

Jobs That Matter: Driving Decent and Sustainable Youth Employment

FOREWORD

This brief is part of the **learning brief series**. The series of learning briefs distills six years of implementation experience from the **Challenge Fund for Youth Employment (CFYE)** into practical insights for designing and delivering youth employment programmes. Drawing on evidence across sectors and geographies, the briefs examine **what has worked, what has proved challenging, and which approaches have delivered sustainable outcomes for young people and businesses**.

Each brief focuses on a theme such as **delivery model, inclusion, business growth, or innovation**; covering topics ranging from job quality and gender inclusion to partner selection, localisation, and results-based financing. Together, the series moves beyond theory to offer **actionable guidance for practitioners, funders, and policymakers shaping future employment initiatives**.

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WHY THIS BRIEF?

The Challenge Fund for Youth Employment's goal is to enable **230,000 young people** to access new or better jobs that reflect their **aspirations and skills**. But focusing on job numbers alone offers limited insights into whether those jobs are decent, inclusive, or sustainable over time.

Drawing on evidence from CFYE's multi-country portfolio, this learning brief distills **design lessons from employment initiatives** that are moving beyond job numbers and **embedding social impact as a core design and management principle**, rather than a compliance add-on.

It shows how this can **benefit young people**, **strengthen business performance**, and have a **positive impact on communities**. The brief also highlights practical ways that CFYE partners have tested to **attract, select, and retain** youth in roles that align with their aspirations, skills, and long-term prospects.

This brief is written for **funders, implementers, and businesses** seeking practical ways to integrate meaningful employment opportunities for young people into core operations.



KEY INSIGHTS

From Principles to Practice: Attract, Select, Retain

CFYE organises its social impact approach around the full youth employment journey (Attract, Select, Retain), recognising that **quality employment outcomes depend on decisions made before hiring, during recruitment, and throughout employment.**

Attracting Youth: Engaging Communities Broadens Recruitment & Builds Employer Trust

Across the portfolio, partners that relied primarily on **advertising vacancies online** or through other formal channels, sometimes **struggled to reach a diverse youth audience.**

These approaches tended to favour young people with stronger networks or prior work experience, excluding candidates with the skills and interest but fewer opportunities to access formal recruitment processes. Additionally, the vacancies weren't inclusive by design.

Shortlist, a CFYE implementing partner (IP) focused on staffing, recruitment, and talent development in Kenya, used a **strategy of tailoring the language used in their job vacancies**. The company conducted tests on job ads for Kenyan employers and found that gender-inclusive language materially increased the amount of female applicants.

By contrast, generic statements about inclusion without concrete actions and policies in place reduced female engagement, highlighting that credibility and specificity in wording are crucial.¹

Selection: Inclusive Processes Widen Opportunity & Highlight Youth Motivation

Selection processes that **stipulate formal qualifications or prior work experience** can **filter out capable young people at an early stage**. For many young people, particularly first-time jobseekers, this can compromise their motivation, confidence, and willingness to apply and participate in the recruitment process.

IPs experienced better selection metrics when they **introduced more inclusive practices**, with the aim of removing barriers for youth with limited formal experience. **Skills-based assessments, staged recruitment process, and transparent communication** about workplace culture enabled employers to identify motivation and capability rather than relying solely on formal credentials.



¹<https://fundforyouthemployment.nl/from-gender-neutral-to-gender-inclusive-hiring/>

KEY INSIGHTS

MadfoatCom, a FinTech and CFYE IP in Jordan, expanded inclusive recruitment and selection of young employees by going beyond standard job advertisements to **actively engage youth through multiple outreach channels**, such as job fairs, recruitment agencies, and partnerships with other companies, which helped to widen the pool of candidates.

They paired this outreach with targeted capacity-building, offering both technical and soft skills training, alongside personalised career counselling, to prepare applicants for roles, boost confidence, and ensure better job readiness.²

Retaining Youth: Fostering Growth Opportunities & Long-Term Engagement

Even when jobs met basic standards, **a lack of progression, feedback, or support reduced motivation** over time and **increased the risk of disengagement** or early exit. This can affect young people if it stalls their career progression, while employers face high turnover, lost productivity, and repeated recruitment and training costs.

Organisations that invest in **mentorship, professional development, and clear progression encourage stronger engagement and lower attrition**. This approach to social impact and decent work puts youth at the centre of job design while remaining grounded in commercial realities.

In Nigeria, the AgriTech organisation **Novus Agro** provided **targeted training and support to foster youth development**, and to ensure youth participation contributes to both individual growth and business outcomes, such as reduced turnover and lower re-hiring costs. The IP also took strategic measures to retaining youth, such as supporting individuals who were relocating for personal reasons to continue their employment in different cities.³

Tools in Focus: Turning Principles into Operational Decision-Making

Across the portfolio, partners often understood **why job quality matters** but **struggled to translate this into day-to-day operational decisions**. Generic decent work checklists offered limited guidance on what to change in practice, while more detailed frameworks were difficult to apply across different sectors and business models.

To address this gap, **CFYE developed two complementary technical assistance tools** that support context-specific action across diverse sectors and geographies.



²<https://fundforouthemployment.nl/from-digital-payments-to-decent-work-madfoatcoms-tailored-approach-to-empowering-the-next-generation/>

³<https://fundforouthemployment.nl/unlocking-the-potential-of-youth-novus-agros-road-to-meaningful-youth-participation/#:~:text=Novus%20Agr0%20is%20reshaping%20rural.%2C%20with%2080%25%20targeting%20women.>

TOOLS IN FOCUS

The **Youth Quality Work Journey (YQWJ)** provides a simple structure for management and **HR decision makers** to assess job quality across the **Attract**, **Select**, and **Retain** stages. Rather than listing standards to comply with, it breaks job quality down into **ten core building blocks** linked directly to operational choices, such as mentoring programmes, flexible working arrangements, and employee health insurance. This helps partners **identify where targeted changes** can improve both youth employment outcomes and business performance.

The **Youth Impact Growth Matrix (YIGM)** is a light-touch digital self-diagnostic tool linked to the YQWJ that is useful for leadership teams to assess **technical assistance needs**. It captures essential information on **partner practices** and **outcomes**, helping to **identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities** for learning. The information gathered through the YIGM enabled CFYE to decide where to focus technical assistance and learning resources, while gathering good practices that could inspire other IPs in the CFYE Portfolio.

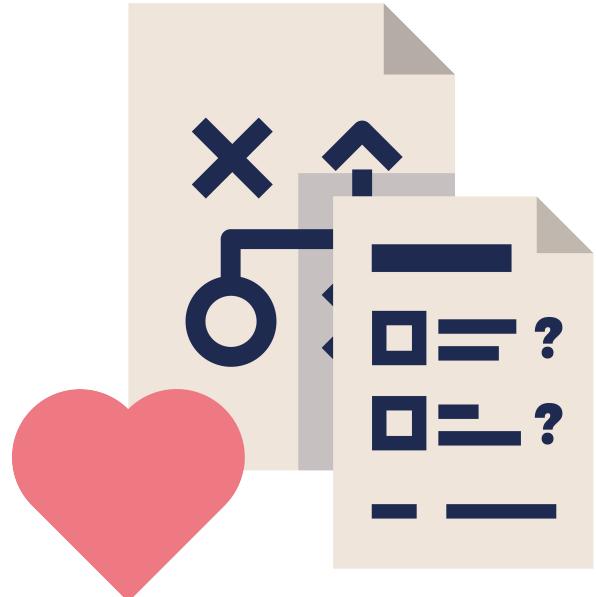
Together, these tools balance structure with flexibility and support evidence informed action.

Attract	Select	Retain		
1. Online Youth Marketing	2. Youth-Inclusive Recruitment	4. Young Professional Development Opps.	5. Peer Networks	6. Space for Youth Voice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Engagement Comms Plan • Youth and Gender Inclusive Language • Youth and Gender Relevant Platforms • Representative Visuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth and Gender Inclusive Selection Criteria • Standardised Selection, Onboarding • Youth-Led Alternative Access • Youth and Women Representative Panels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Development Plan • Training and Qualifications • Mentor/Coach Promotion • Promotion Opportunities • Exit Reference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible Platforms • Safe Informal Space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal Spaces (Brown Bag Lunches, Whatsapp) • Formal/Topic Specific Places (Focus Groups) • Dialogue (Feedback Loops, Suggestion Box) • Recognised Roles (Youth Advisory Board/Advisors)
3. Community-Based Youth Outreach				7. Youth-Focused Secondary Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Engagement, Comms Plan • Youth and Gender Inclusive Language • Youth and Gender Relevant Spaces • Representative Visuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meals • Insurance • Safe Transport • Flexible Working • Access to Technology • Access to Ownership 			8. Young Parent Specific Benefits
				9. Youth-Focused Respect & Dignity at Work
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worker Handbook • Anti-Discrimination Policy and Process • Women Specific Safeguarding Policy and Processes • Sensitisation Sessions
10. Gender-Inclusive Practice				

In addition to these tools, CFYE supported IPs through a mix of **online learning resources**, **webinars**, and **one-to-one coaching and technical assistance support**. Learning resources organised around **[How to Recruit](#)** and **[How to Retain](#)** youth are now available on the ILO's Jumo Platform, freely accessible through an account.

ACTIONABLE GUIDANCE

- **Use impact measurement as a strategic asset, not only a donor requirement:** Partners that aligned social impact indicators with recognised standards (e.g. *B Corp*) can strengthen credibility with investors, customers, and future funders. CFYE's Impact Measurement and Management (IMM) TA supported IPs in Tunisia to design impact theories of change, validate key impact indicators, and enhance the capacity of their staff to collect and analyse relevant data to better share impact stories to important stakeholders.
- **Apply simple frameworks to enable consistent and scalable action:** Structured tools such as the YQWJ provided partners with the opportunity to assess, prioritise, and improve job quality. These frameworks offer shared reference points, while remaining flexible enough to reflect different sectors, sizes, and country contexts.
- **Embed youth-centric approaches within core business strategy:** CFYE's social impact philosophy places youth at the centre of job design, while remaining grounded in commercial realities. This enabled IPs to move beyond compliance driven approaches to decent work and instead integrate youth employment into core business strategy. Inclusive practices across recruitment, management, and development helped organisations to compete for talent and adapt to changing labour markets.
- **Let demand shape technical assistance:** Allowing partners to define how they would use social impact TA increased ownership and led to more inclusive employment interventions. This approach resulted in targeted TA focused on employee leadership and workplace wellbeing. In Jordan, partners used social impact TA to develop youth-led action plans to improve employee retention, including advisory groups, leadership training, and structured feedback mechanisms that embedded youth voice into organisational decision-making and policy design.



INNOVATION SPOTLIGHT

Background

An Agribusiness IP in Kenya, **SokoFresh**, identified that many **young farmers** in remote parts of Kiambu County were **unable to reach premium agricultural markets because they lacked the technical standards required for export**, while also facing serious challenges such as depression and substance abuse that undermined their livelihoods.

TA Intervention

To address this, the company **delivered an integrated programme combining Global GAP & GRASP certification, and audit preparation training to young agribusiness leaders** in the avocado sector. This included baseline assessments, document management, record keeping, mock internal audits and the introduction of an Export Quality Milestone & Scoring Booklet to support continuous improvement, compliance, and market readiness. This was combined with **mentorship support in mental health and addiction** related challenges brought forward by the youth through group discussions and dramatisations.

Results

The initiative reached **100 young people**, with **20 completing full certification preparation** and a further **16 peers receiving compliance training**. Certification is expected to generate significant economic benefits, including **20-60% premiums** and up to **30% productivity improvements**. Many participants also reported overcoming depression and alcohol dependency through the mentoring component.

Why it Matters



The project shows that **pairing market focused technical training with wellbeing support** can simultaneously **strengthen commercial outcomes and resilience among young agribusiness leaders**. It also highlighted the need for targeted technical assistance and mentoring to create sustainable impact goals.

LOOKING AHEAD

CFYE's experience shows that **decent** and **sustainable youth employment** depends on a **holistic approach**. Career development, inclusive culture, wellbeing, and youth voice are central to creating jobs that last and deliver value for both young people and organisations.

For future youth employment initiatives, the embedding of **social impact**, **environmental sustainability**, and **inclusive governance** from the outset will remain critical. Doing so ensures that youth employment efforts move beyond short term job creation toward long lasting, meaningful work that responds to evolving youth aspirations and labour market needs.

Moreover, industry certification, or potential impact-oriented investment channels offer **powerful incentives for companies to prioritise** the measurement, management, and promotion of their **wider impact narratives**.

