Aid and market systems development in Uganda

Evidence on financing contributions and implications for programme design

Uganda Market Systems Development Network

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Abstract

Uganda has received substantial development assistance, while market systems development (MSD) has influenced interventions in business information, agricultural services, trading relationships and refugee livelihoods. This paper asks three questions: how much aid Uganda has received over time; what financing can be identified for MSD-oriented programming; and what the evidence permits us to conclude about its contributions. A structured desk review combines World Development Indicators (WDI) recipient-flow data, programme financing records, evaluations, learning briefs and published research. The consistent aid series covers 1990-2023, with an annual annex extending to 1980. It records US$46.96 billion in cumulative current-dollar net official assistance, equivalent to US$56.25 billion when the annual constant-2023-dollar observations are summed. These are accounting measures, not estimates of development impact. A purposive financing register identifies US$68.28 million in published budgets, phase support and contract ceilings across four programmes, alongside £32.3 million in revised or indicative allocations to two explicitly identified MSD components. These figures are neither audited national MSD expenditure nor a comparable share of Uganda's annual aid receipts. The review finds evidence of changes in service provision and trading practices, reported household gains, and causal welfare gains for a combined graduation-and-MSD package. Evidence of economy-wide impact and the isolated contribution of MSD remains insufficient for national attribution. The paper translates these findings into intervention selection, financing, inclusion, sustainability and measurement guidance. It proposes a reconciled funding register and post-support follow-up as priorities for improving future design decisions. [1-3, 5-16]

Keywords: Uganda; official development assistance; market systems development; programme design; systemic change; aid effectiveness; evidence synthesis.

How to use this paper

Read Sections 3 and 4 for the aid and financing accounts, Sections 5 and 6 for evidence on contributions, and Sections 7-9 for design and measurement. Appendices provide annual data and tools for preparing a concept note. This is a desk-based research paper; it does not report new interviews, field observations or an independently audited national MSD portfolio. The institutional author is UMSDN. Programme findings are attributed to their original sources, including sources co-published by UMSDN.

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1 Executive findings

The strongest conclusion is that MSD has supported identifiable changes in particular Ugandan markets, but its national contribution cannot responsibly be reduced to one beneficiary total, return-on-aid figure or percentage of GDP. Different studies answer different questions, and their findings must retain those boundaries.

First, Uganda's net aid receipts have been substantial but variable. Annual receipts in the extracted WDI series increased from US$0.66 billion in 1990 to US$2.26 billion in 2023 in current dollars. The 2020 observation was US$3.09 billion. In constant 2023 prices, the decline from 2020 to 2023 was about 33.0%. Aid as a share of gross national income fell from 15.7% in 1990 to 4.7% in 2023. A smaller aid-to-GNI ratio can reflect a larger economy as well as changing aid flows; it is not a measure of reduced need. [1-3]

Second, the financial records do not support a national MSD spending share. Published programme envelopes can establish the scale of identifiable commitments, but a budget is not expenditure. In multi-component programmes, the parent budget is not the MSD component. A register that preserves these distinctions is more useful than a misleading grand total.

Third, the outcome evidence spans several levels. The CPM ex-post evaluation documents continued practices and expansion among sampled market actors but expressly rules out national causal inference. NU-TEC's completion review recognises commercial and household gains while identifying limits to wider systemic change. IAM learning briefs reveal both promising compliance behaviour and difficult commercial seed production. DREAMS provides stronger causal evidence for participating households, but its Ugandan trial tests a combined package, not MSD in isolation. [6-7, 10-11, 13]

Fourth, future programmes should finance a plausible lasting function and a defensible transition, rather than assume that a successful pilot will spread. Designs need an identified provider, payer, demand source, public role, inclusion strategy and response to failure. Whether an activity should be commercial, publicly financed or layered with household assistance is a design decision to investigate, not an ideological rule.

Fifth, better evidence is itself a practical investment. New programmes should preserve disaggregated expenditure and performance records, test alternative explanations, examine non-participating actors, and fund follow-up after support ends. UMSDN can contribute as an evidence convenor and steward of comparable records. It should not claim to own the results of programmes implemented by its members or partners.

2 Scope methods and interpretation

2.1 Review questions and boundaries

The financing question concerns aid received by Uganda, not every external financial flow. Foreign direct investment, remittances and non-concessional borrowing are not silently added to ODA. The MSD question concerns interventions that intentionally change market functions, rules, relationships or incentives for the benefit of disadvantaged participants. The presence of a private firm, agricultural training, a grant or a market linkage is not sufficient to establish an MSD approach. [4, 17-18]

The aid analysis uses a common WDI extraction with data updated on 11 November 2026 and downloaded on 17 November 2026. The latest non-null observation across the three selected series was 2023. The paper does not infer 2024-2026 receipts from budgets, news coverage or a different aid measure. Later OECD releases should be reconciled before extending this series. This choice favours internal consistency over presenting a more recent number with a different definition or price base.

Programme evidence ranges from the 2009 SEMA review to the DREAMS Uganda endline report available in 2026. Earlier evidence is used to understand the evolution of approaches, not to describe present prevalence. Planned programmes and funding ceilings are not treated as completed outcomes. The sample is intentionally useful for design and is not a census of every MSD programme in Uganda.

2.2 Search and selection

Searches on 17 November 2026 covered World Bank and OECD data, ILO evaluation records, FCDO DevTracker and procurement records, BEAM programme and evidence resources, evaluator and implementer publications, and relevant published research. The search combined Uganda with aid, official development assistance, market systems development, M4P, programme names, budgets, evaluation, ex-post, sustainability and systemic change. References were followed from the refugee-response compendium and programme profiles. UMSDN's supplied IAM learning briefs were read alongside public source references.

Selection prioritised a Uganda-specific intervention, an intelligible market-change mechanism, a traceable financial or results claim, and enough methodological information to judge what could be inferred. Two related IAM interventions were retained because their contrasting trajectories are useful for design. Financing records without separate Uganda or MSD allocations were mapped but excluded from financial subtotals. The review is a structured scoping exercise, not a pre-registered systematic review or statistical meta-analysis. It has no defensible denominator for estimating what percentage of all Ugandan programmes succeeded.

2.3 Source hierarchy and assessment

For funding, the preferred record is audited expenditure or a donor financial record, followed by an executed contract or completion review, then a published programme budget. Directories are useful for discovery but do not independently verify expenditure. For results, an independent evaluation with an explicit comparison strategy has a different evidential role from routine monitoring or an implementer learning brief. Independence alone does not guarantee causal identification; the design must answer the question asked.

Each contribution is assessed against five dimensions: source and independence; method and comparator; population and observation period; evidence of change beyond directly supported actors; and persistence after support. Results are described as causal estimates, non-causal evaluation findings, programme-reported observations or design intentions. This is a qualitative appraisal, not a numerical score of programme quality. The approach draws on DCED guidance on attribution and wider change, while the synthesis and recommendations are UMSDN's analysis. [17-18]

2.4 Comparability rules

Households, individuals, enterprises, agents and service contacts are retained as different units. Repeated contacts are not additional people; overlapping programme populations cannot be added without deduplication. Sales are not profit, investment plans are not realised investment, and private co-financing is not donor expenditure. An increase after an intervention is not automatically caused by it. A national poverty trend cannot be attributed to MSD by placing it next to an aid chart.

Financial values retain their original currencies and reference periods. No current exchange rate is used to translate a historical programme portfolio. Current-dollar annual aid can be summed as nominal accounting receipts, but the purchasing-power comparison uses the constant-price series. Optional contract extensions and parent-component amounts are not added twice. These rules deliberately constrain what the paper claims; they also make its evidence usable in later due diligence.

3 Uganda aid receipts over time

3.1 What the aid series measures

The primary money series is WDI indicator DT.ODA.ALLD.CD, labelled net official development assistance and official aid received in current US dollars. Its constant-price counterpart is DT.ODA.ALLD.KD, expressed in constant 2023 US dollars at extraction. The relative-size series is DT.ODA.ODAT.GN.ZS, net ODA received as a percentage of GNI. These draw on OECD development finance statistics. [1-4]

Net recipient flows must not be confused with donor headline grant-equivalent ODA, gross commitments, government budget support or money physically transferred to the Ugandan Treasury. Development assistance can include grants, concessional lending and technical or in-kind assistance, with net flows reflecting relevant repayments. Aid may be delivered through public agencies, implementers or other channels. The series therefore answers an accounting question about reported official assistance, not how much unrestricted cash government could spend. [4]

3.2 Scale and trajectory

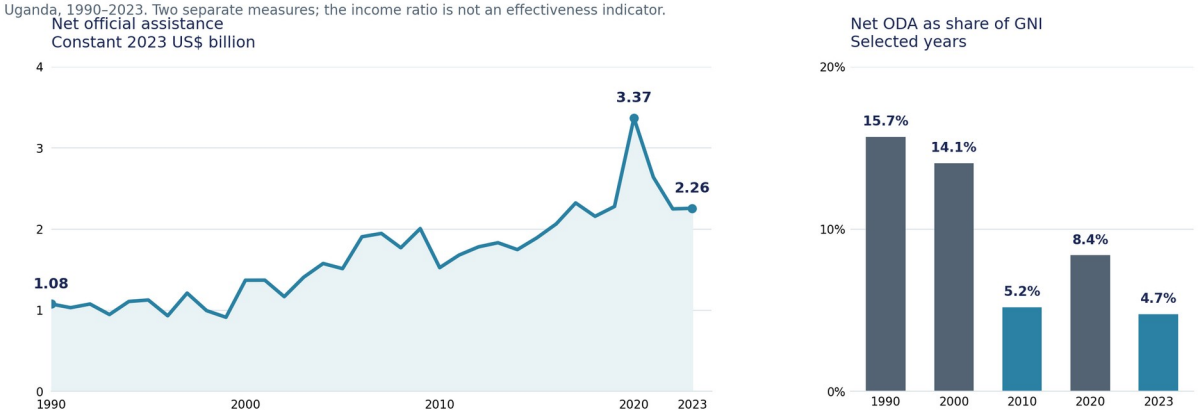
Across 1990-2023, the sum of annual current-dollar observations is US$46.96 billion. Summing the annual constant-2023-dollar observations gives US$56.25 billion. The second number is not obtained by inflating the first total with a single multiplier: each year's observation already uses the WDI constant-price conversion. Table 1 shows totals for periods of different lengths, so it also reports the annual average. [1-2; UMSDN calculations]

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FIGURE 1

Aid receipts have varied, while their share of national income has declined over the longer term

Uganda, 1990–2023. Two separate measures; the income ratio is not an effectiveness indicator.



Sources [1–3]: WDI, underlying OECD DAC data; extraction 17 November 2026. Latest common observation 2023.

Aid is not a Treasury cash transfer measure. Do not read the left series as nominal dollars or the right series as a causal effect.

Table 1 Net official assistance received by period

Period	Years	Current US$ bn total	2023 US$ bn total	Current US$ bn annual mean
1990-1999	10	7.00	10.42	0.70
2000-2009	10	12.60	16.03	1.26
2010-2019	10	17.30	19.28	1.73
2020-2023	4	10.07	10.51	2.52
1990-2023	34	46.96	56.25	1.38

Sources [1-2]; UMSDN calculations. The 2020-2023 period contains four years. The final row overlaps the others and is a summary, not an additional period.

The pattern has two implications for design. A programme cannot assume that the funding environment at approval will persist through implementation. At the same time, volatility in aggregate receipts does not identify the exposure of a particular market or service. A health grant, a humanitarian operation and a market facilitation contract may respond differently. Financing decisions need a programme-specific exposure assessment alongside the national picture.

In current dollars, 2023 receipts were US$2.26 billion compared with US$3.09 billion in 2020. The corresponding constant-price values were US$2.26 billion and US$3.37 billion. The 33.0% real decline is calculated between those two observations; it does not describe every intervening year or establish the reason for the change. The observation for 2023 should not be described as Uganda's aid position in 2026. [1-2]

3.3 Aid intensity and its interpretation

The selected-year aid-to-GNI observations are 15.7% in 1990, 14.1% in 2000, 5.2% in 2010, 8.4% in 2020 and 4.7% in 2023. This ratio contextualises the scale of assistance relative to income, but it says little about how well a particular intervention performs. Differences in economic growth, aid composition, exchange rates and programme timing can all matter. No regression of national income or poverty on aid is estimated here. [3]

For future design, a sensible use of the historical series is stress testing. A proposed function should be examined under delayed disbursements, reduced donor support and a shorter exit runway. The scale of a stress scenario must be labelled an assumption. A hypothetical 25% funding reduction is a planning test, not a forecast of Uganda's next aid receipt. Nor should a programme terminate essential public or humanitarian provision simply because a commercial substitute is hoped for.

4 Identifiable financing for MSD oriented programming

4.1 Why a national spending share is not yet defensible

MSD is an approach used across sectors and funding instruments. The selected records do not supply a reconciled Uganda-wide MSD expenditure series. A project title may describe an approach incompletely, while a multi-component programme may contain both facilitation and direct financing. Consequently, a search result for an agricultural programme cannot be classified as entirely MSD without examining design and finance records.

Table 2 separates four published US-dollar envelopes. Their arithmetic sum is US$68.283201 million, rounded to US$68.28 million. Two entries are programme-profile budgets, one is a contract ceiling and one is support to a defined programme phase. This is a transparent inventory subtotal across non-overlapping named programmes, not a national expenditure estimate, not an independently verified lower bound on money actually spent, and not a currency-adjusted comparison of programme size. [5-6, 8-9]

Table 2 Selected US dollar financing envelopes

Programme or phase	Published period	US$ million	Financial basis and limit
ILO SEMA final phase	2006-2009	1.491312	Reported phase support. Not full FIT and SEMA history; not an audited expenditure account. [5]
Feed the Future CPM	2013-2018	20.991889	Contract ceiling in ex-post evaluation. Ceiling is not actual expenditure. [6]
Feed the Future Ag Inputs	2012-2017	10	Programme profile budget. Directory amount pending reconciliation with final financial records. [8]
Feed the Future IAM	2019-2025 in profile	35.8	Programme profile budget. Not actual spending or confirmation of final dates; results cutoff January 2024. [9]

Subtotal US$68.28 million. These mix reported phase support, a contract ceiling and profile budgets. No expenditure total or national MSD share is inferred.

For sterling, the NU-TEC completion review identifies a revised £18.8 million allocation for Market Development. The CSJ procurement design specifies up to £13.5 million for Component 1A, the explicitly identified MSD intervention. Together these document £32.3 million in revised or indicative allocations, not matched expenditure. The CSJ core contract award covers both Component 1A and a climate innovation fund and is capped at £15.5 million; its optional maximum is £23.25 million. Neither broader figure is added to the £13.5 million component allocation. [7, 14-15]

Table 3 Explicit sterling component allocations

Component	GBP million	What the record establishes	What remains unresolved
NU-TEC MD	18.8	Revised MD allocation in completion review. [7]	Component actual spending not separately verified here.
CSJ 1A	13.5	Indicative MSD ceiling in 2022 procurement. [14]	Subsequent amendments and actual component spend.

Identified subtotal £32.3 million. Excludes parent programmes, optional extensions and CSJ Component 1B. Retain original currency; no exchange-rate conversion applied.

4.2 The parent programme and component problem

NU-TEC illustrates why scope matters. The completion review records £44.3 million in final expenditure for the whole programme, comprising Market Development, financial services, investment and monitoring and

evaluation. The £18.8 million revised Market Development allocation is nested within that architecture. Adding it to the £44.3 million parent total would count part of the same programme twice. Treating all £44.3 million as expenditure on market facilitation would also obscure the other instruments. [7]

The same principle applies to results. The review assigns £115.1 million in additional turnover to the combined programme and £94.4 million to the MD component. The scope cannot be changed merely because both numbers concern NU-TEC. Turnover is not household income or net social benefit. A design appraisal must use the measure and population corresponding to the question it is trying to answer. [7]

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FIGURE 2

National aid flows and programme envelopes answer different accounting questions

Do not divide the selected programme envelopes by national net aid receipts to produce an MSD share.

NATIONAL FLOWS	US$46.96bn	**1990–2023 net receipts, current dollars** Annual recipient-flow series; aid composition is broader than MSD.
USD PROGRAMME ENVELOPES	US$68.28m	**Four selected programmes or phases** Published budgets, phase support and a ceiling; not actual expenditure.
GBP MSD ALLOCATIONS	£32.3m	**NU-TEC MD and CSJ Component 1A** Revised and indicative allocations; parent programmes excluded.

Sources [1, 5–9, 14–15]; UMSDN classification and arithmetic. All programme figures retain original currency.

Different periods, scope and financial bases prevent a comparable national percentage. No cross-currency grand total is reported.

4.3 Exclusions and the next financing account

DREAMS combines household graduation with MSD and has been implemented in more than one country. Its Uganda study-cohort costs are useful for analysis, but they are not substituted for a Uganda programme budget. Wider refugee-response programmes in the U-Learn and UMSDN compendium also combine instruments. Without a separately documented Uganda MSD allocation, their total budgets are excluded. This excludes an unknown amount of relevant investment; it does not mean that those programmes contributed nothing. [13, 16]

A proper national account would link donor project identifiers to transactions and components. For each record it would retain original currency, commitment date, annual disbursement, annual expenditure, refund or repayment, Uganda allocation, MSD allocation rule, source version and overlap with parent or follow-on activities. Private matching finance and beneficiaries would be separate tables. Where staff time supports several components, the allocation basis should be recorded rather than guessed retrospectively.

The paper therefore does not divide US$68.28 million or a converted sterling subtotal by US$46.96 billion. That calculation would mix a selected multi-year envelope sample with annual net national flows, different periods, different currencies and different financial bases. A percentage with those inputs would look precise but would not measure the share of aid invested in MSD.

5 Evidence on contributions and limits

5.1 How to read the evidence

A contribution can be valuable without being a causal impact estimate. Evidence that a provider has adopted a service tells us about behaviour. Evidence that customers keep purchasing after support ends tells us about persistence. A credible comparison of welfare with and without a programme addresses a different question. System-wide change additionally requires evidence about actors and relationships beyond the original partners, including competitive responses and unintended effects. [17-18]

Table 4 Evidence map for the selected cases

Programme or domain	Source type	Supported reading	Main boundary
SEMA business information	Independent learning review [5]	Mechanisms for service provision	Audience welfare not evaluated
CPM agent relationships	Non-random ex-post study [6]	Continuation and expansion in sample	Not a national causal effect
NU-TEC MD	Donor completion review [7]	Commercial gains and qualified persistence	Wider adoption evidence limited
IAM food certification	Implementer tracer brief [10]	Practice and compliance changes reported	Several influences and selected sample
IAM IRB seed production	Implementer learning brief [11]	Adaptation and below-target yields	Viability not demonstrated
DREAMS Uganda	Randomised package evaluation [13]	Causal household consumption effect	Does not isolate MSD component
Input adoption research	Empirical study and simulation [19-20]	Mechanisms to investigate	Not current programme impact

These categories describe what each source can answer; they are not a cross-programme performance ranking.

The cases below are not a performance league table. They span different populations, periods, sectors and research designs. No pooled effect size or national beneficiary total is calculated. Their value is in identifying mechanisms and testing the assumptions that a new design would otherwise carry unexamined.

5.2 Commercial business information and the SEMA experience

The ILO SEMA intervention built on FIT Uganda and sought to make business-focused radio programming responsive to audiences and commercially sustainable. The independent 2009 learning review describes work with broadcasting and supporting services, including production and sales capability. The defined 2006-2009 phase received US$1,491,312. Crucially, the review states that it did not investigate impacts on the target audience; it was designed to document learning and conditions for replication. The case supports a mechanism for changing information-service provision, not a measured national income effect. [5]

For design, this is a reminder to investigate the service business behind information access. Who commissions useful content? What does the audience need? What motivates an advertiser or station to continue? A donor purchasing airtime may deliver immediate information but cannot, by that fact alone, establish an enduring editorial or commercial model. The next programme should test demand and provider capability as well as the relevance and accessibility of content. Digital channels may differ from radio, so the historical model should be re-examined, not copied unchanged.

5.3 CPM and continued intermediary services

The USAID CPM ex-post evaluation examined sustainability and spillover after the 2013-2018 activity. It reports that five of seven interviewed early-participant exporters expanded into new districts using CPM-

linked models. The evaluation also explicitly states that its non-random sampled population cannot support national causal conclusions. Surveys and qualitative work provide useful accounts of continued intermediary services and relationships, but do not establish what all Ugandan farmers gained because of CPM. [6]

A future agent-network design should distinguish recruitment from a functioning commercial network. Evidence would include agents who remain active, the transactions they facilitate, their net remuneration, buyer satisfaction, farmer switching options and changes in service quality. If an agent's main income remains a project allowance, continued existence of the network says little about commercial sustainability. If one buyer controls information and access, increased activity may coexist with weak supplier bargaining power. Both possibilities should be investigated.

5.4 NU TEC and the boundary between direct gains and system change

NU-TEC's completion review reports a substantial Market Development portfolio, while its systemic-change assessment is more qualified. QDS producers continued production, but the review found no evidence of expansion and wider adoption of that model. Commercial-agent arrangements had promising signs of persistence and investment, with more time and scale needed to observe wider change. The multi-component structure also complicates interpretation of aggregate results. These are material qualifications alongside the reported commercial achievements. [7]

The 2025 refugee-response compendium reports an estimated 102,254 households with real agricultural income increases of at least 15% during engagement with NU-TEC MD partners. That is a programme-derived estimate presented in a later synthesis, not an independently identified causal effect or an additional cohort to add to the parent programme. [16]

The design implication is to specify expansion evidence before treating a model as systemic. Repeat provision by a supported actor is a starting point. Wider adoption would require information on other firms adopting, how they learned, what they changed, their commercial incentives and whether benefits reached smaller or excluded suppliers. A new programme should not substitute the size of a partner for that evidence. Large firms may be useful partners, but firm size is not an impact mechanism.

5.5 IAM and food quality certification

IAM's processed-food certification brief reports a July 2022 tracer study of 33 processors. It records increased interest in certification and changes to facilities or practices, while acknowledging that training, technical assistance, enforcement and collaboration operated together. It also questions whether processors would pay for continued support and whether markets rewarded certification with a premium. This is implementer-generated evidence on a combined intervention, not a control-group estimate of training impact. [10]

The reported trajectory is useful because the bottleneck is not simply a lack of knowledge. The intended service depends on buyer requirements, enforcement credibility, the cost of compliance and an advisory provider's business model. A future quality initiative should therefore examine whether upgrading raises margins, reduces avoidable losses or gives access to buyers, and whether these gains cover compliance and advisory costs. Training attendance and certification counts alone cannot answer that question. Certification may also protect consumers through a public-interest function even when a price premium is absent; the public role needs an explicit rationale.

5.6 IAM and the iron rich bean production test

The September 2022 iron-rich-bean brief describes two 2021 production cycles in Karamoja. Reported yields increased from 37 to 115 kilograms per acre, but remained below the anticipated 375 kilograms per acre. The brief identifies weather, labour, group capability, seed performance and market-entry difficulties, and describes adaptation between cycles. These observations do not demonstrate that IRB production had become commercially viable. [11]

This is useful design evidence precisely because the initial proposition did not deliver as expected. A seed multiplication proposal should test agronomic suitability and the actual cost of labour, supervision and quality assurance before projecting scale. It needs a downside case for failed production, a realistic buyer and price, and a rule for further investment. A second season should be an opportunity to test revised assumptions rather than a reason to reset targets without examining viability. Risk-sharing terms must make clear who absorbs losses and whether participants can exit safely.

5.7 Layering with earlier public and humanitarian investment

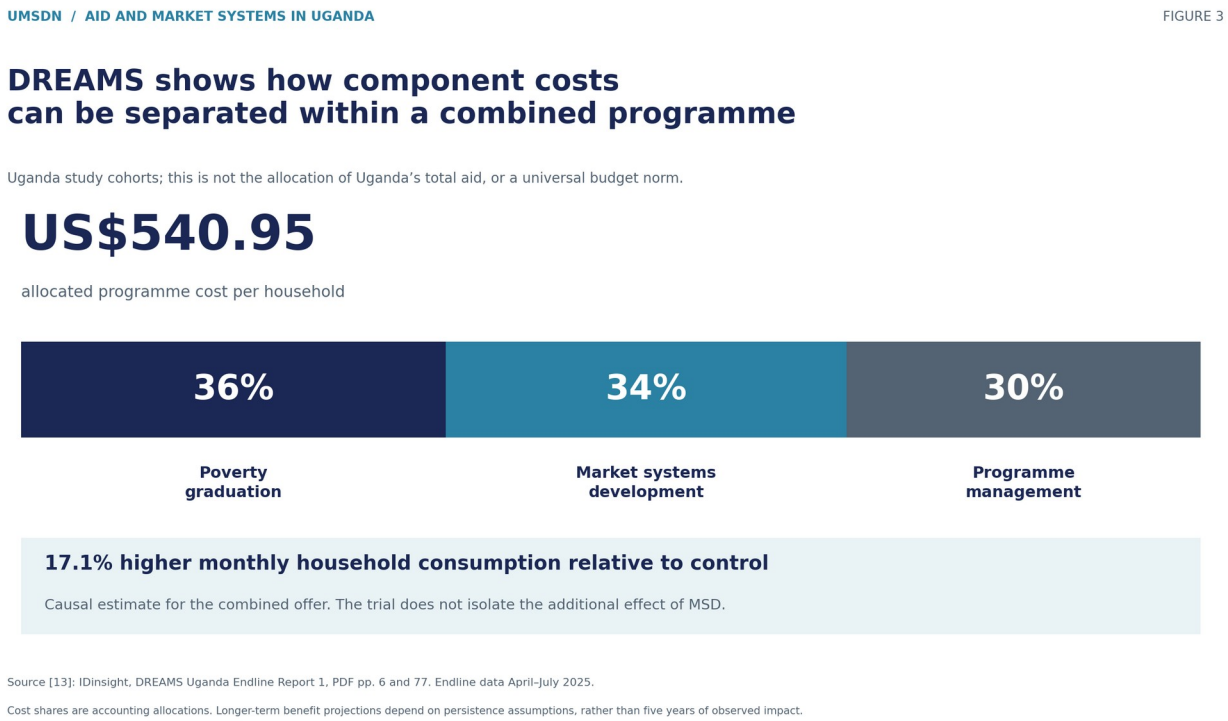
IAM's layering brief describes building on existing farmer groups, village-agent structures and aggregation facilities associated with public and humanitarian actors. It offers an implementation account of how earlier investments can provide a platform for commercial entry. It does not provide a counterfactual estimate of layering's additional effect. The case supports a practical question about complementary provision, not a claim that humanitarian assistance should automatically be withdrawn or that private activity replaces every function. [12]

A future design should start with an inventory of what already exists, who owns it, who can use it and what costs are covered. A warehouse may be physically present but unusable because maintenance, governance or access arrangements fail. An established group may have received training without being commercially ready. The appropriate contribution may be to repair an operating arrangement rather than fund another asset. Where household assistance remains necessary, transitions should be coordinated and monitored for harm.

5.8 DREAMS and stronger household impact evidence

IDinsight's first Uganda endline evaluates a combined graduation-and-MSD package. The randomised study's final sample comprises 6,560 households, with endline data collected in April-July 2025. It estimates a 17.1% increase in monthly household consumption relative to control. The result is evidence for the combined offer under the study conditions. It does not identify the separate incremental impact of MSD. [13]

The report allocates study-cohort costs of US$540.95 per household across graduation, MSD and programme management. Its figure assigns 34% to MSD, 36% to graduation and 30% to management. Those are study cost allocations, not Uganda's national aid allocation. Its longer-term return projections depend on persistence assumptions; they are not observed five-year returns. [13]



For design, the evidence supports testing complementary household capability and market opportunities together where barriers operate on both sides. It does not justify assuming the same cost or impact in a different settlement, sector or target population. A programme seeking the additional value of MSD needs an evaluation strategy that distinguishes the relevant comparison and captures effects on non-participants. Shared market improvements can reach comparison households, so the unit of assignment, spillovers and the interpretation of household effects require explicit planning.

5.9 Input quality as a mechanism rather than an impact claim

Published Ugandan research helps explain why behavioural advice may be insufficient. Bold and colleagues investigate how poor-quality inputs can undermine expected returns and adoption. Reinker and Gralla model interacting adoption constraints in Ugandan input markets. The former provides historical empirical evidence; the latter explores mechanisms through simulation. Neither is a measured impact estimate for a present-day Ugandan MSD programme. [19-20]

The implication is to diagnose whether low uptake is a rational response to uncertain quality, supply reliability or returns. A training-heavy design may otherwise ask customers to purchase a service that does not pay. Quality verification, distribution incentives and recourse can be candidate responses, but their suitability and cost must be established locally. Historical prevalence estimates should not be republished as if they described the current input market.

6 What the evidence supports

6.1 Contributions with a defensible basis

The evidence supports three bounded statements. MSD-oriented programmes have helped test and establish ways of supplying information and agricultural services. Evaluations and learning accounts document continuation, adaptation or expansion among some actors. A combined graduation-and-MSD programme has generated causally estimated household welfare gains in the Uganda trial. Each statement has a different evidential basis and scope. [5-7, 10-13]

A broader claim that MSD has caused a specified share of national poverty reduction is not supported by this review. Nor do the available records establish a national return on MSD aid, a complete count of unique people benefiting or a reliable ranking of MSD against every alternative development approach. These questions would require additional data and suitable designs, not a more confident reading of the same reports.

6.2 A service provision mechanism

A useful design proposition is that assistance can change the cost, risk or information facing a service provider, allowing it to test provision for a previously underserved customer group. If repeated demand and a workable margin then exist, provision may continue. This proposition should be written as a testable causal sequence. It is not established merely by awarding a grant to a provider.

The first weak link may lie with supply, demand, rules or their interaction. A provider might lack technical capability; a customer might lack purchasing power; an agreement might not be enforceable; or the transaction could be too costly for either side. The diagnosis should specify which constraint binds at the intended scale. Otherwise, a provider subsidy can disguise a demand problem, and a customer voucher can disguise a service-quality problem.

6.3 Persistence and expansion are separate outcomes

Persistence asks whether an improved function remains available after the original support ends. Expansion asks whether it reaches new customers, places or actors, or provokes wider changes in practice and rules. A

programme may achieve one without the other. It may also create an accessible niche without transforming the market. That can still be a worthwhile result if the cost, objective and opportunity cost are explicit.

For a design team, these distinctions change the investment decision. Continued provision to original customers may justify a targeted improvement. Wider adoption may justify expanding a model. A claim of systemic change should examine competitive responses, quality, distributional effects and the vulnerability of the new arrangement to shocks. It should not be inferred solely from the number of signed partners or people reached.

6.4 Complementarity does not prove that every component is necessary

A package can work even when its components' individual contributions are unknown. Conversely, a component may be essential for a particular group without being cost-effective for everyone. The appropriate design question is the smallest credible combination that addresses the binding barriers for the target population. This requires considering feasibility, inclusion and alternative ways of delivering the function.

Where household resources are extremely limited, market facilitation may need to be accompanied by temporary direct support. Where a viable service and capable customers already exist, the priority might be standards, information or coordination. Neither condition should be assumed from the location alone. Pilots and evaluations should be designed to resolve the uncertain choice, rather than to validate a package already selected.

7 Implications for future programme design

7.1 Define the welfare objective and the market function

Begin with the group whose outcome should improve and a measurable welfare or employment problem. Distinguish a low income from its proximate business symptom and its underlying market explanation. Rejected deliveries, delayed payments and unreliable input quality can point towards different interventions even when all appear as low sales.

Define the function to improve in operational terms. Examples include reliable quality assurance, timely collection, suitable working-capital assessment, accessible information or safe job matching. Specify what an adequate service would do, for whom and at what price or public cost. This makes it possible to assess whether a proposed training event, grant or asset is actually necessary.

7.2 Establish demand and the provider and payer arrangement

Map the actors who currently perform or influence the function. Investigate incentives, capabilities and power, including participants who decline the offered service. Examine realistic unit economics and operating constraints. A letter of interest is weaker than repeated transactions; a planned investment is weaker than a funded and operating service.

Identify who will deliver and pay after support. Commercial revenue is one option, but membership fees, buyer-embedded provision and public finance can also be appropriate. Where public funding is justified, state the public objective, responsible institution and realistic financing route. Sustainability should mean continued delivery of benefits under a credible arrangement, not a requirement that every service charge an individual user.

7.3 Select the instrument against the constraint

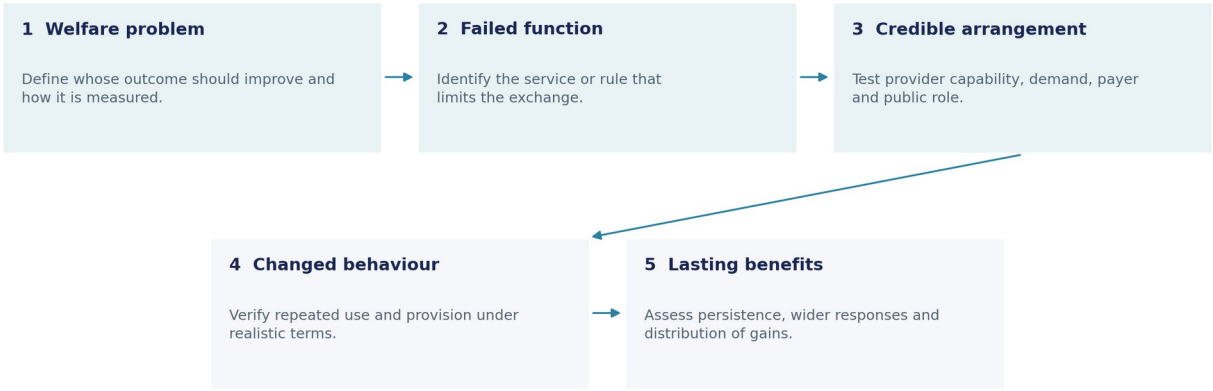
Technical assistance may address a capability gap. A time-limited co-investment may test an uncertain commercial model. A guarantee can address a defined risk allocation problem. Public investment may be justified for an essential public good. Household support may be needed to enable participation. These instruments have different costs, risks and market effects; they are not interchangeable.

Document additionality: what would likely happen without the proposed support? Check whether the award merely pays for a planned expansion or displaces an existing provider. State why the selected partner is suitable and how competitors or alternative channels can respond. Disclosure, open selection where feasible and proportionate support can reduce capture, but should be assessed against the practical constraints of the market.

FIGURE 4

A design should test a lasting function before assuming wider and sustained benefits

UMSDN proposed design logic. Each arrow is an assumption to test, not a guaranteed result.



UMSDN synthesis informed by the reviewed cases and DCED guidance [17–18].

At every stage: investigate inclusion, public responsibilities, risk, competing explanations and the case for adaptation or stopping.

7.4 Design for inclusion without assuming uniform barriers

Participation counts should be complemented by analysis of who controls earnings, carries risk and can continue using the service. Women may face constraints related to time, safety, assets or decision-making; refugees and host households may have different land, mobility or network conditions; persons with disabilities may face inaccessible delivery. These are diagnostic questions, not uniform characteristics to impose on every participant.

Record a plausible response and measure whether it works. Accessible communication, flexible delivery or adjusted transaction arrangements should be tested with intended users. Avoid setting an inclusion target that a commercially selected partner cannot meet under its operating model. Equally, do not excuse exclusion by treating an untested commercial preference as a fixed market fact. A design should specify who is not served and what alternative provision may be needed.

7.5 Build resilience and an exit path into the model

Test how the function behaves under delayed funding, weaker demand, input shortages, adverse weather or failure of a major buyer. Examine who absorbs each loss and whether the response transfers unacceptable risk to smaller actors. Diversification, contingency arrangements, safety nets and changes in contract terms may serve different purposes. Their cost and feasibility need assessment.

An exit plan should begin with a baseline of provider dependence and agreed milestones for reducing support. It should allow adaptation if the service remains beneficial but the original revenue model fails. Termination must consider obligations and foreseeable harm. The proposal should fund the evidence needed to decide whether to adapt, extend or stop, rather than make a promise of self-financing that the delivery team cannot test.

7.6 Use national priorities as context rather than proof

NDP IV's focus on incomes, industrialisation and employment offers a policy context for programme objectives. Alignment is necessary for coherence but does not demonstrate the feasibility or effect of a specific intervention. A credible concept note must still show market demand, public roles, trade-offs and a route from changed functions to improved outcomes. [21]

Coordination can help identify existing investments and avoid duplication. It should also expose conflicting incentives, such as one actor financing free delivery while another tries to establish paid provision. The response is not necessarily to remove free support. It is to establish which needs and participants each arrangement serves and whether the proposed transition is feasible and safe.

8 An appraisal and financing framework

8.1 Minimum decision questions

Table 5 Minimum design and investment decisions

Decision	Evidence needed	Reason to adapt or pause
Who should benefit	Outcome baseline and barriers by group	Target group or relevant outcome remains undefined
Which function fails	Transaction and provider evidence; rival explanations	Chosen tool has no link to a diagnosed constraint
Who delivers and pays	Demand tests, costs and credible funding route	Continuation depends on an unexamined subsidy
Why additional support	Counterfactual and partner investment plans	Support mostly replaces spending already committed
Who bears risk	Loss allocation, safeguards and user feedback	Weaker actors absorb unacceptable downside
What justifies expansion	Repeat use, outcomes, viable provision and wider response	Pilot activity is being mistaken for sustainable change

UMSDN analytical framework. Evidence thresholds must be set for the local decision; no universal pass score is implied.

These questions should lead to a documented decision, not a checklist that every proposal automatically passes. A technically attractive idea with no credible user demand should not proceed unchanged. A model with strong demand but exclusionary terms may need redesign. A socially essential service without a commercial payer may justify public finance, provided the institution and budget route are credible.

8.2 Compare options and account for costs

At concept stage, compare at least the current arrangement, the proposed option and a plausible alternative. Define the outcome and appraisal perspective. Costs to the programme, providers, public agencies and users should be distinguished. The cost of household participation can include time, transport, compliance and risk as well as fees. Ignoring those costs can make a nominally cheap intervention expensive for its intended users.

For an economic case, use incremental benefits relative to a defensible counterfactual. Avoid using total partner sales as benefits; production costs and what would have happened anyway matter. Avoid adding household income and consumption mechanically if they represent overlapping welfare gains. Record discount rate, exchange-rate basis, price year, expected duration and possible displacement. Where monetisation is weak, present a cost-effectiveness comparison and a separate account of non-monetised outcomes rather than invent a return.

A cost per person reached is informative only when reach is defined consistently and related to a relevant outcome. It should not be used to compare a mass information service with a high-intensity household package without explaining the difference in service and expected benefit. Fixed market-level costs and variable participant costs should be separated before extrapolating costs to a larger programme.

8.3 Treat uncertainty explicitly

Present a base case and adverse cases for adoption, service quality, margins, funding and persistence. Use evidence to set ranges where possible; label assumptions where not. A funding cut and delayed revenue can interact, so test combinations as well as individual changes. Assign a decision rule to each major uncertainty.

For example, the design can specify that a limited pilot proceeds before an expensive capital commitment, with review based on repeat transactions, user outcomes, provider costs and inclusion. No universal threshold is supplied here. Thresholds should reflect the market, cost of failure and information required. A failure to meet them should trigger a recorded decision to modify or stop, not a retrospective change in the meaning of success.

8.4 Keep the financing register usable

Maintain one financial account per programme and linked accounts per component. Separate approvals, disbursements, expenditure and private matching funds. Update amendments without overwriting the original value. Mark whether a figure is planned, contracted, paid, spent or returned. Record whether technical assistance and management costs sit inside or outside a component allocation.

For a national MSD account, an allocation rule should distinguish core facilitation, complementary direct support and market-supporting public investment. The taxonomy can be refined, but it must be applied consistently and retain an audit trail. A range may be appropriate where a mixed component cannot be split. A falsely exact allocation is less useful than a transparent unresolved item.

9 Monitoring evaluation and learning for future design

9.1 Measure the intended sequence

A programme should record delivery, provider behaviour, user response and welfare outcomes as distinct levels. An output such as a certified firm or trained agent should not stand in for the intended income or employment outcome. Links in the results chain need to be tested. The DCED Standard and its implementation guidance provide a basis for credible attribution, wider change and use of results in management. [17-18]

Table 6 Monitoring and evaluation questions

Level	Illustrative measure	Evidence task
Function and access	Availability, price, quality and service timeliness	Track users and eligible non-users; verify definitions
Provider behaviour	Repeat provision and investment without new subsidy	Check costs, records and motivations
User response	Repeat purchases, switching and complaints	Record unsuccessful and discontinued use
Welfare and work	Net income, consumption or relevant job quality	Use justified comparator and disaggregation
Wider change	Independent adoption and competitive responses	Investigate diffusion, displacement and shared influences
Persistence and equity	Continued benefit after support; control over gains	Plan follow-up and assess differential outcomes

Illustrative design measures informed by [17-18]. Select and define locally; not every indicator is appropriate to every intervention.

For each indicator, record the unit, denominator, source, collection method, timing, responsible person and disaggregation. Maintain unique identifiers where consent and data protection permit. Record attrition and the reasons firms or households stop participating. A panel containing only continuing participants can overstate sustainability if unsuccessful participants disappear from the sample.

9.2 Choose the comparator for the decision

Randomisation can be appropriate where a programme can assign an offer credibly and ethically, but it is not a universal requirement. A robust contribution analysis may be more suitable for a rule change affecting an entire market. Interrupted time patterns, comparison areas, qualitative process tracing and independent verification can address different parts of the causal account. The choice must be justified and its limitations stated. [17]

Where market-level spillovers are expected, household comparison groups may share some benefits. Designs should decide whether the question is direct participant effect, wider market effect or both. They should investigate competitive harm and displacement as well as positive spread. Non-participant interviews can identify mechanisms but do not, on their own, estimate how common those effects are.

9.3 Fund post support evidence

A closure report cannot by itself establish benefits years after closure. Build a proportionate follow-up plan into agreements and retain lawful access to the records required. The time interval should match the function and expected investment cycle. Seasonal production, firm growth and institutional reform do not mature at the same pace.

Use follow-up to examine continued provision, affordability, provider viability and participation among intended groups. Where benefits decline, investigate whether the cause is a failed model, changed circumstances, withdrawal of complementary support or measurement error. The answer matters for future design: replicating an arrangement that depended on a temporary subsidy may reproduce the same exit problem.

9.4 Report contribution without exaggeration

A publication should identify whether an estimate is descriptive, before-and-after, causal or modelled. State the programme period and the results cutoff separately from the publication date. Show the relevant comparator, sample and source. A target should never be restated as an achievement. A budget ceiling should never become a disbursement merely by appearing in a results narrative.

Results from overlapping programmes need a contribution account and, where relevant, shared identifiers. If several organisations jointly supported a result, each can describe its role without adding the same gain multiple times. UMSDN's future evidence repository should preserve these distinctions and invite corrections through documented source updates.

10 A practical design and research agenda

10.1 Prepare a concept note in stages

The first stage should clarify the outcome, target population, market function and evidence gaps. The second should compare feasible options and negotiate a limited test. The third should examine performance and make a financing decision. A 90-day diagnostic and preparation period can organise this work, but it is not a promise that an agricultural or systemic intervention can demonstrate sustained results within 90 days.

Table 7 A proposed diagnostic and preparation sequence

Period	Work	Decision product
Days 1-30	Confirm outcome and function; map actors; test initial explanations	Diagnostic with evidence gaps and existing investments
Days 31-60	Compare options; examine costs, demand, inclusion and risks	Limited pilot or research protocol with responsibilities
Days 61-90	Review early operational evidence; commission further tests	Recorded decision to proceed, adapt, defer or stop

UMSDN proposal. Ninety days is a planning period, not a demonstrated time to achieve systemic change.

Delivery should be assigned to a capable team with clear ownership of analysis, commercial engagement, public coordination and measurement. Local knowledge is valuable, but it should be tested against records and perspectives from less visible actors. A programme should budget for its own learning requirements rather than assume that another organisation will collect the necessary evidence.

10.2 Priorities for an improved Uganda evidence base

The first priority is a reconciled financing inventory. UMSDN could invite donors and implementers to validate programme periods, parent-component relationships and annual expenditure. Original evidence should remain linked to each claim. A register should show unresolved figures and version changes rather than smooth over them.

The second priority is post-support evidence. Select a small set of documented service models and examine whether providers still deliver, how users experience them and what happens to prices, quality and inclusion. Cases should include discontinued and weakly performing models. A publication series that only recruits success stories cannot establish what future investments should avoid.

The third priority is comparative component evidence. Where a layered programme is proposed, specify the uncertain additional contribution of each costly element. Evaluation should answer a real decision, such as whether another market-level function is worth financing or whether a different delivery model serves excluded households more effectively. This is more useful than comparing labels such as MSD and training without defining the offers.

The fourth priority is data governance. Establish proportionate consent, confidentiality, retention and correction arrangements for enterprise and household records. Share methods and aggregate findings without exposing private business data or implying consent to public profiling. Research involving participants should obtain the appropriate ethical and administrative approvals before fieldwork begins.

11 Limitations

The programme sample is purposive and documentation-led. Programmes with public records are more visible, and implementers may report favourable outcomes more readily than failures. The search does not establish the completeness of funding or results. No interviews were conducted to resolve all amendments, definitions or expenditure gaps. Directory dates and budgets may lag later contractual changes.

The aid series is a specific extraction ending in 2023. Revised official releases can change observations and the constant-price base. The nominal cumulative total is not the present value of aid, a Treasury cash balance, a debt stock or an estimate of social benefit. Neither the aid series nor the programme register includes every category of external finance. Financial subtotals are sensitive to the classification and scope rules stated in Section 4.

Outcome measures differ substantially. Income, consumption, turnover, access, certification and service continuity cannot be pooled into a single impact statistic. Some evidence is generated by implementers and some programmes combine MSD with other interventions. The DREAMS Uganda design identifies the effect of an offered package under the study conditions; the general equilibrium effect of MSD and its marginal contribution are different questions. [13]

Transferability is also limited. Historical evidence on radio, seed markets or agricultural agents does not establish the feasibility of a new digital, employment or urban-enterprise programme. Policy and market conditions change. The design tools in this paper are analytical prompts, not validated prediction models or universal budget norms. They require local evidence and a transparent decision process.

12 Conclusion

Uganda's aid history shows a substantial and variable flow of official assistance. Its MSD experience shows identifiable experimentation with service provision, trading relationships and complementary household support. The evidence contains useful successes, difficult implementation and unresolved questions. Future design should use all three.

The amount of assistance received does not establish how much was allocated to MSD, and an MSD allocation does not establish its effect. A defensible account keeps financing, delivery, behaviour, welfare and wider change connected but separate. It uses the strongest relevant evidence for each claim and identifies where further investigation is required.

For programme designers, the practical task is to specify the function that must improve, the arrangement that could sustain it, the group expected to benefit and the evidence that would justify further investment. For UMSDN, the most useful next contribution is a transparent funding and evidence register, comparative learning across programmes and a credible account of what remains after support. That would make this paper a foundation for better decisions rather than a catalogue of achievements.

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Appendix A Annual aid observations

The table reproduces annual observations from the three WDI series. Dollar columns are expressed in millions. Values are rounded for presentation; calculations use the full downloaded precision. Missing future years are not zero. The 1990-2023 headline total excludes 1980-1989. [1-3]

Table A1 Annual Uganda aid observations 1980 to 2023

Year	Current US$ m	Constant 2023 US$ m	Net ODA % GNI
1980	113.35	296.39	9.16
1981	135.66	365.41	10.24
1982	131.35	357.76	6.11
1983	136.71	381.12	6.23
1984	162.07	465.94	4.54
1985	179.48	509.35	5.18
1986	191.56	445.37	4.94
1987	298.95	590.92	4.80
1988	391.59	719.99	6.07
1989	516.50	943.77	9.91
1990	663.10	1,077.59	15.69
1991	663.28	1,031.93	20.32
1992	724.95	1,077.05	26.17
1993	609.99	947.43	19.23
1994	751.97	1,108.38	19.14
1995	833.96	1,126.53	14.64
1996	674.88	932.01	11.25
1997	813.44	1,211.76	13.01
1998	658.10	995.69	10.01
1999	607.68	913.51	10.15
2000	855.93	1,369.95	14.06
2001	828.94	1,370.89	14.65
2002	732.98	1,167.68	12.13
2003	1,003.71	1,406.93	15.51
2004	1,222.24	1,576.28	15.82
2005	1,195.33	1,512.71	13.33
2006	1,589.23	1,905.68	16.34
2007	1,738.15	1,946.79	14.89
2008	1,643.39	1,769.98	11.59
2009	1,786.35	2,006.34	7.23
2010	1,361.80	1,524.83	5.19
2011	1,572.92	1,680.17	5.73

Year	Current US$ m	Constant 2023 US$ m	Net ODA % GNI
2012	1,642.50	1,781.24	6.15
2013	1,697.09	1,832.17	6.00
2014	1,633.68	1,747.25	5.13
2015	1,638.16	1,892.00	5.16
2016	1,762.60	2,063.96	6.14
2017	2,011.81	2,322.46	6.70
2018	1,945.59	2,157.41	6.08
2019	2,030.93	2,278.48	5.90
2020	3,087.86	3,369.19	8.38
2021	2,565.44	2,639.37	6.47
2022	2,156.96	2,248.78	4.84
2023	2,256.59	2,256.59	4.75

Sources [1-3]. Values rounded for display; extraction on 17 November 2026. Latest common observation 2023.

Appendix B Funding register rules and exclusions

Each amount must have an identifier, time period, original currency, financial basis, geographic scope, component boundary, source and cutoff. Optional extensions are separate contingent entries. Parent programmes are linked to child components and must not be added to them. Programme-profile budgets are provisional until validated against financial records. The downloadable register preserves the exact original amount and classification used in this paper.

DREAMS study-cohort unit costs are excluded from programme-envelope totals. NU-TEC's £44.3 million parent expenditure is excluded from the component subtotal. The CSJ £15.5 million parent contract and £23.25 million optional maximum are not added to the Component 1A allocation. Wider refugee-response and regional portfolios without a verified Uganda MSD allocation are not counted. Exclusion means unresolved scope, not absence of contribution.

Before producing a national MSD share, obtain annual expenditure for an agreed programme universe, allocate mixed components consistently, reconcile transfers between implementers and match the national aid denominator by year, currency, financial basis and coverage. Publish an uncertainty range if reasonable allocation choices materially change the answer. A documented partial inventory should remain labelled partial.

Appendix C Concept note evidence checklist

Table C1 Concept note evidence checklist

Concept note section	Minimum entry
Outcome and population	Defined welfare or work objective, baseline and excluded groups
Diagnostic	Failed function, actors, evidence and alternative explanations
Options	Current arrangement, proposed response and credible alternative
Provider and payer	Institutional roles, unit economics and funding after support
Instrument	Additionality, partner selection, terms and subsidy exit
Inclusion and safety	User-informed adaptations, risk allocation and recourse
Financial account	Original currency, approvals, components and annual expenditure
Appraisal	Incremental costs and benefits, assumptions and sensitivity
Measurement	Comparator, indicators, data governance and follow-up
Decision	Milestones, authority and rules for adaptation or closure

UMSDN design tool. Completion does not certify programme quality; substantive evidence is required.

Appendix D Data and research transparency

The accompanying evidence pack contains the raw WDI responses, an annual aid table, period calculations, a programme funding register, an evidence matrix, a claim-to-source ledger, the source bibliography, and the scripts used to prepare data, figures and the document. External source PDFs are referenced by URL rather than redistributed in the publication pack. Supplied learning briefs were reviewed as sources; their authorship is preserved.

Financial calculations are descriptive. No causal model of aggregate aid effectiveness or national MSD impact is estimated. Source access and evidence checks were completed on 17 November 2026. Users updating the paper should preserve the old data snapshot, record new definitions and revisions, and rerun calculations rather than change headline figures manually. Independent technical and editorial review, including verification of portfolio amendments, would strengthen a subsequent formal publication.