



# Green Jobs and the Future of Work in Africa

Stakeholder Brief: *Funders,  
Donors, and Impact Investors*

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# Introduction

In recent years African governments, multilateral organisations and the international development community align around one key message: The transition to a green economy is a once-in-a-generation opportunity in Africa to take advantage of the youngest and fastest-growing workforce and abundance of renewables and critical resources to accelerate renewable-powered industries, develop new value chains, and create millions of jobs for young women and men. While national transition roadmaps and several youth employment and entrepreneurship programmes have been drawn up, decent, future-oriented work for youth at scale lags behind. A lack of coordinated implementation and finance to support and scale existing youth employment initiatives and green business models is compounded by the absence of concrete and evidence-based strategies to overcome market barriers that green businesses face.

*This brief distills three years of practice-driven research by the **Challenge Fund for Youth Employment (CFYE)** and **INCLUDE**. The partnership brought together case studies of green enterprises from CFYE's portfolio, expert and youth interviews, and multi-stakeholder consultations to understand **what works, why, and how in creating green and decent jobs in Africa**.*

## What is a Green Job?

*Green jobs offer employment in businesses that maintain or restore environmental quality while also providing dignity, fair income, and opportunities for personal and professional development.*

## Where in the economy is the highest potential to create Green Jobs?

In order to identify high-potential business models, look at:

1. **Greening potential of the sector in the economy**, including the extent to which environmental impacts can be reduced. Across CFYE's portfolio, five sectors show the strongest potential for green job creation:
  - ✳ **Agriculture:** climate-smart technology, digital extension, regenerative practices
  - ✳ **Waste management:** recycling, repurposing, waste-to-value models
  - ✳ **Renewable energy:** solar installation, maintenance, off-grid services
  - ✳ **Construction:** green building materials, energy-efficient methods
  - ✳ **Manufacturing:** circular products, recycled materials, repair services
2. **Sustainability objectives of the business strategy**, including their contribution to more environmentally-friendly processes, and assess to what extent it is focused on reducing emissions or adapting to the climate change already in the pipeline.
3. **Level of green skills needed**, including core skills such as environmental awareness, technical and business development know-how, as well as specific skills and knowledge pertaining to green technologies and innovation.
4. **Job profiles offered** to position youth as agents of change to drive green innovation. Young people can play a crucial role as intermediaries between traditional forms of value creation (e.g. farming, informal waste collection, construction) and modern tech-enabled businesses through agent-based employment models and youth-led entrepreneurship.

# Future of Work Pathways: Recommendations for Funders

The creation of large-scale employment for youth hinges on a consolidated effort by ecosystem partners to bridge from donor dependency to de-risking investment in green industries and making green and youth-led enterprises “investable”. The lessons from the CFYE show that funding alone is often not enough to drive the green transformation. Our [evidence synthesis report](#) identifies four interdependent pathways to support green enterprises to scale decent youth employment. In addition, we developed corresponding lessons and recommendations to guide deliberate action by funders:

1. **Awareness:** A credible and comparable evidence base of nationally relevant green business cases is needed to inform donors and investors on reducing risk, improving investment decisions, and supporting countries build effective green economy strategies.

## The Case of... [ThriveAgric](#)

In Nigeria and beyond, ThriveAgric demonstrates how visibility and peer learning can shift perceptions around green jobs in agriculture. By embedding local youth as digitally-enabled field agents and publicly sharing productivity and income data, the company built trust among farmers, local authorities, and investors. This helped reposition climate-smart agriculture from “subsistence work” to a viable, modern employment pathway for youth. The case shows how credible data and relatable role models are essential to legitimise green jobs at scale.

### To build widespread awareness of the economic, social & environmental impact, funders can:

- ✘ Invest in data systems and market intelligence for green job mapping, skills needs assessments, emission reduction and market bottlenecks.
  - ✘ Provide technical support to help enterprises and private sector organisations conduct assessments of impact on job quality and sustainability through low-burden metrics.
  - ✘ Enable knowledge sharing between stakeholders, including youth and informal workers, to learn from peers and global experiences, and collaborate on local green economy strategies.
2. **Green Business Models:** Green enterprises need patient capital and technical assistance to innovate, address market-entry barriers and scale more sustainable, youth inclusive and market-ready models of value creation.

## The Case of... [Hello Tractor](#)

By operating as a marketplace that connects tractor owners, service providers, and farmers through booking agents, Hello Tractor reduced capital barriers while creating intermediary roles for youth as booking agents, mechanics, and hub managers. The model shows how green and digital innovation can improve resource efficiency without requiring asset ownership by farmers. Its data-driven approach strengthened investor confidence and enabled expansion across multiple markets across Africa.

### To support the development and scaling of lucrative green innovations, funders can:

- ✘ Provide concessional early-stage finance and blended finance models to de-risk technological and social innovations.
- ✘ Offer scale-up capital for machinery, logistics, technology and skills training.

- ✘ Support enterprises through mentorship, market linkages, and business coaching.

3. **Decent Work:** Creating decent work (safety, income, skills, career progression, gender inclusion) that matches young people's aspirations to enter, stay, and thrive in the labour market is a risk mitigation strategy that also yields operational benefits.

#### The Case of... TakaTaka Solutions

TakaTaka Solutions in Kenya illustrates how deliberate investment in job quality can professionalise work in highly informal green sectors through formalising waste sorting roles, introducing safety protocols, and stabilising income through structured buy-back systems. These measures increased operational reliability, reduced turnover and improved supply consistency, demonstrating that decent work practices can directly support business performance.

#### To ensure decent work standards, funders can:

- ✘ Use impact-linked finance tied to job quality, retention, gender inclusion, and climate outcomes that align incentives across funders, businesses and implementers.
  - ✘ Support social protection and gender-responsive measures, such as childcare, safety protocols, and healthcare.
  - ✘ Invest in skills ecosystems that link on-the-job training and mentorship with clear career pathways.
4. **Strategic Partnerships:** Collaboration with a diverse range of stakeholders around solving systemic problems is the infrastructure that connects awareness creation, business viability, and decent work into a functioning ecosystem that encourages private investment and innovation in high-potential sectors.

#### The Case of... Waste-to-Work

Initially the Waste to work programme in Kenya was constrained by licensing and policy barriers, however, progress accelerated once county authorities were involved in co-design and recognised informal waste workers as economic actors. This alignment enabled better enforcement, policy adaptation, and stronger collaboration with waste picker associations, waste pickers and businesses.

#### Funders can support collective efforts of other ecosystem actors when they:

- ✘ Bridge funding gaps through finance partnerships that balance short-term support with long-term investment horizons to scale green business models by blending grants, concessional loans, and private investment around shared employment targets.
- ✘ Work with trusted intermediary impact investors that can channel funding to smaller, riskier ventures.
- ✘ Co-design solutions with local governments, like guarantees for investors, tax incentives and subsidies for green businesses.
- ✘ Partner with banks, microfinance and insurance companies to create financial products that reduce risks in markets and recognise youth employment and green innovation as part of ESG performance.

## Walking the Pathways Together

One thing is clear: Africa's green transition will only deliver decent work for youth if funders and other actors are willing to act deliberately and collectively. This means backing green and social innovations early, sharing risk with SMEs as they become investable, and staying engaged beyond short funding cycles. It also means learning together. Key questions remain; from how to measure emission impacts and job quality credibly and practically, to which blended finance models and products effectively de-risk youth- and women-led enterprises. Addressing them requires dialogue, alignment, and experimentation across funders, practitioners, governments, and youth themselves. The four Future of Work Pathways offer a practical starting point. Following them is a choice to invest not only in capital, but trust and patience, and to walk alongside those building the green economy that Africa's youth deserve.

Want to learn more or just stay connected?

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