToC and the barriers to implementation to explain why theorized pathways sometimes fail to produce intended change (Pellegrini et al., 2025; Gaventa & Barrett, 2010; Vigsnes et al., 2024). If national policies contradict program approaches, institutional actors (teachers, administrators, government officials) become reluctant to adopt reforms because they face a loyalty conflict. They must decide whether to prioritize the national policy mandate (which may have enforcement mechanisms) or the program's approach (which

may lack institutional power). This creates risk and uncertainty, making actors cautious about embedding changes into their practice (Anderson, 2018; Coburn, 2004).

Three persistent tensions cut across all governance levels and shape how stakeholders engage with and influence program implementation: The first tension is between upward and downward accountability. Ebrahim (2003) identifies upward accountability (donors, international headquarters and funding sources) as structurally distinct from downward accountability to beneficiary communities and local stakeholders. Upward accountability typically operates through formalized mechanisms including reporting requirements, financial audits, performance metrics, and contractual obligations. These are backed by consequences such as funding withdrawal or contract termination (Agyemang et al., 2017; Ebrahim, 2003). Downward accountability remains largely informal, lacking enforcement mechanisms or formal performance consequences, even though it is essential to program legitimacy and stakeholder engagement (Noble et al., 2025). Empirical research on NGO practice in multiple contexts demonstrates this asymmetry. Agyemang et al. (2017) found that in Ghana and Uganda, upward accountability mechanisms dominate organizational practice, particularly in contexts where donor funding is precarious or competitive.

However, scholars debate whether this tension is inherent to NGO dependance on external funding or shaped by local governance arrangements and stakeholder power dynamics. Keating (2017) argues that proliferating accountability mechanisms, while well-intentioned, can paradoxically undermine organizational effectiveness by subordinating community priorities to donor agendas. Research on NGO monitoring and evaluation practices reveals that staff often experience accountability reporting as a compliance burden rather than a genuine reflection tool, and that donors themselves rarely use reported data to inform strategic decisions (Liverani et al., 2022). Scholars remain divided on whether this disconnect is structural or context dependent. Bradley (2017) argues that the tension between compliance and learning may be

addressable through governance design, while Lister (1999) contends it is inherent to external funding dependence. This theoretical debate remains unresolved in literature.

A second tension concerns the nature of community participation in development programs. Gaventa (2006) and Cornwall (2004) distinguish between invited and claimed participation. Invited participation takes the form of formal mechanisms provided by organizations and governments like consultation meetings, beneficiary feedback mechanisms, and community committees (Cornwall, 2004; Gaventa, 2006). Created participation emerges through autonomous communities organizing development programs around their own interests rather than in response to external organizational invitations (Gaventa, 2006). However, scholars caution that invited spaces often reproduce existing hierarchies and serve to legitimize predetermined outcomes rather than enable genuine voice (Cornwall, 2004; Gaventa, 2006). Cooke & Kothari (2001) argue that participatory approaches can become "tyrannical" when facilitators override existing legitimate decision-making structures and co-opt community voices to advance externally defined agendas rather than genuine local priorities. Gaventa (2006) argues that where stakeholder participation occurs, the real power relations beneath participatory rhetoric are revealed, since those who create spaces are more likely to exercise power within them. This distinction between invited and claimed spaces has become increasingly important in participation literature as scholars recognize that formal participation mechanisms do not necessarily indicate genuine stakeholder agency or influence over program decisions.

A third tension concerns the alignment of policies and structures across local dynamics. Bayeni (2018) examines how national policies, regional arrangements, and local structures interact to shape implementation. When these levels align, stakeholders face a coherent institutional environment that enables coordinated action. When contradictions emerge, stakeholders face competing pressures that constrain the pathways through which program outcomes materialize

(Bayeni, 2018). Schakel (2020) extends this analysis, showing that vertical policy misalignment particularly affects intermediate governance structures, where regional actors must simultaneously comply with national mandates and respond to local conditions. This creates what Tamtik and Colorado (2022) term “governance bottlenecks”, moments where authority and resources flow through regional structures that lack alignment with either national policy or local capacity. The literature suggests that vertical policy alignment is neither static nor inevitable but rather emerges through ongoing negotiation among actors at different levels. It is constrained by institutional power asymmetries and resource distribution (Rhodes, 1996; Schakel, 2020).

2.2 Colombia: Governance, Stakeholders, and Education NGOs

2.2.1 National Level

Rural students lag urban peers by 31 points in mathematics, 37 points in reading, and 30 points in science on standardized assessments (Rodríguez-Gómez, 2024), a gap roughly equivalent to one to one-and-a-half years of schooling (OECD, 2021). These gaps are driven primarily by school characteristics including student-teacher ratios, infrastructure quality, and teacher capacity rather than family background factors (Rodríguez-Gómez, 2024). Approximately 10% to 15% of rural school-age children remain completely out of school, with secondary education completion rates significantly lower in peripheral regions (Rincón et al., 2023).

Colombia's civil society is exceptionally dense, with approximately 296,000 registered organizations, the highest per-capita concentration in North or South America apart from the United States (Evans, 2016). Within the education sector, NGOs perform a dual role. They serve both as supplementary service providers, filling gaps where state capacity proves insufficient, and as pedagogical innovators proposing alternative, locally responsive models rooted in participatory learning (Gebremedhin et al., 2023). However, as Abozaglo (2009) argues,

“insufficient cohesion and coordination among civil society sectors severely limits NGO participation in policy dialogues as unified actors.”

The national governance structures that formally govern education establish the parameters through which all actors operate. Law 715 (2001) fundamentally reshaped Colombia's education governance by transferring administrative implementation authority for primary and secondary education to municipalities and departments. The national Ministry of Education retained policy authority, while implementation was dispersed across 32 departments and 1,102 municipalities (Chegwin et al., 2021). Mayors gained formal decision-making authority over education budgets and teacher hiring (Lowden, 2014). Certified municipalities (populations >100,000) gained greater autonomy, while smaller municipalities retained departmental oversight (Elacqua, 2021). This distribution of authority, with policy control retained centrally and implementation dispersed locally, characterizes what network governance literature identifies as a lead-organization structure (Provan & Kenis, 2008). Consequently, different actors, such as the Ministry, municipalities, and NGOs, occupy distinct positions in Colombia's education policy system, with varying degrees of formal authority and policy influence (Provan & Kenis, 2008; Chegwin et al., 2021).

Decentralization provided municipal governments with potential space for locally responsive education approaches. The organization Fundación Escuela Nueva demonstrated that participatory pedagogy generated significant rural student achievement gains (Colbert & Arboleda, 1989; McEwan, 1998). “FUNDAEC”'s Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT), an alternative secondary program for rural youth, similarly demonstrates how municipal discretion enabled pedagogical innovation (Robinson, 2015).

Yet national policy frameworks simultaneously tightened, constraining the discretion decentralization created. Centralized curriculum frameworks and standardized national assessments, such as “Todos Aprender” teacher training programs, reflect what Morales-Javela

& Sánchez-Santamaría (2023) identify as “centralized pedagogical choices” designed with limited adaptation space. Research on multi-level education governance demonstrates that where national curricula structure implementation expectations, locally responsive approaches face institutional pressure toward standardization (Rhodes, 1996).

Municipal governments operate within an accountability structure shaped by multiple stakeholders. Municipalities must satisfy central government reporting requirements and compliance metrics, as the national government controls policy frameworks and budget allocation rules (Chegwin et al., 2021). Funding allocation mechanisms emphasize capitation grants partly based on poverty indicators (Chegwin et al., 2021). Research on multi-level governance in education identifies this pattern as characteristic of lead-organization structures, where implementing organizations face asymmetrical accountability to central authorities (Provan & Kenis, 2008). Taken together, these experiences show Colombia has a long history of NGO-led pedagogical innovation within decentralized systems, providing precedent for community-based learning initiatives (Colbert & Mogollón, 1997).

2.2.2 Regional Level

Within Colombia's broader territorial divide between urban centers and rural periphery, the Caribbean region exemplifies what Bonet and Meisel (2008) characterize as the country's “institutional periphery.” Unlike the industrialized Andean interior, Caribbean departments have historically experienced lower state administrative capacity and higher poverty levels (Bonet & Meisel, 2008). The limited private sector presence in these departments makes the state a dominant economic actor, shaping how public institutions, including education, are governed (Aguilera-Díaz, 2021). The Caribbean region, comprising departments such as Sucre, Córdoba, Atlántico, and others, represents a distinct governance context within Colombia's decentralized education system.

Sucre and Córdoba are Caribbean departments characterized by governance structures established under Law 715's decentralization. In both Sucre and Córdoba, most municipalities fall into the non-certified category, meaning educational administration remains primarily a departmental responsibility (Elacqua, 2021). This administrative structure concentrates decision-making authority at the regional level, where departmental "Secretariats of Education" manage education policy implementation across dispersed rural municipalities, creating significant principal-agent coordination challenges (World Bank, 2009). The fiscal structure established by Law 715 creates transfer dependence, with departments relying heavily on centralized government transfers for education financing (World Bank, 2009).

Educational disparities in Caribbean departments mirror broader Colombian rural-urban patterns. Rural schools in these regions exhibit higher student-teacher ratios, inferior physical infrastructure, and lower teacher quality compared to urban centers and capital cities (Rodríguez-Gómez, 2024). School characteristics account for over 40% of the rural-urban performance gap, indicating that infrastructure, teacher quality, and administrative capacity are critical factors in educational outcomes (Rodríguez-Gómez, 2024). Caribbean departments, including Sucre and Córdoba, are ranked among the poorest in Colombia, with education quality consequently constrained by limited municipal fiscal resources and capacity (Padilla et al., 2015).

Education governance in Caribbean departments is shaped significantly by political dynamics. Scholars identify clientelist capture as a defining feature of regional education governance, where educational positions and contracts serve as instruments of political patronage rather than professional advancement (Escobar, 2002). Teacher recruitment, administrative assignments, and resource allocation at the departmental and municipal levels are influenced by political considerations, affecting both governance structures and implementation capacity (Fergusson et al., 2023). Regional Secretariats of Education function as political actors that simultaneously

manage compliance with national policy requirements and navigate local political dynamics, creating tensions between technical governance requirements and political priorities at the regional level (Fergusson et al., 2023).

The interaction of structural constraints, transfer dependence, non-certified municipal status, and political dynamics creates significant challenges for regional education governance in Caribbean departments. Yet translating national policy directives into effective rural implementation remains constrained by limited regional administrative capacity and resources (World Bank, 2009). Research on decentralized education governance demonstrates that regional administrative tiers must simultaneously manage compliance with national policy requirements and respond to local implementation realities, particularly in contexts of limited capacity (Chegwin et al., 2021). This multi-level coordination challenge is particularly acute in the Caribbean region, where weak regional institutional capacity intersects with structural poverty and limited local resources (Bonet & Meisel, 2008).

NGOs have become significant education actors in Caribbean departments, addressing identified gaps through supplementary service provision and educational innovation (Gebremedhin et al., 2023). Scholars examining NGO roles in decentralized education systems identify them as important implementers in contexts where state capacity is limited, though their effectiveness depends on alignment with regional governance structures and stakeholder coordination (Bano, 2020; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). The presence of NGO-led education programs in Sucre and Córdoba reflects broader patterns in Colombia where civil society organizations complement state education provision in structurally disadvantaged regions.

Within these governance constraints, pedagogical innovations designed to address rural education challenges have been implemented by NGOs across the region. Programs combining community engagement with locally responsive pedagogy respond to documented limitations

in state capacity to implement uniform national curricula in rural areas (Colbert & Mogollón, 1997; Lopes Cardozo et al., 2016).

2.2.3 Local Level

Local governance in rural Colombia is shaped by two interconnected challenges: compromised formal institutions and systematic youth exclusion. Young people in conflict-affected rural territories often experience themselves as “objects” of external decisions rather than agents capable of shaping their futures (Lopes Cardozo et al., 2016).

Central to this landscape are the “Juntas de Acción Comunal” (JACs), Colombia’s primary community governance bodies. Established in 1958 to bridge the gap between the state and isolated rural territories, “JAC”s are legally the principal vehicle for participatory democracy and public works execution (Gáfaro, 2014). However, in the context of the “state vacuum,” (e.g. absence of effective state institutions) these bodies have become double-edged swords. Research indicates that in many conflict-affected regions, “JAC”s have been co-opted by local political elites as instruments of clientelist control or captured by non-state armed groups to enforce social order (Gáfaro, 2014; Escobar, 2002; CNMH, 2013). This capture creates a 'participation trap' for youth. Not only are “JAC”s frequently dominated by adult-centric hierarchies that view young people as passive beneficiaries rather than decision-makers, but their politicization also makes them dangerous spaces for genuine activism (NIMD, 2025; Bonet & Meisel, 2008). Consequently, the “PSA” program operates consciously outside this formal structure, in “claimed spaces” (Gaventa, 2006) where youth can organize safely without the baggage of traditional clientelist politics.

Education provision at the local level reflects these governance challenges. Rural schools operated by the Colombian state face significant resource constraints: insufficient teaching materials, limited professional development, inadequate infrastructure, and high teacher turnover (OECD, 2018; Rodríguez-Gómez, 2024). Beyond state-provided education, rural

communities have limited access to high-quality alternatives. Private school options are rare and financially inaccessible to low-income families (Colbert & Mogollón, 1997). In Caribbean departments, economic marginalization is more severe than national averages, with extremely limited youth employment opportunities beyond primary education, intensifying the education access crisis (Bonet & Meisel, 2008; Aguilera-Díaz, 2021). This gap has created space for community-based and non-governmental educational initiatives. Organizations including "Fundación Escuela Nueva" have developed models combining participatory pedagogy, community-based teacher training, and multi-grade classroom organization to improve rural education quality (Colbert & Mogollón, 1997).

Given institutional constraints in rural Colombia, communities organize through alternative mechanisms: community-based organizations, neighborhood associations, religious groups, and informal leadership networks (Vargas Castillo, 2019). These alternative coordination mechanisms allow residents to address local needs and mobilize collective action, particularly in contexts where formal institutions are captured by political or criminal actors.

Community-based educational approaches combine participatory pedagogy with community governance, positioning youth as active agents in knowledge construction (Colbert & Mogollón, 1997; Lopes Cardozo et al., 2016). Such programs function through participant-governed networks where authority is shared among autonomous actors and community members rather than concentrated in hierarchical institutions (Provan & Kenis, 2008). Research demonstrates that when programs establish governance structures with direct community participation and accountability, they address documented gaps in state educational capacity while maintaining community autonomy (Bano, 2020; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014).

In Caribbean departments, where local governance is particularly constrained, patterns of institutional weakness and limited education access create conditions where community-based approaches address documented gaps in formal state capacity. Youth out-migration from

Caribbean rural areas represents both an individual response to economic constraints and a consequence of limited governance capacity to offer meaningful youth participation in community decisions (Baliki et al., 2019; Díaz Baca et al., 2024).

Programs such as the “PSA” exemplify such approaches, operating through claimed spaces and participant-governed networks that establish direct community accountability (Escobar, 2002; Fergusson et al., 2023; Kwauk & Robinson, 2016). Research on NGO-led education programs demonstrates that approaches combining pedagogical innovation with community-based governance operate effectively in contexts of institutional weakness (Bano, 2020; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). While rigorous “PSA” data are limited, its predecessor SAT has served over 300,000 students across Latin America since the 1980s, with studies documenting 45% higher test scores in SAT villages compared to state-run rural schools (Brookings Institution, 2016).

2.3 Uganda: Governance, Stakeholders, and Education NGOs

2.3.1 National Level

Uganda's education system is characterized by profound disparities in learning outcomes and educational access between urban and rural populations. Research documents that urban students consistently outperform rural peers in literacy and numeracy by significant margins (Uwezo, 2021). Secondary school completion rates in the poorest quintiles hover near 5%, compared to over 40% in wealthy urban centers (Naamara et al., 2017). These disparities reflect deeper structural inequalities: rural schools face severe resource constraints including insufficient teaching materials, inadequate physical infrastructure, high teacher turnover, and limited access to qualified educators (Werner, 2011; Molyneaux, 2011). Uganda's NGO sector comprises over 14,000 registered organizations (Larok, 2012), many operating in education to fill gaps left by limited state provision in peripheral areas. Research documents that many NGOs function simultaneously as service substitutes addressing state gaps and as pedagogical

innovators attempting to introduce student-centered approaches within the formal system (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010; Uwezo, 2020).

The Universal Secondary Education (USE) policy, introduced in 2007, established a dual governance structure in which one free government school per sub-county operates alongside fee-paying secondary schools (Molyneaux, 2011). Within this framework, the Ministry of Education and Sports enforces regulatory requirements for school recognition, including certified teachers, standard classrooms, and regulated timetables. Research on curriculum standardization and educational flexibility documents that such standardization can create tensions between regulatory compliance and pedagogical flexibility, particularly for programs serving marginal populations (OECD, 2024; Bullard, 2023). Centralized, test-driven systems that prioritize standardized outcomes disadvantage marginalized learners who benefit from adaptive, flexible instruction (OECD, 2023). Teachers in such systems often feel unprepared to address the diverse needs of disadvantaged students without flexibility to adapt curriculum and pedagogy (OECD, 2023). In practice, NGO-led education programs operate along two distinct pathways: some function within registered schools as supplementary programs, while others establish autonomous learning structures outside formal registration, using community tutors and flexible scheduling (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010). This regulatory duality enables alternative models to operate while maintaining the Ministry's standardization requirements.

Uganda's civil society operates within a distinctive funding environment characterized by heavy international donor involvement. Rather than coordinating horizontally with each other, NGOs coordinate primarily with donors, a pattern scholarship terms “disconnected density” (Larok, 2012; Barr et al., 2005). Donor funding channels through two mechanisms: core program contributions directly managed by NGOs, or donor-initiated project funding requiring NGOs to implement specified activities (Bougheas et al., 2022). Simultaneously, the Government of Uganda encourages NGO partnerships in service delivery while maintaining direct involvement

in education through the Ministry (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010). This creates a governance configuration where the Ministry, international donors, and NGOs operate within overlapping mandates and funding streams (Bougheas et al., 2022).

Uganda's education system operates as a centralized Lead-Organization network (Provan & Kenis, 2008), in which the Ministry retains policy authority while delegating implementation through registered schools and donor-supported programs (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2023). The Ministry's regulatory authority and legal mandate establish the parameters within which international donors and local NGOs operate (Mitchell et al., 1997). This authority is reinforced by the "Uganda National Examination Board" (UNEB), which controls school performance through standardized national exams that directly affect funding, teacher tenure, and institutional standing (Werner, 2011; ISER, 2022). Schools consequently operate under intense upward accountability pressure to maximize exam performance, a dynamic well-documented in research on high-stakes examination systems. Rural communities, however, prioritize practical, employable skills. This creates misalignment between the national curriculum's emphasis on academic content and community demand for vocational preparation (Molyneaux, 2011).

Programs operating outside the formal registration framework exemplify alternative approaches to secondary education in Uganda, including the "PSA." Research on community-facilitated education identifies specific conditions for effectiveness: 1) structured facilitator training in teaching methods, literacy techniques, and classroom management, 2) mentoring ensuring alignment with national curriculum objectives, and 3) integration of local knowledge and community context into instruction (Government of Uganda, 2023; Mbalinda et al., 2011). Evidence demonstrates that such approaches achieve higher student engagement than formal schools and effectively reach learners historically excluded by standardized schooling (Blaak, 2013; Ocan, 2017). These programs operate as "claimed spaces" (Gaventa, 2006), establishing

autonomy from centralized Ministry authority and examination-driven accountability. This structural autonomy enables pedagogical flexibility and locally responsive instruction for rural learners (Bano, 2020). However, their relationship to the formal system remains ambiguous: while filling documented gaps in rural secondary education access, they operate outside the regulatory framework that legitimizes formal schooling (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2023).

Research on NGO-led education in constrained governance environments documents that programs combining pedagogical innovation with community-based implementation can address gaps in state educational capacity while maintaining distinctive learning approaches (Bano, 2020; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). The centralized nature of Uganda's education governance creates distinct constraints for alternative models. Programs that maintain structural autonomy while sustaining community and state legitimacy demonstrate stronger sustainability outcomes (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014).

2.3.2 Regional Level

The Busoga Sub-region (Jinja, Kamuli, Buikwe districts) exemplifies Uganda's territorial divide between urban-centered prosperity and dispersed rural periphery. Despite historical significance as a trade hub, these territories face weak institutional infrastructure, limited private sector presence, and poverty rates nearly double the national average (Namukasa, 2007; UBOS, 2024). Given these structural deficits, the district education system becomes the critical institutional mechanism through which policy and resources reach rural learners. Within Uganda's decentralization framework, districts serve as the primary education administration unit under the “Local Government Act” (Kawala, 2018). This administrative deconcentrating focuses decision-making authority at the “District Education Office” (DEO) level while creating fiscal dependence: conditional central transfers provide over 90% of budgets (ISER, 2018; World Bank, 2020). However, resources are often captured or diverted before reaching

schools, further restricting available funds for locally responsive implementation (Reinikka & Svensson, 2004). The combination of centralized authority, limited local fiscal autonomy, and resource loss defines the governance environment for Busoga and other peripheral regions (Namukasa, 2007; Makaaru, 2015).

Regional education disparities mirror broader rural-urban patterns. Rural schools in Busoga exhibit higher student-teacher ratios, inferior physical infrastructure, and lower teacher quality compared to urban Kampala (Naamara et al., 2017; Adipala et al., 2023). Research confirms that these structural deficits account for a substantial portion of performance gaps (Rodríguez-Gómez, 2024). Poverty compounds these disadvantages. The Busoga region experiences poverty rates of 44 to 49%, significantly limiting municipal fiscal resources for education (UBOS, 2024; Kawala, 2018). Additionally, regional disparities are gendered. Namatende-Sakwa (2019) documents how the rigid formal curriculum alienates female students through patriarchal norms, contributing to differential dropout patterns across genders.

Political patronage significantly shapes regional education governance through what scholars' term "clientelist capture". Educational positions, teacher recruitment, and administrative assignments become instruments of political patronage rather than professional advancement (Kjær & Muwanga, 2016; Fergusson et al., 2023). The DEO's technical authority is further constrained by a central government appointee who controls district finances. This dual hierarchy creates what scholars term the "Political-Technical Split": technical approval from the DEO can be superseded by political decisions from the CAO if implementation does not align with central government priorities (Green, 2010). This creates profound accountability failures. Evidence appears in teacher absenteeism: while national rates average 21 to 30%, rural districts experience rates of 30 to 56%, reflecting politically protected positions that prevent discipline (Wilke, 2019; Bold et al., 2017). Additionally, DEOs often retreat into "bureaucratic

performativity," focusing inspections on visible compliance (infrastructure, classrooms) rather than learning outcomes (Lewis, 2017), a response reflecting their constrained authority.

The interaction of poverty, transfer dependence, political patronage, and constrained capacity creates a fundamental governance contradiction. Regional administrative tiers must simultaneously manage compliance with centralized policy directives and respond to local realities. Yet they lack the resources and autonomy to do both effectively (Chegwin et al., 2021; Bashaasha et al., 2011). This "responsibility without power" dynamic is particularly acute in Busoga. Weak institutional capacity, minimal fiscal autonomy, and political interference converge to create systemic governance failure. In such contexts, policy ambitions far exceed implementation capacity (Makaaru, 2015; ISER, 2018; Kawala, 2018; Namukasa, 2007).

NGOs have become significant actors in regional education, addressing documented gaps through supplementary service provision and pedagogical innovation. Their effectiveness depends on alignment with regional governance structures and stakeholder coordination (Bano, 2020; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). Brass (2016) describes regional NGO roles as "service provision as governance." NGOs effectively substitute for state functions due to capacity gaps, creating complex dependencies where organizations fill delivery roles while remaining dependent on external funding (Bougheas et al., 2022; Uwezo, 2021).

Educational innovations addressing rural education gaps have been implemented by NGOs and community organizations, responding to documented misalignment between state capacity and rural needs. Programs combining community engagement with locally responsive education directly address the tension between centralized academic curricula and community demand for practical, employable skills (Colbert & Mogollón, 1997; Molyneaux, 2011). Rural communities prioritize vocational preparation aligned with local livelihoods, yet national curricula remain oriented toward academic knowledge (Namatende-Sakwa, 2019; Lopes Cardozo et al., 2016). This educational mismatch, combined with institutional capacity gaps and political barriers,

creates space for alternative education models that operate outside formal systems while maintaining direct community engagement and livelihood-aligned instruction.

2.3.3 Local Level

Local dynamics in rural Busoga are shaped by two interconnected challenges: personalized gatekeeping by LC1 leadership and systematic youth marginalization. The LC1 is designed as Busoga's primary grassroots governance institution for community participation, but frequently operates through personal authority rather than transparent, merit-based criteria (Golooba-Mutebi, 2008; Kjaer, 2019). Local initiatives, including education programs, cannot operate without the LC1 Chairperson's permission. Yet approval depends on individual preferences and relationships rather than formal processes (Barr et al., 2005). This personalization creates what might be termed a “Gatekeeper Paradox”: while the LC1 is the most accessible form of local government, its personalized operation can simultaneously reinforce exclusion of marginalized groups (Mwesigwa, 2021). Simultaneously, local dynamics reflect what scholars term “Gerontocracy”: authority concentrates among older men, and youth are viewed as social juniors rather than equal stakeholders (Ntege, 2024; Lopes Cardozo et al., 2016). Education provision at the local level reflects these governance challenges: rural schools in Busoga face significant resource constraints, and private alternatives remain inaccessible to low-income families. Youth employment opportunities are extremely limited, with minimal formal sector options beyond primary education (UBOS, 2024; Adipala et al., 2023).

Given these constraints, communities in Busoga organize through alternative mechanisms: community-based organizations, neighborhood associations, informal leadership networks, and youth peer groups (Mwesigwa, 2021; Lopes Cardozo et al., 2016). Research on community participation in education demonstrates that when external actors work through such community organizations and trusted local leaders, engagement improves significantly (Wilke, 2019; Reinikka & Svensson, 2004). These alternative coordination mechanisms align with the

concept of “claimed spaces” (Gaventa, 2006), where they contrast with the “invited spaces” (LC1 meetings, school committees) created by formal authorities, which in Busoga are frequently constrained by personalized gatekeeping, reducing effectiveness for genuine community participation (Golooba-Mutebi, 2008; Kjaer, 2019). Community-based educational approaches combine participatory pedagogy with community governance structures that position youth as active agents in knowledge construction rather than passive recipients (Colbert & Mogollón, 1997; Lopes Cardozo et al., 2016). Such programs function through “participant-governed networks” where authority is shared among community members rather than concentrated in hierarchical institutions (Provan & Kenis, 2008). Importantly, programs positioning youth as educators and knowledge leaders disrupt gerontocratic authority structures, offering alternative pathways for youth to participate meaningfully in community decisions (Ntege, 2024; Lopes Cardozo et al., 2016). Evidence demonstrates that students taught by trained youth facilitators achieve substantially higher learning outcomes than traditional instruction (Banerjee et al., 2023; Bold et al., 2017), indicating educational effectiveness alongside governance benefits.

A critical barrier to community-based education in Busoga remains what scholars’ term “Epistemic Violence”: parents often view non-formal education as a second-class alternative to formal certification (Namatende-Sakwa, 2019; Lample, 2018). Lample (2018) documents that communities in Uganda selectively adopt curricula based on local economic realities and cultural beliefs about education's purpose. These hierarchies, where academic credentials are valued over practical skills, are reinforced through community narratives about legitimate education. Even evidence-based community approaches thus face demand-side obstacles: parents maintain aspirations for formal credentials that alternative models cannot provide. Yet rigorous evidence documents that community-based educational approaches can achieve substantial learning gains, contradicting community perceptions of inferiority.

In this context, the “PSA” program implemented in Uganda by “KN,” is supporting this evidence. A randomized controlled trial of “PSA” teacher training in Uganda (Banerjee et al., 2023) found students achieved 24 percentage points higher pass rates on the “Primary Leaving Examination” (from 51% to 75%) and 0.73 standard deviations higher critical thinking scores. Gains were largest for girls and poorest students and persisted in follow-up. The program ranks in the top five percentile of global education interventions by learning effect size. This evidence suggests that community resistance to non-formal models reflects cultural beliefs about credentialing rather than actual pedagogical effectiveness.

The local dynamics challenge is therefore not only political (managing LC1 gatekeeping) but also cognitive (reshaping community perceptions of what constitutes valuable education). Research demonstrates that approaches combining pedagogical innovation with community-based governance operate effectively in contexts where formal institutions are constrained (Bano, 2020; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). Youth out-migration from rural Busoga also represents the consequence of limited governance capacity to offer meaningful youth participation in community decisions (Adipala et al., 2023; UBOS, 2024).

3. Case Study

This chapter outlines the contextual foundations for the comparative analysis. It examines how the “PSA” program operates through two locally rooted partner organizations, “FUNDAEC” in Colombia and “KN” in Uganda, within distinct institutional and governance contexts. By situating the program within each country’s institutional landscape, the chapter provides a foundation for analyzing how local dynamics influence implementation and outcomes.

3.1 Unity Foundation

“UF” is a Luxembourg-based international NGO founded in 1980. Its founding mission is grounded in the principle that every population has “the right and responsibility to chart its own path of progress,” reflecting commitments to participatory development, spiritual principles

rooted in Bahá'í perspectives, and education as a pathway for community empowerment (UF, n.d.). Rather than acting as a direct service provider, “UF” operates as a partnership intermediary offering strategic guidance, technical support, financial resources, and external accountability mechanisms to locally rooted organizations. The organization is headquartered in Luxembourg and operates programs in seven countries: Uganda, Colombia, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Cambodia, and Vietnam (UF, n.d.).

Since 2018, “UF” has operated through multi-year framework agreements with Luxembourg's Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MFEA), shifting from individual co-financed projects that were first implemented in 1991. The current 2022-2026 Framework Agreement allocates €4.56 million across six partners, with the MFEA co-financing 60 to 80% and other donors (Bahá'í IDO, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, Echidna Giving) providing the remainder (UF, n.d.). The agreement outlines several mandatory requirements: auditable financial systems that meet international NGO standards, an annual independent external audit, quarterly narrative and financial reports (with receipts and expenditure justification), performance indicator tracking, and maintenance of beneficiary demographic data. Non-compliance carries explicit consequences, including formal warnings, suspension of funding, termination of agreements, and potential fund repayment (Conlin, 2013).

“UF” conceptualizes its role as “accompaniment” rather than direct management or supervision (INT01). This approach is defined as “supporting a society, its institutions and its citizens, on their own path toward less dependence on outside aid” through listening and partnership (Farmer, 2012). It is operationalized through yearly field visits, technical support missions to address organizational challenges, and monthly coordination calls (INT01). This philosophy reflects the belief that effective partnership depends on mutual respect and collaborative problem-solving rather than hierarchical control. It aims to foster partner ownership of solutions, build trust-based relationships, and enable context-responsive adaptation (Farmer,

2012; INT01). While the accompaniment model emphasizes partnership, “UF” also enforces non-negotiable minimum standards as outlined in the framework agreement. Funds are disbursed on a quarterly or semi-annual basis, with the release of each tranche contingent upon submission of prior financial reports, the absence of outstanding audit findings, and demonstrated progress toward programmatic targets (UF, n.d.). “UF” serves as the intermediary between donor requirements and local partnerships, creating a structural tension between its “accompaniment” philosophy (Farmer, 2012) and its hierarchical governance practice. Framework agreement compliance flows downward, while accountability flows upward through financial gatekeeping (see Appendix 1).

3.2 The “Preparation for Social Action” (“PSA”) Program

The “PSA” program is a non-formal education program targeting out-of-school youth (ages 12 to 18) in rural Uganda Colombia. It is designed to build youth agency and community engagement through participatory learning (UF, n.d.). A global network of ten organizations across Africa, Asia, and Latin America currently implements the “PSA” program. It follows a tutorial system where locally selected youth (“tutors”) facilitate small study groups of 10 to 15 participants (“learners”) in accessible community-based settings (Banerjee et al., 2023). “PSA” is an adaptation of the “SAT” program, originally developed by “FUNDAEC” in Colombia in the mid-1970s and later tailored for African and Asian contexts beginning in 2006 (Brookings Institution, 2016). “PSA” implementation is structured through hierarchical but locally adaptable governance arrangements, including Units (study groups led by tutors), Unit Coordinators (overseeing tutors), Regional Coordinators (supervising multiple areas), and a National Program Coordinator responsible for overall operations and donor reporting.

The program operates through a cyclical model integrating academic learning with community engagement. During the Study Phase, learners explore subjects such as mathematics, language, science, and social studies through materials grounded in local context rather than taught in

abstract terms (Banerjee et al., 2023; FUNDAEC, n.d.). This approach reflects the principles of "problem-posing education," in which learners explore real community issues rather than passively absorb pre-defined content (Banerjee et al., 2023). In the Service Phase, learners identify pressing community needs through participatory assessment process known as "readings of reality." In the final Action Phase, Learners draw on their analysis to design and implement projects that address identified needs, such as establishing vegetable gardens, organizing savings groups, leading health campaigns, or advocating for improved water access (Banerjee et al., 2023). Across this cycle, learners are explicitly positioned as "Promoters of Community Well-being," not passive beneficiaries, but active community members engaged in problem analysis, solution design, and collective action (UF, n.d.).

The "PSA" structure embodies three distinctive design choices. First, "PSA" relies on tutors selected by the community to lead small study groups, rather than certified teachers working in formal schools (Banerjee et al., 2023). Second, these groups meet in locally available venues referred to as "claimed spaces", (Gaventa, 2006) and collaboratively select the community-relevant issues to address using the "PSA" materials. Decisions about meeting locations, project focus, and session structure are made collectively by learners and community members (UF, n.d.). Third, "PSA" does not culminate in a formal, state-recognized certificate. Instead, participants' learning is reflected in the projects they implement and the recognition they receive as "Promoters of Community Well-being" within their communities. This outcome-oriented approach differs from conventional programs where success is measured through formal credentials such as secondary diplomas or university degrees (UF, n.d.; Banerjee et al., 2023).

3.3 Colombia: "FUNDAEC"

"FUNDAEC" operates within Colombia's decentralized education governance system, established by the 1991 constitutional reform and Law 715 (2001), which delegated

implementation authority to 32 departments and 1,102 municipalities, while the Ministry retained policy control (Elacqua, 2021; Chegwin et al., 2021). The Caribbean departments where “FUNDAEC” works, Córdoba and Sucre, represent the country's institutional periphery, characterized by limited state administrative capacity, poverty, and scarce private sector presence (Bonet & Meisel, 2008). This institutional context termed a “state vacuum”, where state presence is weak or absent (O'Donnell, 1993), creates both opportunities and constraints for NGO-led education. “FUNDAEC” was founded in 1974 by Colombian scientists and educators seeking to counter development models marginalizing rural populations. From the outset, “FUNDAEC's philosophy emphasized science and education serving smallholder farmers and rural youth, enabling active participation in shaping their futures through action-research integrating material and moral dimensions of progress (Brookings Institution, 2016; FUNDAEC, 2021). Recognized as an NGO in 1989, “FUNDAEC” is “UF”'s oldest partner, collaborating since 2008 (UF, 2023). “FUNDAEC”'s flagship innovation is the **“**SAT”, with hundreds of thousands of students participating in the program across Latin America by combining academic subjects with practical, context-relevant learning (FUNDAEC, 2021). Under the 2022-2026 framework agreement, “PSA” targets 1,200 participants through 81 tutors, supported by 40 agricultural plots and 90 backyard gardens. Beyond numerical targets, the program seeks to address structural exclusion by building confidence, skills, and agency among rural youth, encouraging them to remain in their communities as active contributors to local development (FUNDAEC, 2021; UF, 2023).

“FUNDAEC” navigates competing institutional logics: its founding philosophy emphasizes local autonomy and context-responsive curriculum (Farmer, 2012), yet as a “UF” partner, it must satisfy Luxembourg's Framework Agreement compliance requirements (UF, n.d.). This creates an “alignment paradox:” in Colombia's institutional vacuum, “FUNDAEC”'s autonomous decision-making is strategically valuable for community trust and program

effectiveness. However, “UF”’s standardized compliance requirements may exceed what locally rooted organizations can realistically sustain.

3.4 Uganda: “Kimanya-Ngeyo”

Established in 2007, during “Uganda's Universal Secondary Education” (USE) expansion, “KN” has served as “UF”’s principal partner in East Africa. The organization operates within Uganda's centralized education governance system, where the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) controls curriculum standards and the Uganda National Examination Board drive high-stakes exam accountability (Golooba-Mutebi, 2008; Tripp, 2010). “KN” strategically maintains pedagogical flexibility by operating outside formal registration while complying with regulatory requirements. This approach allows the organization to navigate what scholars term Uganda's “institutional cage” (Tripp, 2010): a governance environment marked by tight state constraints that limit adaptation. “KN”'s core mandate encompasses implementing the “PSA” program while conducting action research on sustainable agriculture and education. Over 17 years, the organization has evolved into an anchor institution with strong community ties and growing recognition from national education authorities, who have endorsed its teacher-training initiatives as potential models for wider system integration (KN, 2024).

“KN” operates across the Busoga Sub-region (Jinja, Kamuli, and Buikwe districts), serving rural and peri-urban youth through 40 to 50 “PSA” groups annually (reaching approximately more than 500 participants), alongside professional development programs that have supported more than 2,000 teachers since 2015 (KN, n.d.; RELI, 2021). “KN”’s implementation of “PSA” places deliberate emphasis on embedding learning within the life of communities. Tutors conduct “readings of reality” together with households, farmers, local leaders, and youth to identify pressing needs and opportunities for action. These participatory processes have led to the spread of backyard gardens, savings groups, poultry projects, and health campaigns, while also strengthening trust between communities and local councils (KN, 2024).

The organization invests in institutional learning and capacity-building: tutors and coordinators meet regularly in reflection spaces to analyze data and adapt strategies, while teacher training programs for educators and administrators extend “PSA” principles into formal schools, aligning with Uganda's curriculum (KN, n.d.; Lample, 2018). “KN” documents good practices, develops educational resources, and maintains partnerships with the Regional Education Learning Initiative (RELI), district education offices, and other government agencies, establishing itself as a regional reference point for community-linked education (RELI, 2021; KN, n.d.).

3.5 Local Governance Architecture and Decision-Making Authority

The “PSA” program operates through local governance architecture on multiple levels that distributes decision-making authority, resources, and accountability mechanisms across five hierarchical levels. These include: international (Luxembourg MFEA funding), organizational (“UF” coordination), national (“FUNDAEC” and “KN” as country partners), regional (coordinators implementing contextually responsive strategies), and local (tutors and communities). This structure creates both efficiency gains (standardized compliance across contexts) and tensions (uniform requirements applied to contexts with vastly different institutional capacities).

Requirements flow downward through formal channels (audits, reporting requirements, performance targets), while accountability flows upward through financial gatekeeping (audit clearance required for fund release) (Appendix 1). The governance system originates with the 2022-2026 Framework Agreement between Luxembourg's MFEA and “UF,” which establishes mandatory compliance standards, performance tracking, and demographic data collection. “UF” channels these requirements to national partners (“FUNDAEC” and “KN”), who embed them into their organizational hierarchies. Both operate through identical “PSA” implementation tiers: Units, Tutors, Unit Coordinators, Regional Coordinators, National

Coordinators operationalizing distinct functions: local delivery (tutors facilitate learning), regional support (coordinators provide accompaniment), and national accountability (compliance, reporting, data quality) (UF, n.d.a, n.d.b, 2024b).

Different types of decision makers operate at each level, each constrained by requirements from higher levels of the system. National partners determine program scope, geographic priorities, and annual targets within the parameters of the Framework Agreement, subject to approval at annual partnership meetings with "UF." Regional coordinators allocate resources within their regions and decide which communities receive priority support, constrained by regional budgets set at the national level. Local tutors and communities decide specific project priorities through "readings of reality," participatory community assessments. This represents the most localized decision-making authority within the formal system (KN; FUNDAEC, 2021).

Formal Accountability operates primarily through financial gatekeeping mechanisms. Partners submit quarterly financial reports, including receipts and expenditure justifications, which flow upward through the organizational hierarchy (Appendix 1). Critically, disbursement of the next tranche is conditional on satisfactory completion of prior period reporting (UF, 2024b; Conlin, 2013). External audits by Baastel, a Canadian audit advisory firm mandated by the MFEA to conduct an independent evaluation of "UF," confirm that financial systems meet international NGO standards and that expenditures are properly documented (Baastel, 2023). Audit clearance, defined as absence of outstanding findings, is required before any further funds are released. This structure creates a dual accountability mechanism, where both financial compliance (receipts, audits) and programmatic performance (progress toward targets) must be demonstrated for resources to continue flowing (UF, 2024b). Although local governance dynamics are formally hierarchical, informal practices operate alongside official structures. Regional coordinators exercise significant discretion in implementing national policies. Tutors rely on relationships with the coordinators to solve problems. Communities provide feedback

that is often informal and may not be captured in official documentation (Lample, 2018; UF, 2024b). These informal practices constitute critical local dynamics that shape program outcomes but often remain undocumented in formal reporting systems. This observation was also confirmed during the interview process (INT01).

4. Program Scope and Resource Allocation

This chapter outlines the scope of “UF”’s partnerships and the allocation of resources, beginning with an overview of program scale and financial trends in Uganda and Colombia. Building on the preceding case study, it examines how these patterns are reflected in the scale of “UF”’s partnerships and the distribution of financial resources across the two country contexts.

4.1 Program Scale and Financial Overview

This chapter presents the quantitative scope of “UF”’s partnerships, establishing the financial context for the subsequent governance analysis. Both countries exhibit similar budget utilization rates to date (approximately 60%), suggesting broadly comparable implementation capacity and financial management practices. The higher absolute budget in Uganda (€617,000, compared to €432,000 in Colombia) reflects greater external input into the partnership with KN and the broader geographic scope of activities across Jinja, Kamuli, and Buikwe districts. By contrast, the “PSA” program in Colombia is more established (UF, 2024a). Colombia's smaller budget aligns with “FUNDAEC”'s more institutionally mature context, in which the “PSA” program is embedded within existing educational structures and benefits from national recognition (UF, 2024c).

Country	Total Budget (EUR)	Total Spent (EUR)	Budget Utilization (%)	Number of Activities
Uganda	617,332	366,445	59.4	14
Colombia	431,872	262,845	60.9	14

Figure 1: “*PSA” Budgets in Uganda and Colombia (2022–2024)*

4.2 Resource Allocation by Result Area

“UF”'s results framework comprises four main areas that structure program activities across all partner countries (Baastel, 2023; UF, 2024b):

- R1: Community awareness and understanding of education's importance
- R2: Capacity building for youth, adults, and institutional actors (“PSA” program, teacher training, tutor development)
- R3: Community-led development actions (schools, agriculture, health, income generation)
- R4: Institutional strengthening of partner organizations (governance, monitoring, documentation)

Uganda allocates the largest share of its resources (56%) in R2 (Capacity Building), reflecting an emphasis on training tutors, coordinators, and teachers to lead “PSA” study groups and introduce participatory education into formal schooling (KN, 2021). This allocation aligns with “KN”'s role as both implementer and training hub within the RELI (UF, 2024a).

By contrast, Colombia allocates the largest share (53%) to R4 (Institutional Capacity), highlighting “FUNDAEC”'s organizational maturity, its 50-year trajectory, and its role as an educational innovator embedded in national education policy (UF, 2024c). R4 investments prioritize documentation, skystemic learning, and policy engagement over direct service delivery.

Result Area	Uganda Budget (EUR)	Uganda (%)	Colombia Budget (EUR)	Colombia (%)
R1	4,137	0.7%	3,844	0.9%
R2	343,380	55.6%	187,307	43.4%
R3	103,646	16.8%	13,629	3.2%
R4	166,170	26.9%	227,092	52.6%

Figure 2: *Budget Allocation by Strategic Result Area (R1–R4) in Uganda and Colombia*

The contrasting allocation patterns reflect differing governance priorities and organizational contexts. Uganda's focus on R2 supports the expansion of "PSA" into new communities and the training of local tutors, consistent with the service-provider role often played by NGOs in sub-Saharan Africa (Barr et al., 2005; Oketch & Rolleston, 2007). Colombia's emphasis on R4 reflects "FUNDAEC"'s function as a knowledge broker and policy advocate, aligning with the Latin American tradition of NGOs as educational innovators (Rincón-Gallardo & Fleischman, 2016).

4.3 Sectoral Breakdown and Implementation Focus

Activities within "UF"'s Framework Agreement are classified according to OECD "Development Assistance Committee" (DAC) sector codes, which specify whether funding supports primary education, adult education, agricultural development, health education, or policy and administrative functions (Baastel, 2023). This classification enables cross-country comparison and ensures alignment with international development standards, allowing "UF"'s investments to reflect recognized development priorities.

In Uganda, the largest share of resources is allocated to Education Policy and Administration (sector code 11110), accounting for 423,722€ or 68.6% of the total budget and primarily through R2 and R4. These funds primarily support teacher training, tutor development, and coordination activities that underpin the "PSA" program's expansion and sustainability (UF, 2024a). Agricultural Development (sector code 31120) represents the second-largest sectoral allocation at 48,947€, or 7.9% of the budget. This investment reflects "KN"'s emphasis on integrating agricultural knowledge and practical skills into the "PSA" curriculum through initiatives such as household gardens, seed banks, and community plots (KN, 2021). Adult Education (sector code 11230) receives 24,226€, representing 3.9% of the budget, and focuses specifically on "PSA" study groups aimed at youth and adult learners. This modest allocation reflects that

much of Uganda's adult education programming is embedded within the broader category of Education Policy and Administration, which includes tutor training and coordination.

Colombia exhibits a similar prioritization of education policy and administration, which receives 336,178€ or 77.9% of the total budget. This allocation supports “PSA” facilitation, tutor training, and institutional coordination, reflecting “FUNDAEC”'s role as an educational innovator with deep institutional ties to Colombia's national education system (UF, 2024c). Unlike Uganda, however, Colombia allocates a significantly smaller proportion of resources to agricultural development, with just 6,222€ or 1.4% of the budget. This difference is attributable to “FUNDAEC”'s strategic focus on embedding “PSA” within formal education pathways rather than pursuing standalone agricultural or livelihood projects. This approach emphasizes empowering local communities to take initiative and lead their own development processes. Health Education (sector code 12261) receives minimal direct allocation in Colombia, as health-related themes are integrated into the “PSA” curriculum rather than funded as separate activities.

Figure 3 summarizes the sectoral breakdown for both countries across selected sectors. The data reveal that while both Uganda and Colombia prioritize education policy and administrative functions, Uganda invests substantially more in agricultural development relative to its overall budget. This divergence reflects the distinct programmatic emphasis of “KN” and “FUNDAEC”. “KN”’s mandate includes fostering community-based agricultural innovation as a complement to educational programming, whereas “FUNDAEC”'s focus remains on formal education system integration and pedagogical leadership.

Sector	Uganda Budget (EUR)	Uganda (%)	Colombia Budget (EUR)	Colombia (%)
Education Policy & Administration	423,722	68.6%	336,178	77.9%
Adult Education (PSA)	24,226	3.9%	32,029	7.4%

Sector	Uganda Budget (EUR)	Uganda (%)	Colombia Budget (EUR)	Colombia (%)
Agricultural Development	48,947	7.9%	6,222	1.4%
Rural Development	5,508	0.9%	2,963	0.7%
Others	115,268	18.7%	54,159	12.6%

Figure 3: *Sectoral Budget Breakdown by OECD/DAC Category (Uganda vs. Colombia)*

The sectoral analysis underscores the complementary but distinct roles that “KN” and “FUNDAEC” play within “UF”'s broader network. “KN” operates in a context where education and livelihood development are deeply intertwined, necessitating integrated programming that addresses food security, agricultural productivity, and education simultaneously. “FUNDAEC,” operating in a context with more established public education infrastructure, focuses on systemic pedagogical reform and teacher capacity building, leveraging its historical role as an innovator in rural education (Rincón-Gallardo & Fleischman, 2016). These sectoral patterns thus reflect not only organizational preferences but also the distinct socio-economic and governance contexts in which each partner operates.

4.4 Spending Trends and Implementation Dynamics

Examining annual spending patterns reveal key insights into the pace and trajectory of program implementation in both countries. Figure 4 illustrates the annual expenditure trajectories for both countries, revealing a synchronized "investment pulse" likely driven by the “UF”’s framework agreement cycle (UF, 2024b). Both partnerships exhibit an identical trend: a sharp acceleration in 2023 (~23% growth) followed by a strategic consolidation in 2024 (~9% decline).

As shown by the 2023 peak in Figure 4, this acceleration corresponds to distinct strategic investments in each context. In Uganda, the increase to €107,962 reflects a phase of organizational strengthening, including the appointment of a new executive director and

expanded tutor training to scale “PSA” into additional districts. In Colombia, the parallel rise to €58,048 corresponds with “FUNDAEC”’s focus on Result Area 4, requiring intensive upfront investment in learning material production and policy advocacy (Baastel, 2023).

The subsequent convergence in 2024 signals a shift from expansion to maturation across both partnerships. The synchronicity of these patterns implies that “UF” employs consistent oversight across its partner network, ensuring that resource flows align with programmatic phases regardless of the local context. By mid-2024, both countries had achieved approximately 60% budget utilization, reflecting comparable financial management capacity. However, these financial trends illustrate resource deployment rather than impact. Without additional data on participant learning gains, these figures cannot be directly conflated with educational quality, highlighting the need for the qualitative analysis that follows.

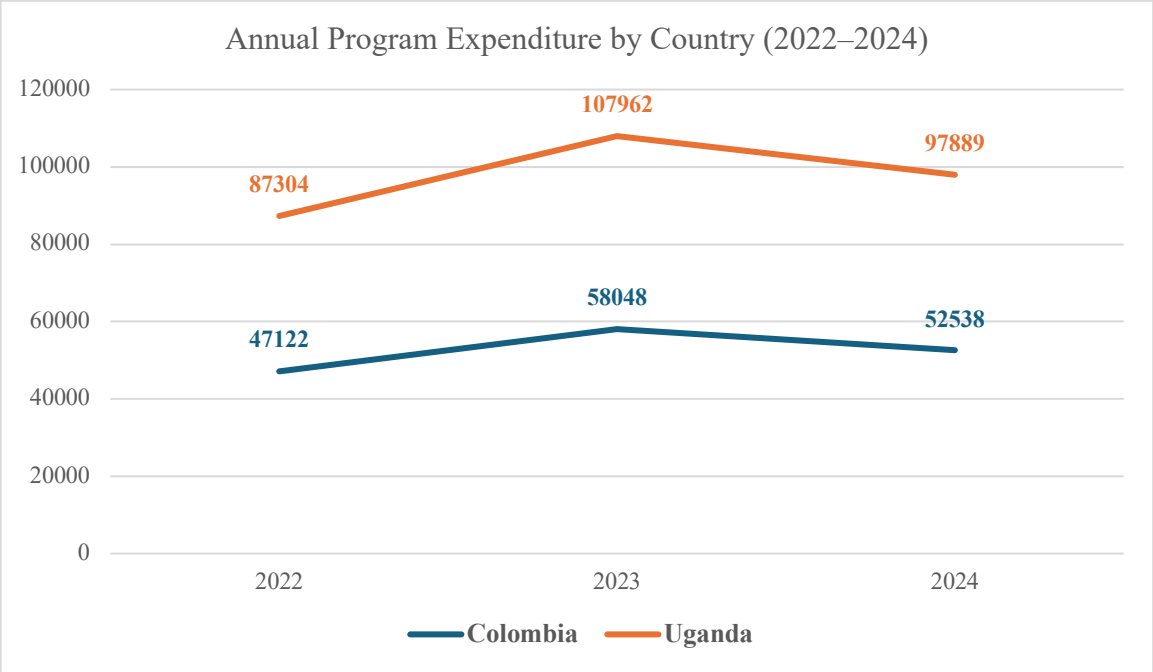

Figure 4: *Annual “PSA” Program Expenditure (2022–2024) Colombia and Uganda*

5. Methodology Erik

Building on the program scope and resource allocation outlined in the previous chapter, this section explains how the qualitative study was designed and conducted. It clarifies the research paradigm, data sources, analytical steps that underpin the subsequent qualitative analysis of local governance dynamics in Uganda and Colombia. It describes the qualitative research

design, the use of semi-structured interviews and internal documents, as well as the comparative case study logic guiding the analysis of the “PSA” program.

5.1 Research Paradigm and Approach

This study employs a qualitative research approach grounded in three interconnected pillars: 1) semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders across organizational levels, 2) in-depth case study analysis of “UF”’s implementation of the “PSA” program through its partnerships with “KN” and “FUNDAEC”, and 3) comparative analysis across Uganda and Colombia to examine how contrasting local dynamics shape program implementation and outcomes (Appendix, 2)

A qualitative approach is essential because understanding how local dynamics shape program outcomes requires exploring how stakeholders at different organizational levels interpret and negotiate institutional arrangements, make decisions, and adapt strategies in context, the lived experiences and meanings that cannot be fully captured by quantitative indicators alone (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research is grounded in an interpretive paradigm, which views local dynamics as socially constructed through interaction rather than as fixed formal rules (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 2014). This paradigm is particularly useful for analyzing how stakeholders influence outcomes through informal practices and contested negotiations that are not captured in formal organizational documents. Accordingly, this research engages stakeholders across all organizational levels, including international donors, headquarters strategists, local NGO leaders, program implementers, and community members, to capture how local dynamics are experienced and negotiated in practice, enabling a comprehensive analysis of how the “PSA” partnerships function in Uganda and Colombia (Bryson, Crosby & Stone, 2006).

These three interconnected methods are elaborated below: 1) Semi-structured interviews serve as the primary method of qualitative data collection. This approach uses open-ended questions

to explore how stakeholders interpret local dynamics, negotiate decisions, and experience program implementation on their own terms (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This method is well-suited to exploring local dynamics because it privileges stakeholder perspectives, revealing not only what decisions are made, but how and why those decisions occur within specific institutional contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). 2) The case study design enables in-depth examination of how local dynamics operate within “UF”'s “PSA” program implementation across three interconnected cases: “UF” as the meta-organizational actor, “KN” in Uganda, and “FUNDAEC” in Colombia. This design is appropriate because it allows for the investigation of how “UF“ navigates internal stakeholder dynamics while simultaneously supporting the distinct local dynamics of its partner organizations. It incorporates both qualitative interviews and analysis of organizational documents (e.g., internal reports, program data, financial records, and institutional communications) to capture the complexity of how local dynamics shape program implementation and outcomes (Yin, 2014). 3) The comparative analysis examines how identical program designs produce divergent outcomes across different governance contexts. Rather than isolating a single variable, this approach reveals the mechanisms through which local dynamics shape organizational responses and stakeholder relationships. Uganda (with centralized governance) and Colombia (with decentralized governance) serve as contrasting cases that illustrate how governance structures generate distinct adaptive strategies, ranging from institutional diplomacy to community-led spaces, within the same replicated NGO program.

5.2 Data Management

This part explains how qualitative data were collected, analyzed, and validated to study governance dynamics in the “PSA” program. It details how semi-structured interviews conducted across multiple stakeholder levels were combined with internal administrative data and systematically coded using MAXQDA to identify key themes related to stakeholder roles,

local governance, and program outcomes. Together, these methods and triangulation steps establish the credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the study's qualitative findings.

5.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

This study employed semi-structured interviews as the primary qualitative data collection method, balancing comparability through standardized core questions with the flexibility to explore individual perspectives. A total of 13 interviews were conducted between October and November 2025, with an average duration of 30 minutes each. Interviews were strategically conducted across three governance levels to capture diverse viewpoints. At the leadership level, (n=4) "UF"'s president in Luxembourg, a representative from Luxembourg's MFEA, and senior staff from and "KN" (Uganda) provided strategic and donor-related perspectives on program design, partnership dynamics, and accountability requirements. At the program implementation level (n=4), program coordinators, area managers, and tutors from both implementing countries offered operational insights into "PSA" program implementation and structural challenges encountered at ground level. At the community level (n=2), local youth participants and community leaders shared firsthand experiences of how the "PSA" program operates within their communities. To enhance validity and triangulation, two interviews were also conducted with external observers (n=2): a German journalist with expertise in African NGO programs and a U.S.-based researcher specializing in Latin American educational initiatives, including "SAT" and "PSA". These external perspectives served as comparative reference points to distinguish between challenges specific to "UF"'s partnerships and broader sectoral dynamics common to similar NGO programs.

Interviews were conducted in English, Spanish, and German, depending on respondents' language and location. All interviews were recorded with participant consent, transcribed verbatim in their original language, and then translated into English by the research team for analysis, with particular attention to preserving semantic meaning and nuanced language.

Interview transcripts are presented in English in the appendices (see Appendix 4). All interviews followed a pre-defined semi-structured format to ensure comparability of questions and responses while remaining responsive to individual participant perspectives. Interview guides covered core topics derived from the research questions and literature, including stakeholder roles and influence, governance structures at multiple levels, accountability mechanisms, and program implementation. These core topics directly correspond to the deductive coding categories developed for data analysis (see section 5.3), enabling systematic comparison of interview responses against the analytical framework and research questions. The complete interview guide is presented in Appendix 3.

Respondents were selected through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015) and participant referrals to ensure diverse perspectives. Recruitment was facilitated through "UF", its partner organizations, and professional networks in the education sector.

The final interview sample (N=13) is presented in Figure 5 below. All interviews were conducted in line with Nova School of Business and Economics' ethical research guidelines. Participants received an information sheet explaining the purpose of the research, provided informed consent, and were assured of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation. To protect privacy, interviews were anonymized during transcription, using code identifiers (INT01-INT13), stored securely, and used exclusively for academic purposes.

Interview Code	Country	Role	Stakeholder Level
INT01	Luxembourg	Program Director	Governance & Leadership
INT02	Luxembourg	NGO co-financing officer	Governance & Leadership
INT03	Colombia	Student	Community Stakeholder
INT04	Colombia	Tutor	Program Implementation
INT 05	Colombia	Zonal Coordinator	Governance & Leadership
INT 06	Colombia	Local Government Official	Community Stakeholder
INT07	Uganda	Student	Community Stakeholder
INT08	Uganda	Tutor	Program Implementation
INT09	Uganda	Local Government Official	Community Stakeholder
INT10	Uganda	Program Coordinator	Governance & Leadership

INT11	Uganda	Program Coordinator	Community Stakeholder
INT12	Germany	Journalist and Founder	External Observer
INT13	USA	Researcher on SAT / PSA	External Observer

Figure 5: *Interviewees by Stakeholder Country, Role and Stakeholder Level*

5.2.2 Secondary Sources

To complement the qualitative interview data, the research included a targeted review of internal administrative documents as part of the broader case study. This step was necessary to reconstruct the financial scope and operational context of the program.

The key sources were two types of documents: 1) “UF”'s internal monitoring system for the “Framework Agreement 2022-2026,” which tracks financial disbursements, budget allocations, and activity-level expenditures for Uganda and Colombia (2022-2024). 2) Three unpublished internal reports from “UF” (UF, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c) which document “PSA” implementation, monitoring data, and financial distribution. These records reflect actual spending verified by an external financial audit conducted by Baastel, an international consulting firm specializing in financial management and program evaluation for development organizations (Baastel, 2023), rather than projected budgets.

It is important to clarify the limitations of this dataset. The reporting system captures input indicators (financial expenditures and sectoral classifications) but does not include programmatic outcome indicators such as participant numbers, completion rates, or learning outcomes. Consequently, the data is used solely to illustrate resource allocation patterns and strategic priorities, not to evaluate program impact or causal relationships. These documents were shared under a collaboration agreement and are cited but not publicly available. Only aggregated data relevant to the research questions are reported.

This administrative data served a triangulation purpose by providing an objective quantitative baseline of resource allocation patterns and financial priorities, which the qualitative interview analysis builds upon. While interviews reveal how stakeholders perceive and navigate governance arrangements, administrative documents demonstrate what resources were actually

allocated to specific activities, illuminating the material constraints and strategic choices that shape program implementation. These documents grounded the analysis of governance dynamics in concrete organizational realities rather than relying solely on stakeholder perceptions.

5.3 Data Analysis

5.3.1 Analytical Framework and Coding Process

This study employs a qualitative research design based on semi-structured expert interviews (N = 13). Data were analyzed using a hybrid deductive–inductive thematic analysis approach, supported by the qualitative coding software MAXQDA. This hybrid approach was selected because it enables the research to systematically examine how local dynamics shape program outcomes through predetermined theoretical lenses (deductive focus) while remaining open to unexpected patterns and stakeholder priorities that may not fit initial theoretical expectations (inductive flexibility).

The deductive codes were derived directly from the research questions and relevant literature on NGO governance, stakeholder involvement, and local dynamics (e.g. internal stakeholder groups, local governance arrangements, program outcomes, and strategic lessons for cross-country operations). These preliminary codes formed an initial coding frame, consisting of three overarching concepts, defined as follows:

1) The “internal stakeholder groups” code captures data on donor and implementer roles, stakeholder perceptions of accountability, and differing visions guiding program implementation. This code directly addresses RQ1 by examining who participates in decision-making and how different stakeholder groups shape the program. 2) “Local dynamics” codes captured data on both formal local government institutions and informal governance structures shaping collaboration between stakeholders. 3) The “program outcomes” code included reflections on community engagement, perceived legitimacy, success indicators,

implementation challenges, and lessons for replicating the “PSA” program. This code addresses RQ3 by capturing perceived results and replication implications. Together, these three codes enabled systematic comparison of stakeholder perspectives across interviews while ensuring all findings were grounded in the research questions.

After developing the initial deductive coding frame, all interview transcripts were coded line by line in MAXQDA. Segments that did not fit the existing codes were assigned new inductive codes, which were then reviewed and, where appropriate, integrated into the three main concepts. The inductive codes particularly (C9 and C10) captured lessons for replicating the “PSA” program, as well as funding logics and perceived success of the program (see Appendix 3). Coded segments were compared across interviews and between countries to identify patterns, similarities, and differences, which were then grouped into overarching themes that directly inform the findings chapter.

5.3.2 Comparative Analysis and Theme Development

Coded segments were systematically compared at multiple levels: Coded segments were first filtered by theme in MAXQDA and exported as tables for each code family. Within these exports, segments were sorted by stakeholder group (leadership, implementers, community, external) and by country to identify similarities and differences in how roles, governance and outcomes were described. All segments coded “internal stakeholder groups” were examined together to reveal how different actors described their roles and influence, while Uganda-coded segments were contrasted with Colombia-coded segments to identify how local dynamics shaped organizational responses and adaptation differently in each context.

Themes were developed through an iterative process of thematic synthesis, in which closely related codes were clustered based on shared concepts and their explanatory relevance to the research questions. The first theme integrates codes related to “internal stakeholder groups” (A1-A4) to explore how governance hierarchies influence “PSA” outcomes. The second theme

draws from codes on “local dynamics” (B1–B3), highlighting how formal and informal structures either enable or constrain adaptation in Uganda and Colombia. The third theme integrates codes such on program outcomes (C8), strategic lessons (C6) and legitimacy (C5) to analyze how “PSA” is developed sustainable and how “UF” navigates the tension between long-term capacity building and donor expectations.

These themes directly address the research questions by explaining the mechanisms through which local dynamics shape organizational responses, stakeholder participation, and program outcomes across contexts. The findings presented in Chapter 6 are grounded in this comparative thematic analysis. A detailed codebook with all deductive and inductive codes, definitions, and citations is provided in Appendix 3.

5.4 Data Validation and Triangulation

To ensure methodological rigor, this study applied the qualitative validity criteria outlined by Loh (2013), specifically credibility, transferability, and confirmability.

Credibility was established through methodological triangulation across three data sources: 1) semi-structured interviews with stakeholders at multiple organizational levels to capture diverse perspectives on local dynamics. 2) case study analysis used to verify interview insights against organizational records and internal documentation. 3) comparative case analysis across the Uganda and Colombia contexts to assess whether observed patterns held consistently across different institutional settings. This multi-method approach strengthened confidence that the findings reflected actual program dynamics rather than isolated or responded-specific biases. Transferability was strengthened by the comparative case design and by offering detailed contextual descriptions of program settings, stakeholder roles, and governance structures. This supports readers in assessing the applicability of findings to similar NGO contexts. Confirmability was ensured through a documented audit trail maintained in MAXQDA, including coding decisions, memos, and codebook revisions. This process allows

interpretations to be directly linked to specific data segments rather than researcher bias, thereby supporting critical assessment of the credibility of the study's strategic recommendations.

6. Qualitative Analysis Erik

This chapter analyzes how governance arrangements shape the outcomes of the "PSA" program in Uganda and Colombia. It draws on thematic coding of interviews with donors, NGO leaders, implementers, community members, government officials and external observers. Patterns in decision-making, influence and accountability structure the analysis into three sections. Section 6.1 examines the roles and influence of internal stakeholders. Section 6.2 places these dynamics within national governance contexts. Section 6.3 links governance structures to perceived program outcomes and identifies strategic lessons across Uganda and Colombia.

6.1 Roles and Influence of Internal Stakeholder Groups

The analysis of internal stakeholder groups reveals a multi-layered governance architecture in which actors assume distinct yet interconnected roles. Four thematic patterns emerged from the coded interview segments: 1) a shared but differentially articulated vision of community empowerment, 2) consultative governance structures characterized by asymmetric decision-making authority, 3) the influential position of donors in shaping strategic direction, and 4) multi-directional accountability mechanisms associated with varying degrees of perceived tension.

Across stakeholder levels, interviewees articulated a broadly shared understanding of "PSA"'s purpose: enabling communities to become protagonists of their own development through capacity building that integrates intellectual, moral, and practical dimensions. "UF"'s president framed the program as supporting "young people and adults to develop both their intellectual and moral capacities, enabling them to contribute to the well-being of their own communities" (INT01). This vision was echoed by "FUNDAEC"'s zonal coordinator (INT05) and by "KN"'s program coordinator (INT10).

However, the emphasis shifted across stakeholder levels, reflecting Stakeholder Theory's insight that organizations serve multiple constituencies with distinct interests (Freeman, 1984; Najam, 1996). “UF” Leadership and the donor representative (INT01, INT02) foregrounded long-term capacity building and systemic change, while program implementers such as tutors placed greater emphasis on practical livelihood improvements. An area coordinator in Uganda noted that the purpose is “to improve the livelihoods of the populations in the communities […] in the social sphere, the economic sphere, and also the spiritual sphere” (INT11). Community-level participants similarly highlighted concrete applications (INT03). These divergent emphases reveal that the program maintains coherence despite stakeholders prioritizing differently, unity comes through negotiation, not uniform agreement.

Decision-making within the “PSA” program operates through nested consultative structures that span from village-level reflection spaces to strategic negotiations with donors. “UF”'s president described an “inclusive consultation process” in which “multiple voices come together across different levels,” with local partners playing “a crucial role because they're working directly with the communities” (INT01). “FUNDAEC”'s coordinator elaborated on this rhythm: annual plans are developed through reflection within leadership, shared with zonal and unit coordinators for field input, revised iteratively, and then reviewed quarterly (INT05).

Despite this consultative rhetoric, formal decision-making authority remains concentrated at higher organizational levels. This pattern reflects the coordination dilemma in network governance (Hooghe & Marks, 2020): efficiency-driven decision-making (donor compliance, rapid strategy) conflicts with inclusive participation. The “PSA” program resolves this tension in favor of upward accountability, prioritizing donor reporting timelines over community voice a trade-off that implementers experience more acutely than leadership acknowledges (INT11, INT07). The MFEA representative acknowledged that “communities are consulted throughout, though not always as formally as they should be” (INT02). “KN”’s coordinator was candid

about this asymmetry: decisions about community activities draw heavily on his ground-level information, but strategic direction is shaped by “the Program Lead [who] carries more weight because they have information about donors and partners and the organization's strategic goals” (INT10). The area coordinator in Uganda stated more bluntly that “the voice of the donors and funders […] matters most over the others. That's the reality of how these programs are structured” (INT09). This structural concentration of authority reflects the lead-organization governance model (Provan & Kenis, 2008), in which hierarchical authority flows through intermediary layers, a pattern evident in both Uganda and Colombia despite their different governance contexts. While consultation is institutionalized, ultimate authority remains with funders, a tension that limits genuine community co-design, as perspectives enter through gatekeepers rather than direct representation.

The Luxembourg MEFA, as “UF”'s principal institutional donor, plays a structuring role that extends beyond financial provision. The Ministry representative described the donor contribution as “both strategic and operational,” including refining objectives, clarifying results frameworks, and “strengthening the theory of change when needed” (INT02). “UF”'s president confirmed this framing, noting that the MFEA and the BIDO, an international development organization, “act as two filters”, one ensuring compliance with Luxembourg's development policy, the other safeguarding program quality and values (INT01). This dual-filter arrangement provides stability: the five-year framework agreement with 60 to 80% co-financing offers predictability that enables long-term planning (INT01).

However, it also constrains adaptation. The Ministry representative acknowledged “a degree of tension” between donor requirements for “structured reporting and verification procedures” and communities' preference for “responsiveness and flexibility,” yet immediately framed this tension as manageable, noting that it is “managed by ensuring reporting systems don't overshadow genuine community needs” (INT02). “UF”'s president went further, stating:

“Honestly, we don't really feel that tension” (INT01). By contrast, implementers were more forthcoming about the practical weight of this tension. The Ugandan Program Coordinator observed that “being accountable to donors becomes prioritized compared to accountability to communities” (INT11), while another described active effort to mitigate this pressure “through continuous conversation with community members and setting productive projects with them” (INT07). The experience of this donor-imposed constraint varies significantly by organizational position, a pattern consistent with Stakeholder Salience Theory (Mitchell et al., 1997), where stakeholder proximity to power shapes perception of competing demands. Leadership frames the tension as resolved or minimal (INT01, INT02), while implementers perceive it as an ongoing priority (INT11). External observers connect this pattern to wider sectoral dynamics. The German Journalist emphasized that credibility requires local experts to be “heard and quoted” externally, not only in fieldwork but in donor acquisition and public representation (INT12). An academic researcher distinguished between locally rooted NGOs that “collaborate internationally” and large Northern-based organizations that “create innovations and then put them in 10 countries,” noting that “PSA”'s implementing partners fall into the former category, a structural feature that may facilitate genuine local ownership (INT13).

Accountability in the “PSA” program operates across multiple axes: to communities, to implementing organizations, and to donors. “UF”'s president characterized accountability as “multidimensional” and “developmental rather than punitive,” encompassing narrative and financial reports, ongoing dialogue, and capacity building to strengthen partners' autonomy (INT01). The Ministry representative similarly identified “multiple mechanisms: reporting, both narrative and financial, monitoring systems, external evaluations, and open dialogue” (INT02). At the community level, accountability is expressed through regular meetings, transparent communication, and responsiveness to feedback. A Colombian government official emphasized that program legitimacy “ultimately depends on community acceptance and

genuine participation," demonstrated through "regular meetings with local leaders [and] transparent communication about activities and decisions" (INT06). KN's coordinator described community gatherings where "tutors share learning with the community and local leaders, that's a form of community accountability" (INT10).

Yet the mechanisms and perceived weight of accountability differ by stakeholder level. Leadership interviewees consistently reported that donor and community expectations are "actually quite compatible" (INT01) and that "responsibilities to donors and communities follow the same direction" (INT03). Implementers' accounts were more nuanced. While one Colombian tutor stated that "transparency and strong alignment with community goals ensure donor and community accountabilities work in harmony" (INT04), a Ugandan tutor acknowledged feeling tension because "being accountable to donors becomes prioritized" (INT08). This divergence reveals the accountability paradox: the tension between upward donor accountability (standardized metrics, compliance) and downward community accountability (responsiveness, flexibility) identified in development literature (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014; Bano, 2020).

6.2 Local Dynamics

Interviewees described a layered local governance environment in which formal institutions, community leadership, and NGO structures together shape how "PSA" is anchored in Uganda and Colombia. At the formal level, municipal and district officials emphasize that the "PSA" operates most effectively when aligned with local education plans and supported through access to public infrastructure such as schools and community centers (INT06, INT09). Government actors see their role as providing institutional backing, permissions and policy coherence, while NGOs contribute pedagogical models and technical guidance and communities provide participation and local knowledge (INT02, INT06, INT09). Unity's own administrative design of units, coordinators and regional structures supplies an additional governance layer that

standardizes implementation and creates regular spaces for planning and review across communities (INT01, INT02).

At the same time, both country cases reveal structural weaknesses in formal local governance that affect program delivery. In rural Colombia, the municipal officials point to the “fragmentation of local governance” and limited state presence, which produces coordination gaps and slows decision making (INT06). Similar concerns appear in Uganda, where district officers highlight the impact of staff turnover and political cycles on communication and approval processes (INT09). These constraints reflect what network governance literature identifies as the "missing middle" problem (Tamtik & Colorado, 2022): even when NGOs seek alignment with public structures, weak or unstable regional and local institutions limit the extent to which programs can embed in state systems or scale through government channels.

Alongside formal arrangements, informal relationships and community leadership play a critical role in keeping collaboration functional. Tutors and coordinators in both countries stress that home visits, informal conversations, and joint reflection meetings enable faster information flows and help resolve problems before they escalate (INT03, INT05, INT07, INT08). External and donor observers confirm that trust and personal familiarity can “solve in minutes what might take weeks through formal channels”, provided that final decisions still follow official procedures (INT02, INT12, INT13). This pattern illustrates what scholars identify as "shadow governance" that compensate for weak formal capacity (Rhodes, 1996): In Colombia, small group discussions and locally initiated schedule changes sustain participation despite logistical challenges (INT03). In Uganda, informal networks circumvent rigid bureaucratic gatekeeping. These practices indicate that informal governance is not a parallel system but an essential complement to relatively lean formal structures (Section 2.1).

Collaboration between NGOs, communities and state actors is described as both a strength and an object of ongoing learning. In Uganda, one tutor reports that initial misunderstandings with

local leaders stemmed from divergent views of development, with officials expecting visible inputs and numerical targets while the organization emphasized long term capacity building (INT04). This tension reveals the coordination dilemma (Hooghe & Marks, 2020), institutional efficiency (measurable outputs) conflicts with participatory legitimacy (community-driven change). Through repeated study sessions of national legislation and joint reflection on roles, these relationships evolved into partnerships in which leaders now convene community gatherings and see “PSA”-trained youth as resources for fulfilling government responsibilities (INT03). Colombian respondents similarly highlight that regular joint field visits, shared evaluations and multi-actor reflection workshops result in more realistic decisions and smoother implementation (INT04, INT06), demonstrating how frequent communication helps coordination work better in fragmented systems. At the same time, several interviewees warn that collaboration breaks down when information does not circulate promptly, when NGOs advance activities without sufficient consultation with municipal offices or when other organizations pursue approaches that communities perceive as disempowering (INT02, INT06, INT11).

Uganda's centralized system operates as a lead-organization network (Provan & Kenis, 2008), where the Ministry retains centralized authority and “KN” must navigate what interviewees describe as a "state cage" through institutional compliance (INT09, INT10). This structure constrains educational flexibility as formal approvals required at multiple levels slow adaptation to community feedback. However, informal relationships (e.g., home visits, joint reflection, trust-building) become strategically essential, creating adaptation space within rigid formal channels (INT02, INT07, INT08).

By contrast, Colombia's decentralized system operates as a participant-governed network (Provan & Kenis, 2008), enabling “FUNDAEC” to function autonomously in "claimed spaces" with communities (INT02, INT06). This "state vacuum", institutional fragmentation rather than

centralized control, enables pedagogical autonomy and community co-design but creates sustainability risk: if state systems never absorb the program, scaling depends entirely on NGO capacity. Informal relationships here build trust infrastructure substituting for weak formal state capacity (INT03, INT04, INT06). The governance structure determines not just whether collaboration happens, but what kind is necessary for the program to function.

Interim Findings: Local governance structures determine not just whether collaboration happens, but what kind of collaboration is necessary for the program to function. Where institutional channels are stable and communication among NGOs, communities and state actors is frequent, “PSA” is more likely to be integrated into local development agendas and supported through public resources. Where governance is fragmented, politicized or philosophically misaligned, the program tends to rely more heavily on its own unit structures and on informal relationships, which can sustain high quality local implementation but make systemic scaling through government systems more difficult. This difference reflects a fundamental governance trade-off: Uganda's centralized system constrains autonomy but provides scaling pathways through government structures, whereas Colombia's decentralized system enables autonomy but lacks institutional anchoring for systemic impact.

6.3 Program Outcomes and Strategic Lessons

This section adopts a comparative perspective to assess how differing local dynamics in Uganda and Colombia condition “PSA”’s outcomes and sustainability. Interview data reveal that while “PSA” is broadly perceived as successful, stakeholders define success through different lenses. For leadership and donors, success is primarily framed in terms of capacity development and sustainable impact, measured by communities’ ability to sustain development processes over time without external dependency (INT01, INT02). By contrast, implementers and community members emphasize tangible livelihood improvements and behavioral changes. Tutors in Uganda and Colombia cite specific examples such as poultry projects, vegetable stalls, savings

groups (INT11) and women starting small businesses (INT03) as the most convincing evidence of impact. These divergent definitions are not contradictory but complementary: leadership prioritizes process-oriented outcomes (capacity building), while communities emphasize tangible results (livelihood changes). Each perspective reflects stakeholders' organizational roles, consistent with Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984; Najam, 1996).

Community ownership emerges as the critical determinant of sustained and systemic impact across both contexts. Interviewees across all levels agree that where communities actively participate in defining priorities, programs survive challenges. Where they are treated as passive recipients, initiatives fail once funding ends (INT01, INT06, INT07). This ownership is fostered through what the "UF" leadership and Professor Murphy-Graham describes organic growth, expanding only when local capacity is ready rather than chasing donor targets (INT01, INT13). However, this approach faces a structural tension with what development literature describes as the "project mentality" (Bano, 2020; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014), whereby short-term funding cycles pressure NGOs to demonstrate rapid, quantifiable results that may undermine long-term community ownership (INT13).

Cross-country comparison reveals further strategic insights, particularly regarding the balance between standardization and adaptation. "UF"'s framework agreement with the Luxembourg Ministry provides a stable five-year funding horizon that allows for long-term planning and flexibility (INT01, INT02). This stability enables local partners like "KN" and "FUNDAEC" to adapt the program to local realities, such as modifying training schedules to fit harvest seasons or redesigning workshops to be closer to communities (INT01). However, challenges remain in harmonizing these flexible, community-led timelines with rigid donor reporting requirements. As one Journalist noted (INT12), there is often a mismatch between the raised finger from the global North regarding values and the practical needs of communities, creating a risk of ideologization if local voices are not sufficiently heard in strategic governance. This

tension between international principles and local realities reflects the structural power asymmetries in “Global North-South” partnerships, where donors accumulate disproportionate power to define organizational priorities and acceptable implementation approaches (Bradley, 2017; Moshtari, 2024).

Legitimacy emerges as a dynamic, continuously negotiated phenomenon rather than a fixed attribute. In Uganda, initial government skepticism about a program that offered no handouts eventually turned into partnership as officials saw the value of self-reliant communities (INT10). Similarly, in Colombia, legitimacy was built by respecting local knowledge and avoiding the imposition of external solutions (INT06). Yet fragility remains: staff turnover, economic pressure on volunteer tutors, and fragmentation of local governance can quickly erode hard-won gains (INT01, INT06). This reveals how the coordination dilemmas inherent in multi-level governance (Hooghe & Marks, 2020) ultimately constrain resilience: even strong community relationships cannot withstand institutional instability when governance structures are fragmented**.**

6.4 Comparative Analysis

Uganda's centralized governance architecture and Colombia's decentralized structure produce fundamentally different implementation logics for the same “PSA” program. These differences are not merely contextual variations but structural determinants of program outcomes. Drawing on the preceding sections, this analysis demonstrates how these structural distinctions shape program implementation and long-term sustainability.

Uganda's “state cage” forces “KN” into institutionally aligning innovative pedagogy with rigid national curriculum standards to secure government approval (Lample, 2018). This configuration generates institutional stability but constrains programmatic flexibility. In Uganda, 56% of the program budget is allocated to capacity building, reflecting the intensive effort required to navigate centralized bureaucratic structures (UF, 2024a). Colombia's

institutional vacuum enables autonomous "claimed spaces" where communities co-design programs (Gaventa, 2006; Section 3.3). This configuration permits flexibility but creates vulnerabilities with respect to long-term sustainability. In Colombia, 53% of resources are allocated to institutional strengthening rather than direct service delivery (UF, 2024c). This represents a critical structural trade-off: centralization provides institutional anchor but constrains flexibility, while decentralization enables autonomy but requires robust community infrastructure to sustain impact (Faludi, 2011).

In Uganda's centralized system, state and donor actors acquire heightened salience because they control system access (Mitchell et al., 2017). A Ugandan coordinator observed: “being accountable to donors becomes prioritized compared to accountability to communities” (INT11). In Colombia, communities become primary stakeholders because state actors lack effective authority, shifting salience downward. Colombian coordinators emphasized that “joint field visits and multi-actor reflection workshops result in more realistic decisions” (INT02, INT04).

Across both contexts, interviewees identify communication and information flow as critical enabling assets (INT01, INT02, INT12). Regional coordinators function as translation mechanisms absorbing competing donor and community demands. A “KN” coordinator noted that “strategic direction is shaped by the Program Lead, who has information about donors and partners” (INT10). Yet neither partnership systematically invests in these middle-level managers, representing a shared structural vulnerability.

Invited spaces (formal committees) often function performatively, whereas claimed spaces (autonomous community organizations) generate more robust forms of ownership (Gaventa, 2006). Where communities are passive recipients, programs collapse when funding ends, whereas when claimed spaces are protected, programs are more resilient to governance shocks. “UF” leadership frames this principle as “organic growth,” emphasizing that community

ownership constitutes the central program objective, and that expansion occurs only when local capacity is ready (INT01).

6.5 Literature Gaps & Research Contributions

While existing research extensively examines NGO program outcomes, far less attention has been paid to the organizational structures that enable sustained implementation in challenging governance environments. This thesis demonstrates that NGO effectiveness across divergent contexts depends fundamentally on how local dynamics shape internal stakeholder coordination.

6.5.1 Underinvestment in Middle-Level Organizational Actors (Gap 1)

Multi-level governance research typically examines national or local levels, overlooking the middle-organizational level as critical to sustainability of the program (Provan & Kenis, 2008; Edwards & Hulme, 1996). This thesis identifies middle-level coordinators and regional managers as critical "translation mechanisms" (Section 6.1). These actors absorb competing donor compliance demands and community-responsive adaptation pressures, yet neither partnership systematically invests in their capacity or authority. This addresses a gap by demonstrating that NGO success is strongly shaped by robust investment in middle-level leadership capable of managing governance contradictions (Golooba-Mutebi, 2008; Eaton, 2006).

6.5.2 Programs as Context-Specific Political Mechanisms (Gap 2)

Stakeholder Theory traditionally treats power dynamics as static entities (Mitchell et al., 1997). This thesis demonstrates that education programs reshape stakeholder salience based on governance context. In Uganda's centralized "state cage," state and donor actors maintain heightened salience and the NGO must prioritize upward accountability, whereas in Colombia's institutional vacuum, communities become primary stakeholders and the NGO operates through claimed spaces with horizontal accountability (Section 6.2). "Claimed spaces" produce more

robust ownership than “invited spaces” (Gaventa, 2006) but operate distinctly depending on governance archetype (Section 6.4). This challenges the widespread assumption in development practice that participation mechanisms produce uniform outcomes and demonstrates how the same program must engage fundamentally different stakeholder configurations (Banks et al., 2015).

6.5.3 Institutional Sustainability Requires Governance-Informed Adaptation (Gap 3)

While educational efficacy of alternative education models is increasingly validated (Ashraf et al., 2020), the literature lacks comparative understanding of institutional sustainability across different governance contexts. This thesis compares Colombia (state vacuum) and Uganda (state cage), demonstrating, through comparative resource allocation patterns, that sustainability requires context-specific strategies (Section 6.4). Uganda allocates 56% to capacity building to navigate centralized bureaucracy, whereas Colombia allocates 53% to institutional strengthening to build autonomous community infrastructure, patterns reflecting structural necessity, not preference. This challenges the “Middle Ground” assumption that the ToC universally applies, demonstrating instead that effective implementation requires distinct, context-specific strategies matched to each governance archetype.

6.5.4 Research Contribution

This thesis contributes to multi-level governance scholarship by 1) revealing underinvested middle-level actors whose translation labor is essential to sustainability, 2) demonstrating that stakeholder salience is structurally determined by governance contexts, and 3) providing evidence that governance-informed partnership design (not standardized replication) determines long-term institutional impact. Sustainable NGO operations across multiple countries depend on diagnostic capacity to identify local governance constraints, invest in communication channels to manage them, and prioritize community ownership over rapid scaling-principles that challenge conventional development practice.

6.6 Limitations and Future Research

This study examines how governance structures shape “PSA” program implementation in Uganda and Colombia. However, limitations merit explicit acknowledgment.

The reliance on gatekeeper referrals by “KN” and “FUNDAEC” in recruiting a small interview sample of 13 participants (N=13) for approximately 30 minutes each may have introduced sampling and selection bias. This carries positivity bias risk: selected participants, particularly tutors and coordinators, may represent more successful implementations or present organizations favorably. To mitigate this, triangulated interview data with internal financial documents (UF, 2022-2026; UF, 2024a, 2024c; Baastel, 2023), comparing subjective stakeholder claims with documented resource allocation. Additionally, the sample included diverse hierarchical levels (executive directors to field tutors) and external observers (journalist and independent researcher) to capture divergent perspectives.

However, community representation remains limited. Only two youth participants were interviewed (rural young adults' limited communication access prevented broader community sampling). This constrains community voice in governance analysis, with perspectives weighted toward organizational leadership and implementation staff, biasing analysis toward formal governance structures over informal community practices.

Interviews conducted in English, Spanish, and German were translated by the research team to preserve semantic meaning minimizing language and translation bias. However, translation inevitably introduces interpretive mediation. Governance concepts (e.g., “accountability,” “community ownership,” “legitimacy”) carry distinct connotations across languages and institutional contexts, potentially obscuring nuanced local understandings encoded in original-language usage.

This case study design isolates the variable of local dynamics by holding the educational program constant across two contexts (Yin, 2018). However, it examines a single international

NGO network and its organizational culture. “UF”'s consultation-based approach and Bahá'í principles may create governance dynamics unrepresentative of secular or purely donor-driven organizations (UF, n.d.). Additionally, the “state cage/state vacuum” framework, while analytically useful, may oversimplify real-world governance that exists on a spectrum rather than fitting discrete categories. Finally, the analysis examines stakeholder perceptions of governance through interviews rather than direct observation of decision-making in practice (Lample, 2018), limiting verification of reported dynamics against actual implementation.

The study focuses on local dynamics affecting implementation (2022-2024), not on educational outcomes or program impact. External shocks (e.g., funding withdrawal, political instability, or infrastructure failure) are not analyzed. Longitudinal tracking beyond the “2022-2026 Framework Agreement” cycle would strengthen claims about institutional durability and sustainability mechanisms.

Quantitative outcome data (e.g., participant numbers, completion rates, learning gains) would validate governance-outcome relationships theoretically proposed here. Expanded interview samples across stakeholder groups, including sustained community-level sampling, would reduce leadership bias. Longitudinal studies tracking program sustainability beyond current funding cycles would test whether observed governance-outcome patterns persist across institutional shocks. Finally, comparative analysis of multiple educational programs within similar governance contexts (Brass et al., 2018; Bano, 2020) would determine whether governance-informed adaptation strategies transfer beyond this single NGO network.

7. Conclusions All

7.1 Literature Discussion<

This thesis examined how local dynamics and “UF”'s internal stakeholder arrangements shape “PSA” program implementation and outcomes in Uganda and Colombia. Through comparative case study analysis, the research generates strategic insights for “UF” and other NGOs operating

in fragmented governance contexts, with particular attention to organizational mechanisms sustaining program delivery.

The literature review demonstrated that governance frameworks, NGO effectiveness, and stakeholder theory have been studied extensively in isolation, with limited work examining how external governance constraints translate into internal coordination and accountability demands within NGO partner networks. This thesis addresses this gap by empirically tracing how country-level governance architectures condition “UF”'s internal mechanisms and multi-level stakeholder interactions.

“UF” functions as a meta-organizational actor managing donor relations and knowledge coordination, while local partners “FUNDAEC” and “KN” operationalize program delivery in response to contextual conditions. The core contribution of this thesis lies in demonstrating how interactions across local dynamics and stakeholder levels shape the partnership within the “PSA” program and help replicate into other countries. Methodologically, the study combined document analysis of formal governance frameworks with qualitative semi-structured interviews across stakeholder levels, enabling examination of governance both as institutional arrangement and as lived organizational practice. Interviews with “UF” leadership, local partners, participants, and external observers supported analysis of governance interactions and stakeholder relationships.

Despite significant differences between Colombian and Ugandan governance contexts, both contexts reveal similar mechanisms for responding to external constraints and shaping program outcomes. Stakeholders consistently identified communication and information flow between governance levels as critical assets for enabling sustainable community empowerment and program continuity. Local ownership emerged as central program objective, with successful implementation depending on community adaptation supported by external tutoring and knowledge coordination through local partners.

The analysis revealed that the same educational program confronts vastly different structural environments: what this thesis conceptualizes as a “state cage” in Uganda and a “state vacuum” in rural Colombia. Uganda's centralized governance architecture, from the Ministry of Education to local councils, creates a highly regulated environment. “KN” must invest substantial resources navigating these permission structures, engaging in institutional imitation to align innovative education with rigid national standards. Conversely, Colombia's fragmented governance creates both constraints and opportunities: local communities and grassroots structures become more salient because they substitute for weak state capacity in sustaining program delivery.

Stakeholder influence is not static but structurally determined by national governance architectures. In Uganda, state actors and international donors acquire heightened salience because they control system access, forcing the NGO to prioritize upward accountability over local responsiveness. In Colombia, the absence of strong state infrastructure elevates local communities and grassroots organizations as relatively more salient stakeholders.

Importantly, strategic visions articulated at upper governance levels must be transmitted through collaborative communication rather than hierarchical enforcement, with local partners and communities understood as active agents who continuously adapt program components. This principle is validated by divergent resource allocation patterns: in Uganda, 56% of the budget directs toward capacity building and tutor training, reflecting intensive external support needed to navigate centralized bureaucracy. In Colombia, 53% of resources flow to institutional strengthening and policy documentation rather than direct service delivery, confirming that local dynamics actively determine not just program activities, but fundamental resource distribution.

The study reveals divergence in how program success is conceptualized across stakeholder levels. While leadership frames success through “capacity building” and “organic growth,”

local implementers and communities define it through tangible livelihood improvements. Program sustainability depends on translation mechanisms that allow these definitions to coexist. The research identifies the “dual-filter model”, where “UF” and national authorities absorb administrative rigidity, as the structural mechanism enabling this coexistence. By shielding local partners from short-term funding pressures, this governance arrangement allows local ownership to emerge at its own pace, prioritizing trust over rapid scaling.

Overall, sustainable cross-country NGO operations depend less on standardized implementation models than on robust governance arrangements facilitating continuous communication, stakeholder coordination, and contextual adaptation while preserving program coherence.

7.2 Analytical Insights: Strategic Lessons derived from the Research Question

This section systematically synthesizes all three predefined research objectives (Section 1.3) and answers with help of empirical the central research questions:

RQ1: “How do Unity Foundation's internal stakeholder groups and local governance dynamics influence the implementation outcomes of the "Preparation for Social Action" (PSA) program in Uganda and Colombia?”

RQ2: “What strategic lessons can be drawn for NGOs replicating the program in cross-country operations?”

First, the analysis demonstrates that local dynamics fundamentally alter how the same program produces outcomes. Uganda's centralized architecture creates a “state cage” that forces vertical orientation toward government actors. This dense hierarchy compels “KN” to prioritize relationship management and institutional alignment over programmatic flexibility. Colombia's “state vacuum” forces horizontal orientation toward community actors.

NGOs cannot assume that replicating organizational structures and policies will produce consistent outcomes across contexts. Rather, organizations must diagnose specific local

governance structures and reorient operations accordingly. Centralized contexts require heavy investment in government relationship management and acceptance of constrained flexibility, while decentralized contexts demand investment in community networks and tolerance for internal leadership volatility. This governance-informed approach demands explicit governance mapping before program design, identifying which stakeholders control decisions, what accountability pressures dominate, and where authority lies

Second, local coordinators and unit leaders are key to sustainable program growth despite contradictory institutional environments. These middle-level actors absorb demands from upstream hierarchy (e.g., international donors, government officials, community members) and translate between competing stakeholder logics.

NGOs seeking to strengthen "PSA" sustainability must invest specifically in capacity building and decision-making authority for middle-level managers. This investment should include dedicated communication training and institutional recognition that their role involves managing governance contradictions, not simply implementing directives, recognizing that translating between competing stakeholder demands significantly contributes to program sustainability.

Third, qualitative evidence reveals that invited spaces often function performatively, legitimizing NGO presence rather than substantively shaping program direction. By contrast, the most robust program ownership emerges in claimed spaces, where communities actively participate in defining priorities and adapting materials to local realities. These autonomous structures are primary drivers of program resilience and sustainability. Where communities are treated as passive recipients within invited spaces, initiatives fail once external funding ends. Where claimed spaces are nurtured, programs survive governance shocks and funding challenges.

NGOs should explicitly fund informal tutor networks and youth associations rather than focusing solely on formal governance committees. Resources should facilitate grassroots exchanges, the sites where actual capacity building occurs. This requires shifting monitoring and evaluation to focus on the strength and autonomy of claimed spaces rather than formal system integration. Donors must employ differentiated metrics adapted to regulatory contexts, emphasizing qualitative evaluation alongside quantitative measures. “UF”'s non-directive partnership model enables local organizations the discretion to navigate these contexts differently.

“UF”'s internal stakeholder structures and local governance arrangements influence “PSA” outcomes through complementary mechanisms. Sustainable cross-country NGO operations depend less on standardized implementation models than on governance-informed partnership design that explicitly diagnoses local governance constraints, invests in organizational capacity to manage those constraints through clear communication channels, and prioritizes community ownership over rapid scaling.

8. Table of Figures

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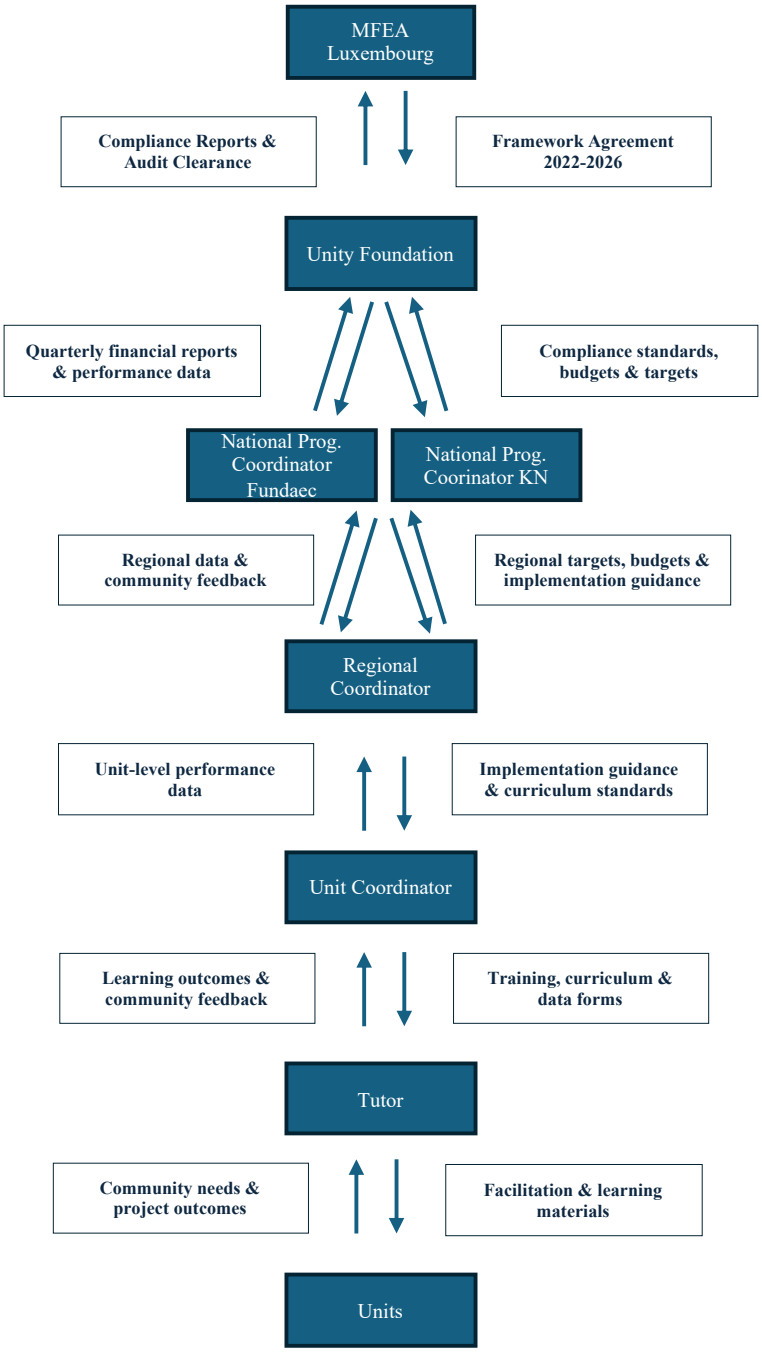
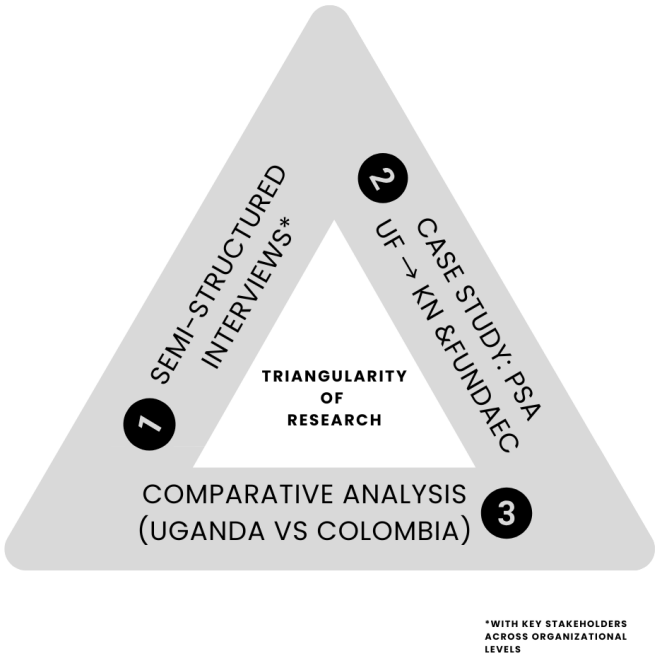
VI Appendix

Appendix I: "PSA" Governance Architecture



Appendix II: Triangularity of Research Design



Appendix III: Data Management (Codesystem)

Interview Question	Key Concept(s) from Thesis	Codes from Codebook
What is the main purpose of NGO-led and community-based education programmes such as PSA?	Vision, Purpose & Ideology; Community Empowerment Model	A1 (Vision, Purpose & Ideology)
Who defines the program's purpose? And how do you contribute to it in your role?	Multi-Stakeholder Vision Definition; Baha'i-inspired Development Philosophy	A1 (Vision, Purpose & Ideology); A2 (Governance Structures)
What is the broader purpose of international NGOs working through local partners in education and development?	Stakeholder Theory; Vision, Purpose & Ideology; NGO as Political Actor	A1 (Vision, Purpose & Ideology)
How do external actors (donors, experts, media, civil society) help shape the perceived purpose of such programs?	Multi-Level Governance; Donor Roles & Funding Logics; Pluralized Governance	A3 (Donor Roles & Funding Logics); A1 (Vision, Purpose & Ideology)
What aspects stand out as working particularly well, and what differentiates PSA from other programs you know?	Community Capacity & Agency; Pedagogical Innovation (PSA Model); Empowerment-Based Learning	C1 (Community Capacity & Agency); C4 (Practical Relevance of PSA); C5 (Legitimacy & Value Communication)
From your experience, what elements of community-based education programs tend to work particularly well?	Community Capacity & Agency; Pedagogical Innovation (PSA Model)	C1 (Community Capacity & Agency); C4 (Practical Relevance of PSA)
What differentiates initiatives like PSA from more traditional, top-down development interventions?	Community Ownership; Alternative Educational Models; Participatory Learning vs. Top-Down	C2 (Community Ownership); C5 (Legitimacy & Value Communication)
What do you think are the most significant difficulties this program faces from your perspective?	Implementation Challenges; Short-Term vs. Long-Term Impact Measurement	C10 (Challenges); C8 (PSA Outcome/Success)
What recurring challenges do you observe when international NGOs try to collaborate with local partners?	Coordination Dilemma; Network Governance; Partner Collaboration Challenges	C10 (Challenges); C3 (Role Definition & Collaboration)

Where do you most often see gaps between program intentions and on-the-ground realities?	Accountability Paradox (Upward vs. Downward); Local Dynamics vs. Donor Requirements	C10 (Challenges); A4 (Accountability); A3 (Donor Roles & Funding Logics)
Is there anything in NGO–government–community collaboration that researchers often underestimate?	Context-Specific Barriers; Informal Governance Dynamics	C10 (Challenges); B3 (Collaboration Patterns); A4 (Accountability)
How do different actors (NGOs, UNITY Foundation, communities, and local government) work together in these programs?	Formal & Informal Governance Structures; Multi-Level Collaboration	B3 (Collaboration Patterns); B1 (Formal Local Governance); B2 (Informal Governance)
Where does collaboration run smoothly, and where do you still see difficulties?	Role Definition & Collaboration; Stakeholder Relationship Management	C3 (Role Definition & Collaboration); C10 (Challenges)
How do you work with local government bodies in your country?	Formal Local Governance; Government Relations Strategy	B1 (Formal Local Governance); B3 (Collaboration Patterns)
Which forms of coordination between NGOs, local communities, governments, and donors tend to be effective?	Formal & Informal Governance Structures; Lead-Organization Governance Model	B3 (Collaboration Patterns); B1 (Formal Local Governance); B2 (Informal Governance)
Where do these collaborations typically break down?	Stakeholder Salience; Power Asymmetries; Philosophical Alignment in Partnerships	C10 (Challenges); B3 (Collaboration Patterns); A2 (Governance Structures)
To whom do you think these programs are most accountable, and how is that accountability expressed?	Multi-Directional Accountability; Upward (Donors) vs. Downward (Community)	A4 (Accountability); C2 (Community Ownership)
How is accountability actually operationalized? What mechanisms enforce it?	Accountability Operationalization; Transparency & Reporting Mechanisms	A4 (Accountability); A2 (Governance Structures)
In your view, what makes NGOs perceived as legitimate and accountable actors?	Legitimacy & Value Communication; Trust & Acceptance	A4 (Accountability); C5 (Legitimacy & Value Communication)
What usually undermines legitimacy—lack of transparency, donor dependence, weak political grounding, limited community voice?	Donor Dependence; Community Voice; Transparency vs. Compliance	A4 (Accountability); A3 (Donor Roles & Funding Logics); C5 (Legitimacy & Value Communication)
When certain decisions are made, whose voices matter most?	Stakeholder Influence; Decision-Making Authority Distribution	A4 (Accountability); A2 (Governance Structures)
How can we tell whether these programs are successful? What kind of evidence really convinces you?	Long-Term Outcomes vs. Short-Term Outputs; Capacity Building Evidence	C8 (PSA Outcome/Success); C1 (Community Capacity & Agency)
Which short-term outputs versus long-term outcomes matter most?	Community Transformation Indicators; Behavioral Change vs. Output Metrics	C8 (PSA Outcome/Success); C6 (Strategic Lessons)
What kind of evidence or signals convince you that an NGO program is achieving lasting or systemic impact?	Long-Term Outcomes vs. Short-Term Outputs; Systemic Impact Evidence	C8 (PSA Outcome/Success); C6 (Strategic Lessons)
How can one tell when an initiative becomes locally embedded rather than remaining project-based?	Local Embedding; Sustainability Pathways (Community-Led vs. Institutional)	C2 (Community Ownership); C8 (PSA Outcome/Success); C9 (Scaling/Growth)
Can you share a recent example where field feedback changed a decision?	Learning Systems; Feedback Loops; Adaptive Management	C6 (Strategic Lessons); C10 (Challenges)
How are strategic priorities normally established?	Governance Structures; Decision-Making Processes; Strategic Planning	A2 (Governance Structures); A4 (Accountability)
What's the review cycle for strategy? Is it annual, multi-year, every six months?	Governance Cycles; Reflection & Learning Integration; Flexibility within Strategy	A2 (Governance Structures)
How much voice do communities have in setting these strategic priorities?	Community Participation in Strategy; Stakeholder Voice in Priorities	C2 (Community Ownership); A2 (Governance Structures)
How are decision rights and responsibilities divided between UNITY Foundation, your national partner organization, and yourself?	Organizational Hierarchy; Distributed Decision Rights; Multi-Level Authority	A2 (Governance Structures); A4 (Accountability)

Briefly describe your role and your main responsibilities	Role Definition; Coordinator Responsibilities; Ground-Level Authority	A2 (Governance Structures); C3 (Role Definition & Collaboration)
If you could change one thing to improve how these programs work, what would it be?	Adaptive Management; Learning-Oriented Governance; Continuous Improvement	A2 (Governance Structures); C10 (Challenges)
How does information flow from tutors and communities up to leadership and back down?	Information Flow Systems; Feedback Mechanisms; Data-to-Decision Pathways	A2 (Governance Structures); B2 (Informal Governance); C6 (Strategic Lessons)
How do you balance government compliance requirements with learning and adaptation?	Compliance vs. Learning Tension; Regulatory Environment; Operational Flexibility	A4 (Accountability); C10 (Challenges); A3 (Donor Roles & Funding Logics)
What criteria guide scaling decisions?	Scaling Strategy; Sustainability Pathways; Growth Management	C9 (Scaling/Growth); A2 (Governance Structures)
Can you share a recent example where field feedback changed a decision?	Adaptive Management; Responsive Governance; Change Implementation	C6 (Strategic Lessons); C10 (Challenges)
How do different actors work together - different levels of decision-making?	Multi-Level Communication; Vertical & Horizontal Information Flows	A2 (Governance Structures); B3 (Collaboration Patterns)
What role does learning/reflection play in strategic adaptation?	Organizational Learning; Reflection Cycles; Evidence-Based Adaptation	A2 (Governance Structures); C6 (Strategic Lessons)
Based on your work and observations, what key lessons should NGOs, governments, or donors take to improve cross-country partnerships?	Cross-Country Comparative Analysis; Context Sensitivity; Governance Adaptation; Scalable Solutions	C6 (Strategic Lessons for Cross-Country Operations); C7 (Comparison)

Appendix IV: Codebook

- 1 Program outcomes & strategic lessons
  - 1.1 C10 Challenges
  - 1.2 C9 Scaling/Growth of the program
  - 1.3 C8 PSA Outcome/Success of the Program
  - 1.4 C7 Comparison
  - 1.5 C6 Strategic lessons for cross-country operations
  - 1.6 C5 Legitimacy & value communication
  - 1.7 C4 Practical relevance of PSA for livelihoods/education
  - 1.8 C3 Role definition & collaboration
  - 1.9 C2 Community ownership
  - 1.10 C1 Community capacity & agency
- 2 Local Dynamics
  - 2.1 B3 Collaboration patterns between NGOs and state/local actors
  - 2.2 B2 Informal governance & community leadership
  - 2.3 B1 Formal local governance
- 3 Internal stakeholder groups
  - 3.1 A4 Accountability

3.2 A3 Donor roles & funding logics
3.3 A2 Governance structures
3.4 A1 Vision, purpose & ideology

Appendix V: Information Sheet for Participants

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Researchers:
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RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This comparative case study examines how local governance dynamics and internal organizational structures influence the implementation and long-term impact of community-based education programs across different institutional contexts.

Specifically, we investigate:

1. How do Unity Foundation's internal stakeholder arrangements shape collaboration with local partners and program execution?
2. How do local dynamics in Uganda and Colombia enable or constrain “PSA” program adaptation and systemic impact?
3. What strategic lessons can international NGOs draw from implementing the same pedagogical innovation across vastly different institutional environments?

CASE STUDY CONTEXT

Organization Focus: Unity Foundation (Luxembourg-based NGO)

Program: Preparation for Social Action (PSA)

Local Partners:

- FUNDAEC (Colombia) – Foundation for the Application and Teaching of Sciences

- Kimanya-Ngeyo (Uganda) - Foundation for Science and Education

Geographic Comparison:

- Uganda: Centralized governance system with institutional capacity constraints
- Colombia: Decentralized governance system with distributed institutional infrastructure

Research Rationale: Both countries implement the same pedagogical innovation (PSA) but within contrasting governance architectures, offering unique insights into which governance conditions enable or constrain systemic impact.

YOUR PARTICIPATION

We are seeking interviews with diverse stakeholders to understand how governance structures and stakeholder relationships shape program outcomes.

Interview Focus:
Your interview would explore:

- Governance structures and decision-making in educational NGO programs
- Challenges in NGO-community-government collaboration across Latin American contexts
- Accountability mechanisms and legitimacy of educational innovations
- Strategic lessons for scaling and embedding programs within national education systems
- Comparative observations on institutional capacity and systemic integration

Interview Format:

- Duration: ~30 minutes
- Method: Semi-structured interview (in-person, video call, or phone)
- Language: English
- Recording: With your consent, for transcription and analysis purposes

DATA CONFIDENTIALITY & ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Voluntary Participation:
Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without providing a reason, and this will not affect your relationship with the research team or institutions involved.

Informed Consent:
You will be asked to provide informed consent before the interview. An informed consent form will be provided separately.

Anonymity & Privacy:

- Your interview will be assigned a code identifier (e.g., INT01) for analysis purposes
- Direct quotes in the thesis will be anonymized unless you explicitly consent to attribution
- Raw interview data will be stored securely and accessible only to the research team
- All data will be deleted following institutional retention policies

Data Security:

- Recordings will be transcribed and then deleted
- Transcripts stored on secure, password-protected systems
- Access restricted to the three researchers

Research Ethics:
This research has been conducted in accordance with Nova School of Business & Economics ethical research guidelines and receives institutional oversight.

Appendix VI: Transcripts of the Interviews

Due to their substantial length, complete interview transcripts (INT01-INT13)

are provided as a separate attachment to this thesis.