

**Defining and  
Measuring Jobs:  
CFYE's Approach in  
Capturing  
Programme  
Outcomes**

# 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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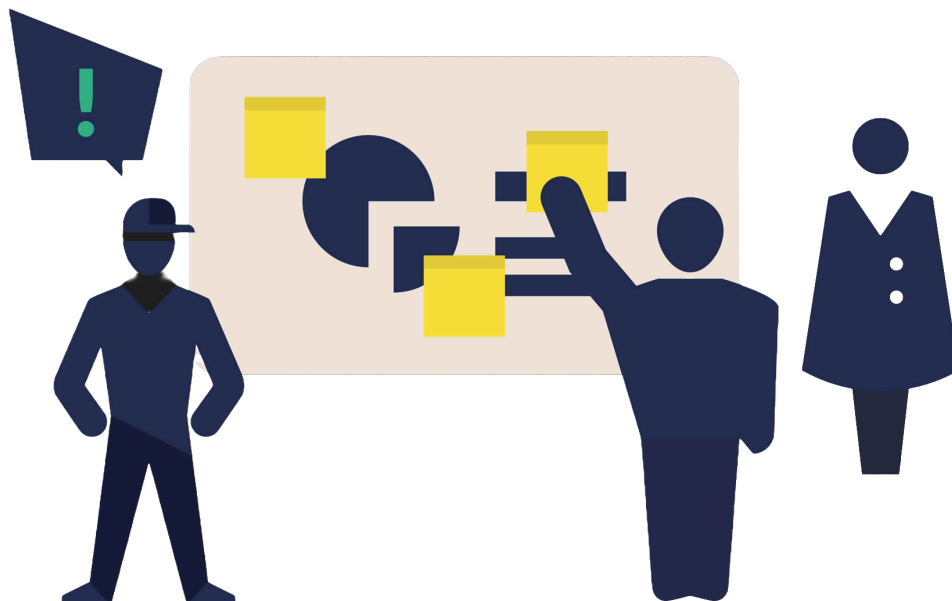
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# WHY THIS BRIEF?

Counting jobs sounds straightforward until you try to define **what a “job” actually is**, and how it has come about.

CFYE works across both the supply and demand sides of the labour market, supporting business growth, training and matching youth into roles, intermediary-led finance and business development, and youth entrepreneurship. The resulting **jobs vary widely in duration, formality, and quality**, making it difficult to apply a single definition or measurement approach.

This brief draws on CFYE’s experience of **defining and measuring jobs in practice**. It unpacks the trade-offs involved in balancing rigour, feasibility, and comparability, and shares lessons for programmes navigating similar choices across varied labour markets and delivery models.



# KEY INSIGHTS

**There is no perfect way to count jobs – programmes must make explicit choices and navigate trade-offs**

**Measuring jobs involves a series of design choices;** what constitutes a job, how it is counted, and what level of certainty is acceptable. These choices become more complex where employment spans full-time, seasonal, part-time, and multi-income work, and more consequential when job outcomes are linked to grant payments.

In line with its mandate to support 230,000 youth into decent employment, CFYE developed its **Create, Match, Improve** framework – reflecting different ways partners influence employment – and adopted a headcount-based approach with basic decency criteria, counting individuals rather than full-time equivalents. Additional rules were introduced to capture irregular work, including minimum duration thresholds for temporary jobs.

While the programme defined a common framework with three core outcomes, partners developed **tailored results chains and indicators** aligned to their business models. For example, a partner engaged in training and matching youth may define a “matched job” based on placement and retention over a minimum period, while a financial institution may define a “created job” based on verified new hires among enterprise loan recipients.

Given the diversity of pathways and actors involved, CFYE focused on counting jobs where there was a **clear link to project support**, rather than attempting to isolate and attribute outcomes solely to the programme, providing a practical way to define the boundaries of what could be counted.

CFYE’s approach enabled aggregation across a diverse portfolio, but came with trade-offs. **Combining different types of work within a single job count reduces comparability and makes metrics such as cost per job harder to interpret.** Attempts to improve comparability through further disaggregation increased reporting burden and proved difficult to apply consistently.



# KEY INSIGHTS

## Balancing verifiability and completeness is a constant trade-off

Programmes often face a core decision: **count only what can be verified**, or **use estimates to capture a broader picture of employment effects**.

CFYE prioritised verification through partner reporting, documentation, and spot checks. This **strengthened credibility and allowed jobs to be linked to specific businesses and individuals**, but required significant investment and could undercount jobs — particularly in informal contexts or more indirect pathways.

In some cases, jobs could not be counted where minimum documentation requirements were not met, even where partners were confident employment had occurred. Temporary or seasonal workers who did not meet duration thresholds were also excluded. This was the case for Balloon Ventures, where additional research showed that **routine monitoring was not capturing a significant number of casual and supply chain jobs** associated with supported businesses.

In other cases, **verification approaches were adapted**. Some partners initially relied on bank statements to verify income, but shifted to a combination of business records and self-reported surveys when beneficiaries were unwilling or unable to share financial documents.

While less robust, this allowed outcomes that would otherwise go unrecorded to be captured.

These challenges were more pronounced in **fragile and conflict-affected contexts** — including Sudan, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Jordan — where access constraints, displacement, and security risks limited the feasibility of standard verification approaches. This sometimes required **adapting project designs, pausing verification activities temporarily, or revising data collection approaches** to reflect operational realities and data feasibility.

Estimation approaches such as extrapolating from research or applying ratios or proxy measures can help fill these gaps. Though they come with uncertainty and weaken traceability to specific beneficiaries, these may be the most feasible option in certain contexts.

Choosing between approaches requires balancing credibility and completeness, taking into account programme objectives, operating context, and the feasibility of data collection. In practice, CFYE **found that no single approach was sufficient across all contexts**, reinforcing the need for adaptive, pathway-specific measurement choices.



# KEY INSIGHTS

## Measurement complexity varies by pathway – and distance from the worker

A headcount approach is **most straightforward where partners directly employ workers**, using payroll or HR records. It becomes more complex as distance from the worker increases.

In training and matching models, tracking employment outcomes **depends on follow-up with graduates and data sharing by employers**; both of which can be unreliable in practice. Training providers frequently reported low response rates to follow-up surveys and inconsistent cooperation from employers after placement. In some cases, programme design further compounded these challenges. For example, a digital marketing training partner in Nigeria using income-sharing arrangements found that **linking repayments directly to reported employment unintentionally discouraged trainees from reporting** successful placements, leading to underreporting and prompting a revision of the model.

**Measurement challenges were also pronounced in self-employment.** Unless activities were mediated through platforms that captured earnings data, partners often struggled to track income reliably. In Kenya, youth in the creative sector were reluctant to share income due to taxation concerns, while in Tunisia, rural women were hesitant to disclose income or formalise arrangements for fear of losing social protection benefits.

In intermediary models, where jobs are created within businesses several steps removed from the programme, it becomes **harder to verify employment details or assess contribution with confidence.**

These differences highlight that a single, standardised measurement approach may not be appropriate across models. Instead, **measurement approaches** – and expectations around data precision and contribution – **need to be calibrated to the project or business model**, reflecting the level of proximity to the worker.

## Measurement depends on partner capacity and incentives

Generating credible employment data depends on partners' ability to track and report outcomes. Many CFYE partners required support to establish **systems for capturing individual-level data.** While some found this valuable, others experienced it as burdensome – as one partner noted,

“ *Measuring jobs was harder than creating jobs.* ”

**Even capturing basic information, such as age and gender, proved challenging in some contexts.** CFYE encouraged partners to build on existing systems where possible. For example, EcoBriks in Uganda integrated data collection into its registration and payment processes and introduced incentives for agents to provide accurate information, improving data quality.

# KEY INSIGHTS

CFYE's use of outcome-based payments further raised the stakes. Linking disbursements to verified results gave incentives for accurate reporting but also **required significant investment in partner capacity and ongoing support through the in-country CFYE team.**

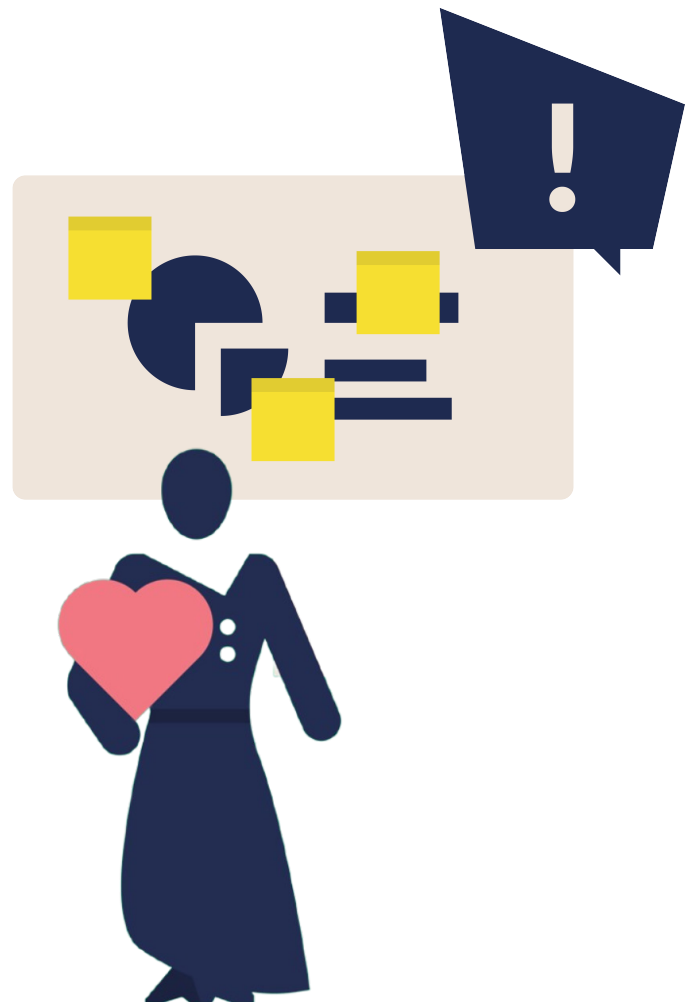
## What you measure and reward shapes what gets delivered

Measurement systems do more than track results, they shape how programmes and partners prioritise and deliver outcomes.

Simpler indicators, such as the number of new hires, are easier to report but can overlook job duration and income stability. **More nuanced indicators** – for example, tracking whether gig workers reach a minimum income level over time – **better capture meaningful outcomes**, but increase complexity and reporting burden.

These dynamics influence delivery. In some cases, partners prioritised **more easily measurable outcomes**, improving performance against targets but **risking a shift toward short-term results over more meaningful outcomes.**

Where payments are linked primarily to headcount-based outcomes, these effects can be amplified, encouraging a focus on the number of jobs created, potentially at the expense of job quality, duration, or income stability. This **underscores the importance of aligning measurement and incentive structures** with the full range of outcomes a programme seeks to influence.



# ACTIONABLE GUIDANCE

## Be explicit about definitions and their implications

Clearly define what constitutes a job, including how part-time, seasonal, and self-employment are treated. Where choices are made, such as using headcount rather than full-time equivalents, be transparent about the implications.

Where possible, **define a minimum set of disaggregation categories** (e.g. full-time vs part-time, waged vs self-employed) to support interpretation of results. Greater transparency and consistency in definitions can also support more meaningful benchmarking across programmes and help mitigate the risk of unrealistic target-setting based on non-comparable results.

## Tailor measurement to employment pathways

Measurement strategies should align with how employment outcomes are delivered. Direct employment, matching, and intermediary models require different approaches.

The further the programme is from the worker, the more important it is to **define realistic expectations and clear data flows**.

## Balance verifiability with completeness

Be deliberate about whether to prioritise verified results, broader estimates, or a combination of both. **Verification strengthens credibility but may undercount outcomes**; estimation provides a fuller picture but introduces uncertainty.

Where estimation is used, document assumptions clearly and triangulate where possible.

## Keep measurement systems practical and invest in partner capacity

Where measurement depends on partners' ability to track outcomes, **invest early in simple, practical systems and clear guidance**, building on existing processes where possible, and offering ongoing support where needed.

This can include:

- Simple templates for tracking individuals
- Integrating data collection into business processes
- Phasing requirements as capacity develops

Measurement systems should remain manageable — **overly complex requirements can reduce data quality and increase reporting burden**.



# INNOVATION SPOTLIGHT

## ADDRESSING TENSIONS BETWEEN ANALYTICAL DEPTH & REPORTING FEASIBILITY

### Fund-Level MEL Practices

#### KEY OUTCOMES



More nuanced portfolio analysis



Improving insight generation



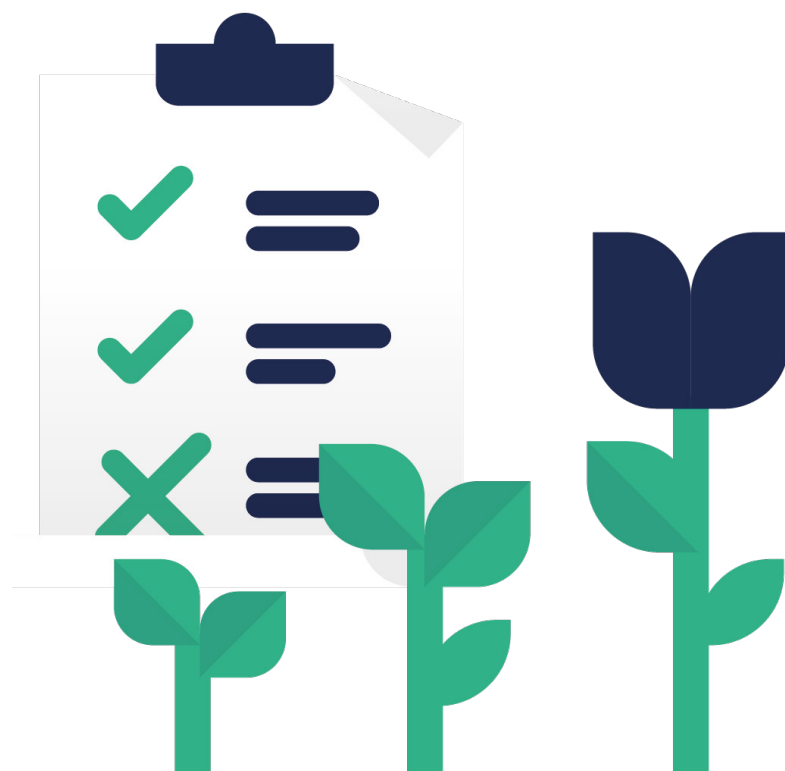
Shifts burden from partners to programme level



Preserves consistency across a diverse portfolio

To address the tension between analytical depth and reporting feasibility, CFYE introduced backend tagging of indicators to classify jobs (e.g. waged vs. self-employed). This **shifted the burden of categorisation from partners to the programme level**, enabling more nuanced portfolio analysis without requiring additional partner reporting.

Although less precise than fully disaggregated data, this approach offered a **practical compromise** – improving insight generation while preserving consistency and usability across a diverse portfolio.



# LOOKING AHEAD

Measuring jobs in youth employment programmes is about making informed choices balancing precision, practicality, and relevance in complex and varied contexts. **No single approach can fully capture the range of employment outcomes** across different pathways, sectors, and models.

## Key areas for improving practice include:

Capturing indirect and informal employment	Using estimation alongside headcount approaches
Integrating job quality and income stability more systematically into measurement frameworks	Measuring outcomes in fragile and conflict-affected contexts

