

LEARNING BRIEF

Technical Assistance That Sticks: CFYE's TA Design for Uptake, Adoption, & Impact

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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?

Across private-sector development programmes, **technical assistance (TA) is often designed with good intentions, but is ineffective in terms of driving longer-term behaviour change.**

This is typically due to generic content, poorly-timed delivery, or being shaped more by the offer developed by TA providers rather than the support the business actually needs. As a result, **TA risks becoming a box ticking exercise rather than a catalyst for sustainable impact.**

Drawing on six years of delivering TA to more than 120 businesses across the Challenge Fund for Youth Employment (CFYE) portfolio, **this learning brief distills what has driven uptake, adoption, and improved employment outcomes for CFYE's implementing partners (IPs).** It shows how strategically offered and commercially relevant TA shows potential to shift business practices, unlock growth, and make job outcomes more inclusive and sustainable.

The brief is **intended for fund managers, practitioners, and donors designing TA facilities for private sector development programmes.**



KEY INSIGHTS

Diagnostic-led & Customised Support Improved Relevance, and therefore, Uptake and Absorption of TA

Diagnostics resulted in a stronger link between TA interventions and improved youth employment outcomes.

Offered in the first year of implementation, CFYE's business, operations, and impact diagnostics enabled country teams to identify each IP's capacity gaps, prioritise and sequence TA topics, and customise a TA plan. **This ensured that the support was directly linked to overcoming operational and business bottlenecks.** As a result, TA aligned with diagnosed business needs saw significantly higher participation and subsequent adoption of recommendations than portfolio-wide, semi-standardised, or generic offerings.

Notably, while diagnostic-led TA improved relevance and uptake, **country teams identified governance challenges that sometimes undermined its effectiveness:**

- **Timing and Readiness Tensions:** IPs often requested TA early in implementation, before they had sufficient operational experience to validate whether their business and employment assumptions were holding up. **Diagnostics did not always help surface the mismatch between IP requests versus readiness to absorb TA,** highlighting the importance of country teams carefully assessing and planning TA deployment accordingly.

- **Budget Allocation Concerns:** Country-level 'use it or lose it' TA budgets **sometimes created incentives to respond to the loudest or fastest TA requests,** rather than to those IPs with the greatest diagnosed need or capacity to absorb support.

To address this, CFYE developed a proprietary **Portfolio Performance Management Tool** which country teams could use to link TA allocation decisions more clearly with performance and the IP's relative importance to the portfolio, such as its role in overall or female job targets. This supported country teams in making more effective budget allocation decisions, even if TA activities were planned further into the project timeline.

Together, these challenges reinforced the core learning: **diagnostics are most effective when paired with decision-making frameworks that prioritise absorption capacity and strategic timing.**



KEY INSIGHTS

Example: Diagnostic-led Scaling and Investment Readiness TA supported a **Tunisia-based Skills-Building Platform** to pivot from a largely supply-driven model (training youth first, and subsequently seeking placements) to a demand-led approach anchored in employer needs. **TA supported the firm to engage employers first, identifying specific vacancies and competency gaps, and then designing vacancy linked training.**

Beyond curriculum redesign, targeted TA supported a broader business model transition, enabling the firm to move from a learner fee-based model toward a hybrid approach in which employers co-finance training and placement. **This not only improved placement rates but enhanced the company's commercial viability.**

Tailored Technical Assistance drove Higher Adoption of TA Recommendations

CFYE tested diverse TA modalities, ranging from portfolio-wide webinars to customised, in-person 1:1 support (See Table pg. 10). A notable pattern emerged, based on a combination of IP feedback and programme results data:

- **Light-touch, Scalable TA:** webinars were both cost-efficient and effective for awareness raising, especially during the COVID pandemic in 2020-2021. CFYE's proprietary online learning platform - ImpactFuel Hub - was useful for **blended and asynchronous learning on topics such as Meaningful Youth Participation and Gender Inclusion.**

However, while helpful for early-stage companies, these TA activities resulted in limited adoption by more mature companies due to generic content.

- **Blended or High-Touch TA** (group level TA + follow-on coaching, business clinics, in-person and customised 1:1 support) were more resource-intensive, but **saw significantly more engagement, and were more likely to trigger operational and strategic shifts when customised to IP needs.**
- In all cases, **sustained engagement across different delivery modalities** (e.g. coaching, peer-to-peer exchange, resources on learning platform) drove higher adoption of TA.

Example: CFYE supported customised, 1:1 TA for District Spaces (**RDNA**), an Egyptian food company, on food safety and quality assurance standards. The TA provider assessed the IP's stores, co-processing facility, and warehouse operations. The assessment revealed significant risks, prompting an overhaul of operations. As a result of the TA, **the IP redesigned and upgraded its co-processing operations, strengthening hygiene protocols, redesigning butchery spaces, and formalising inventory and quality control processes.** This shift proved commercially and operationally critical: the co-processing facility now supplies 40–50% of RDNA's shelf keeping units (SKUs) and supports future store expansion.



KEY INSIGHTS

Business Maturity, Leadership Bandwidth, & Perceived Quality and Timeliness of TA Significantly Shaped whether IPs Engage with the TA Offer and Adopt Support

TA generated the highest additionality where leadership had the bandwidth to engage and delegate internally and where support was delivered with the right level of practicality, enabling IPs to apply recommendations into their project.

- **Smaller or Early-Stage IPs:** Benefitted most from operational TA (Human Resource (HR) management, Finance, Monitoring, Evaluation, & Learning (MEL) systems), when the support arrived **early enough to fill foundational gaps that directly affected project delivery and reporting.**
- **Midsized, Growth-Oriented IPs:** Showed strongest results from business TA (such as Supply Chain Management, Marketing and Sales, & Scaling & Investment Readiness), particularly when **senior leadership was directly invested and delegated staff effectively, and where TA was timely and practical enough to unlock bottlenecks.**
- **Mature or Established IPs:** Engaged selectively, using TA opportunistically; **impact largely depended on alignment with existing strategy and credibility of support.**

Examples: **EcoBrixx**, a growth-oriented waste management company established in Uganda in 2017, reported improved investor engagement, better HR and financial systems, and increased operational resilience as a result of 1:1 TA support on Scaling & Investment Readiness. Moreover, TA on Logistics and Supply Chain Management enabled the IP **to enhance the efficiency of the business by expanding their collection network in a cost-effective manner and thereby improving CFYE job outcomes.** Senior leadership remained directly involved throughout, enabling the business to absorb TA recommendations effectively.

TA delivered to Ugandan IP **Proteen** on Financial Management focused on high level assessments and underscored issues the company already had knowledge of, rather than providing hands on support to implement improvements. This, compounded by the IP's limited internal capacity, **resulted in lack of follow-through and absorption of support.** As a result, while the TA helped frame conceptual gaps, it did not strengthen Proteen's ability to deliver its model.



“ **Technical assistance was critical at the start, but over time the internal team gained the skills to independently manage core components. This reduced reliance on external support, ensuring program ownership and long-term sustainability.** ”

- MadfoatCom, Jordan

KEY INSIGHTS

Linking impact TA to Business Incentives Drives Uptake

Across CFYE's portfolio, uptake of impact TA, such as on Gender Inclusion, Meaningful Youth Participation (MYP), and Job Quality, was **significantly higher when the offer was framed not as a compliance requirement but as a business optimisation strategy**. IPs were most responsive when:

- **The Business Value was Made Explicit & Measurable:** When IPs could clearly see - usually through an informal conversation with the CFYE team during the diagnostic stage - how social impact contributed to profitability, retention and reduced recruitment costs, brand reputation, and greater investor interest, they were **more willing to invest management time, delegate staff, and adopt recommendations**.
- **TA was Delivered by Experts with Private Sector Credibility:** IPs engaged more deeply when the TA provider understood **commercial realities and operational pressures**. Private sector savvy experts - typically found by broadening the screening criteria beyond development sector experience and tapping relevant networks - were **able to translate social impact themes into practical, commercially relevant actions**. This included linking gender-inclusive HR practices to reduced turnover, or connecting job quality improvements to productivity gains.

Examples: At Serianu Cybershujaa Programme, a Kenyan cybersecurity firm operating in a male-dominated sector, uptake of CFYE-supported Gender Inclusion TA accelerated once inclusion was framed as a commercial strategy.

The TA leveraged Serianu's existing private-sector partnerships to demonstrate that expanding women's participation could strengthen Serianu Cybershujaa Programme's value proposition to clients seeking reliable, job-ready talent. As a result, the IP designed women-only recruitment cohorts and conducted targeted outreach, **training 883 women in cybersecurity and successfully placing 548 women into sector roles**. Gender inclusion became embedded not as a CFYE outcomes objective, but as a core component of Serianu's growth strategy, directly linked to market expansion, employer partnerships, and revenue generation.

In the case of a **retail IP in Egypt**, Gender Inclusion TA - specifically the development of gender-responsive training materials - **failed to gain traction because the service provider lacked private sector expertise and could not demonstrate commercial relevance**. This was compounded by the TA being delivered outside CFYE's standard, centrally coordinated Gender TA model, limiting peer learning and strategic alignment. Without a credible business case, IP leadership deprioritised the TA and eventually terminated the service provider contract.



ACTIONABLE GUIDANCE

CFYE's experience suggests that TA uptake and adoption is driven by how strategically and commercially support is designed and delivered.

1. Offer TA strategically:

Consider timing of TA delivery and how it may link to potential uptake: For example, operational TA, such as Financial Management, MEL, and Policies & Codes are more value-additive in the early stages of the project. Capacity building in these topics can strengthen the IP's ability to deliver and track job targets.

Offer blended modalities to translate capacity-building into practice: Combine cost-effective online toolkits and webinars with follow-on tailored, and in-person support to reinforce capacity-building.

Assess leadership buy-in early: Assess leadership willingness to allocate staff time and attend initial sessions. Where strategic pre-alignment is critical, structure TA in phases with clear decision gates. This will enable scaling support where engagement is genuine, or to pause or exit TA where leadership follow-through proves weaker than anticipated.

2. Design and Frame Impact TA as Business-Driven: Impact-focused TA (e.g. Gender Inclusion, Job Quality, and Meaningful Youth Participation) is most likely to be adopted when it is explicitly framed as solving core business challenges such as productivity and retention, and delivered by experts with private-sector credibility.

3. Prioritise Country Team Judgement: Teams on the ground are critical decision makers on TA modalities, timeline of delivery, resource allocation, and expert selection, in order to achieve IP buy-in and TA adoption. Tools such as CFYE's IP Portfolio Performance Management Matrix can support country teams in allocating limited TA funds based on portfolio priority and performance metrics.



INNOVATION SPOTLIGHT

ADDRESSING LOW-ENGAGEMENT IN TA DELIVERED ONLINE: PILOTING IN-COUNTRY BUSINESS CLINICS

KEY OUTCOMES



Higher learning engagement through country-level clinics



Stronger fit between learning topic and business needs



Practical and concrete scale-up planning for market constraints

Jordan

To address low engagement in portfolio-wide webinars and the learning platform, while at the same time maintaining resource-effectiveness, CFYE piloted **Business Clinics** – **country-level, peer-based workshops for IPs facing similar challenges.**

Business Clinics combined: topical business themes that were relevant for a group of IPs, peer exchange, informal problem solving, and expert facilitation.

IP feedback suggests **that business clinics strike a good middle ground between scale and relevance**, particularly for operational and growth-oriented challenges. Peer-to-peer exchange brought an added benefit over 1:1 support.

Business Scale-up & Market Intelligence Clinic in Jordan

























This TA activity brought together manufacturing IPs for a hands-on, peer learning session focused on export readiness and market intelligence. Through structured diagnostics and interactive exercises, businesses surfaced challenges around logistics costs, geopolitical instability, and raw material price fluctuations. The clinic **helped IPs benchmark their competitiveness, identify priority gaps** - such as digital marketing, data analytics, and financial preparedness for export - and **co-develop practical strategies for navigating markets.**

By combining market intelligence with tailored guidance on branding, product quality, and operational efficiency, the clinic enabled IPs to translate abstract market constraints into actionable scale-up plans anchored in real business needs.



TA by Modality



Modality	Depth of Impact (CFYE Experience)	Cost-efficiency & Scalability	Flexibility to Customise	Challenges/Risks
Country team support: field visits and formal routines (quarterly reporting & annual reviews) High	 High	 High as country team is also managing day-to-day operations	 Low if Country Teams don't have specialised expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success depends on CFYE expertise
MEL advisors: field visits	 High strong institutionalisation of MEL practices; linked to potential of securing external funding	 Low resource-heavy	 High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success depends on CFYE expertise
Portfolio-level TA: Webinars, Learning Platform: often asynchronous	 Low	 High	 Low as it is portfolio-wide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low engagement; • Relevant IP staff does not attend; Can be too generic; some IPs disengage if not relevant
Learning events; can be cross-country, i.e. some IPs travel to nearby country.	 Moderate creates peer learning opportunities; can lead to multiplier effects e.g. new partnerships	 Low	 Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact can fade without follow-up • Mostly serves to motivate but does not trigger significant operational or strategic changes
Cross-country: Group TA + follow up 1:1 coaching; some IPs travel to nearby country. 1-2 day workshop on a particular topic.	 Moderate creates peer learning opportunities; can lead to multiplier effects e.g. new partnerships	 Low	 High due to follow up 1:1 coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging to find mix of high-engagement facilitator + topical expert • Momentum can drop during follow-up coaching
Country-Level TA + follow up 1:1 coaching: 1-2 day workshop for country IPs on a particular topic	 High creates peer learning opportunities	 Moderate	 High due to follow up 1:1 coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging to find mix of high-engagement facilitator + topical expert • Momentum can drop during follow-up coaching
Business clinics: Country-level TA: 1-2 day workshop (or series) for country IPs with similar set of challenges	 High	 Moderate	 Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff mismatch: representatives who join are not always the one with most knowledge on a topic/key decision-maker
Customised 1:1 IP level TA: roughly 1-3 months of support by an expert based on a curated scope of work	 High can lead to sustained change in how businesses operate	 Low	 High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IP struggling with business priorities and/or validating CFYE jobs doesn't prioritise TA • Scope of work must be strongly aligned with requirements; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to find in-country expert on niche topics.

LOOKING AHEAD

CFYE's experience **underscores that TA delivers the strongest results when deployed strategically**. Its effectiveness is shaped not only by the technical content itself, but by **the use of appropriate diagnostic tools, well-timed engagement, senior leadership buy-in, sustained follow-through, and clear alignment with firms' commercial incentives**.

While CFYE has observed through anecdotal evidence some IP gains from TA support, evidence gaps remain that are critical for strengthening future design. These include insights into:

- *The extent that TA driven changes are sustained once project support ends*
- *Tracking of TA's role in catalysing external investment*
- *TA cost-effectiveness relative to the business growth and inclusion impact achieved*

Addressing these gaps will be **key to better understanding and designing more effective TA facilities** for private sector development programmes.

