

09

LEARNING BRIEF

Localisation as a Driver of Results: Lessons from CFYE Country Portfolios

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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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Subject Matter Lead: Ahmed Darwish

Editorial Lead: Sarah Ebady

Editorial Review Team: Justin van Rhyn & Emily Waters

Icons Design: Machiel van Wijngaarden

Report Design: Faatimah Clarke

WHY THIS BRIEF?

In private sector development programming, **localisation is increasingly recognised as a way to improve relevance and effectiveness** by aligning interventions more closely with market realities. For the purposes of this brief, **localisation refers to placing programme decision-making authority closer to markets and partners**, covering design assumptions, partner selection, portfolio management, and technical assistance, rather than merely decentralising implementation activities.

In practice, however, localisation is often reduced to decentralised implementation, while critical decisions on programme design, partner selection, portfolio management, and technical assistance remain centrally driven.

Across CFYE country portfolios, **experience shows that localisation delivers value when applied as a programme design and management approach**, one that enables country teams to exercise judgement over what is funded, how risks are assessed, how portfolios adapt, and how support evolves. Where these decisions remain overly centralised, programmes struggle to respond to diverse markets, fragile contexts, and partner needs.

Drawing on delivery experience from across the CFYE portfolio countries, this learning brief **highlights how localised programme management strengthened effectiveness and portfolio quality**, with a focus on the role of locally driven technical assistance.



KEY INSIGHTS

Localisation Improves Programme Realism where Data and Assumptions are Weak

Private sector development programmes often rely on labour market data, wage benchmarks, and sector forecasts that may be incomplete or unreliable. In such contexts, local judgement is not just helpful; it is foundational to credible programme design.

In **Sudan**, for example, the absence of reliable labour market data and an enforceable minimum wage meant that centrally defined benchmarks offered limited guidance. Rather than applying a standardised wage floor, the Sudan country team **developed a contextualised research scoping document drawing on cost-of-living indicators and wage data** gathered directly from some of Sudan's largest employers. This grounded approach allowed the team to **assess realistic employment conditions and distinguish feasible delivery models from aspirational proposals**, a process that would have been impossible to replicate remotely.

Localisation also enables programmes to remain dynamic as conditions evolve. When macroeconomic conditions in Sudan shifted dramatically, particularly as conflict disrupted operating environments, the country team was able to adjust benchmarks and partner expectations in real time rather than waiting for central guidance. This adaptability proved critical to **keeping the portfolio viable under circumstances that no central planning process could have anticipated**.

In **Nigeria**, the country team encountered a different but equally instructive dimension of this challenge. Standard youth employment definitions did not reflect the realities of who was actually available and motivated to work:



For most people in Nigeria, life begins at 30. The UN defines youth as 18 to 35, but at 18, you're still in school, and at 25, you're still figuring things out.

The people most eager to work are often above 35, with children, with responsibilities. At one training session, 200 people came.

Ninety-eight percent were over 35. Officially, they did not count as youth, but they were the ones who showed up and worked hard. Our partners quietly hired them anyway.



- **Amarachi Kalu**, CFYE Nigeria
Country Lead

This example captures what localisation makes possible: the ability to interpret programme definitions and assumptions through the lens of lived market reality, and to act on that interpretation in ways that improve outcomes. A remotely managed programme, bound to standardised eligibility criteria, would have missed the people most ready to work.

In data-poor or informal markets, localisation is **foundational to sound design and realistic portfolio planning**.



KEY INSIGHTS

Localisation Strengthens Partner Selection and Portfolio Quality

Localisation plays a critical role in **shaping who programmes work with and how partnerships are structured**. Partner selection is not just a technical exercise; it is a judgement call that depends on knowledge of organisational credibility, local political economy, delivery track record, and ecosystem dynamics that are rarely visible on paper.

In **Sudan**, country teams actively guided consortium development using contextual knowledge of organisational credibility, complementary capacities, and delivery feasibility. This **strengthened the applicant pipeline by filtering out unrealistic partnerships and surfacing credible actors that may have been overlooked in a centralised proposal review**. Crucially, local knowledge also informed the political economy of partner selection, helping the team identify which actors carried reputational risks and ensuring that only organisations with genuine community legitimacy were brought into the portfolio.

At the same time, a risk worth acknowledging is that locally embedded teams may sometimes rely on informal networks that favour known actors over emerging or less-visible organisations with genuine potential. **Effective localisation should guard against this by combining local intelligence with structured outreach to broaden the applicant pool.**

¹ For further insight, see the *Vice Versa Global* article <https://viceversaglobal.com/localisation-is-not-a-transfer-of-tasks-but-of-trust/>

² For further reading on partner-selection, see the *CFYE Learning Brief* *Selecting the Right Partners to Co-Fund*

Country leadership in **Kenya** and **Nigeria** echoed this experience, noting that **locally embedded teams are better positioned to assess genuine delivery capacity**, particularly for smaller firms or ecosystem actors whose operational strength may not be evident on paper.

Implementing a multi-country fund **requires striking the right balance between standardised selection processes and a nuanced understanding of country-specific realities**. CFYE achieves this by operating within a central, transparent framework that ensures fairness and consistency across all proposals, while local teams lead sourcing and pipeline development, drawing on their deep knowledge of market dynamics and contextual factors. Central governance ensures that final decision-making is coherent, comparable, and aligned with overall fund standards.

What this looks like in practice varies considerably by country. In some markets, local teams surface structural nuances that fundamentally reshape pipeline strategy. In **Morocco**, for instance, the country team **identified early on that public sector financing of youth training and employment is unusually prominent**, which compressed the pool of [private sector](#)¹ applicants relative to what standard programme assumptions would predict.



KEY INSIGHTS

Recognising this allowed the team to recalibrate its sourcing approach, adjusting selection windows, target applicants, and eligibility framing, before the pipeline was set. This kind of upfront contextual intelligence, which no central team could have generated from a distance, is precisely what localisation enables².

Localisation improves portfolio quality by **embedding contextual judgement into partner selection** rather than relying solely on central screening.



Localisation is Critical to Effective Technical Assistance

Across CFYE portfolios, experience shows that while not all technical assistance needs to be delivered locally, decisions about TA must be localised. Some support requires specialised external expertise; other TA demands deep contextual understanding to be effective. Localisation, in this sense, is about who decides what TA is needed, when it is needed, and how it should be delivered.

When TA decisions were shaped locally, country teams were better able to identify real constraints, select appropriate modalities, adapt sequencing as conditions changed, and engage experts who understood how businesses operate in context. Reflections from **Kenya** and **Nigeria's** country leadership confirmed that TA delivered the greatest value when grounded in local realities and market dynamics, and that the match between TA provider and partner needs, improved significantly when **selection decisions sat with country teams rather than centrally**.

In **Kenya**, the country team's proximity to implementing partners allowed them to **recognise when a standard TA offer was insufficient** for a particular business context, and to reframe support in terms that **resonated with the partner's commercial priorities** rather than programme compliance requirements. This kind of adaptive judgement, small in any single instance but significant in aggregate, is what distinguishes locally driven TA from centrally designed delivery. Across multiple Kenya portfolio partners, the result was higher engagement, stronger adoption of recommendations, and support that partners continued applying well after the programme ended.

The **249Startups** case from **Sudan** illustrates how localisation works across multiple layers simultaneously, and how the relationship between local and central teams, when functioning well, produces better outcomes than either could achieve alone.

249Startups is a **leading social enterprise delivering startup incubation programmes in Sudan**. Through CFYE support, it launched the Rhino Accelerator, **actively co-building ventures and deploying catalytic capital across the Sudanese ecosystem**. As its various programmes, all centred on venture building, grew in ambition and portfolio size, and as the 2023 conflict reshaped both the operating environment and the CFYE project design, an organic need emerged: to formalise and institutionalise the venture studio model itself.

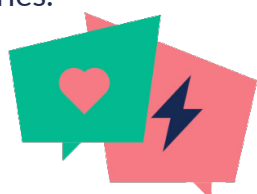
KEY INSIGHTS

This was not a centrally prescribed intervention. It arose directly from the **IP's own operational experience**, from the recognition that without codified systems and a structured framework, the studio's impact would remain dependent on individual knowledge rather than repeatable process.

The Sudan country team validated and championed this need. Their contextual understanding of 249Startups' operating environment, including the complexity of building ventures in a frontier market and the severe disruption caused by conflict, **allowed them to assess the request not as an administrative ask but as a strategically important investment in the IP's long-term resilience.**

What happened next reflects the value of a well-functioning central-local relationship. Through ongoing conversations between the Sudan country team and a central team member, the programme identified Venture&, a TA provider that had recently completed the same type of venture studio structuring engagement for **EdVentures in Egypt**. The prior successful delivery was a strong signal of provider quality, but the fit went considerably deeper than a proven track record.

By this point, 249Startups had expanded its operations into Egypt, a move driven by the conflict in Sudan but enabled by the cultural, linguistic, and geographic proximity between the two countries.



It is important to note that the **Egyptian and Sudanese startup ecosystems are structurally very different**: Egypt's is more mature, better capitalised, and embedded in a significantly larger domestic market. Even so, for a Sudanese founder or operator venturing into Egypt, the shared language, overlapping social and business norms, and geographical closeness reduce the friction of entry in ways that matter tremendously.

Having an Egyptian TA provider, who was deeply rooted in the local startup ecosystem, and had already delivered this exact model for an Egyptian IP meant that 249Startups received support that was **both technically rigorous and locally grounded**, not just in venture building methodology but in their new market context. The engagement produced a codified venture studio playbook, a stage-gated venture framework, and a strategic orientation for cross-border expansion that reflected real ecosystem knowledge rather than generic best practice.

This case unifies several aspects of localisation at once: a need identified by the IP and validated by the local delivery team; a TA provider identified through central-local knowledge sharing; prior portfolio experience used as a quality signal; and delivery grounded in the local context most relevant to where the IP was operating and growing.



Localisation improves TA effectiveness by **positioning TA strategy, design, and execution closer to partners and markets, and connecting local needs to cross-portfolio knowledge** through strong central-local relationships.

ACTIONABLE GUIDANCE

1. Localise decision-making at high-impact points.

Enable country teams to shape design assumptions, partner selection, portfolio adjustments, and TA strategies. Central oversight should focus on quality standards and results verification; contextual decisions should sit with those closest to the market

Examples from the portfolio:

- In **Nigeria**, locally embedded teams navigated age eligibility norms that conflicted with programme definitions, enabling pragmatic decisions that improved delivery outcomes.
- In **Sudan**, country teams built a contextualised wage reference framework using employer data rather than applying unreliable national statistics.
- In **Morocco**, pipeline strategy was recalibrated based on local knowledge of public sector dominance in youth employment financing.

2. Embed contextual judgement into partner selection and monitoring.

Complement central due diligence with local insight on feasibility, delivery dynamics, and political economy. **Local teams should lead sourcing and pipeline development; central governance should ensure coherence and comparability across the portfolio.** Be attentive to the risk that local networks may inadvertently exclude less-known but high-potential actors, and build in structured outreach to counteract this.

3. Localise TA strategy, not just TA delivery.

Country teams should be the primary decision-makers on TA modalities, timing, resource allocation, and expert selection. Use tools such as CFYE's IP Portfolio Performance Management Matrix to link TA allocation to portfolio priority and absorption capacity rather than responding to the loudest or fastest requests. **Invest in the central-local relationship so that portfolio-wide knowledge, including prior TA provider experience, can inform local decisions.**

4. Keep standards central, judgement local.

Maintain central oversight of quality thresholds, results verification, and fund accountability, while decentralising contextual decisions. The table below illustrates how this split can work in practice.

Keep Central	Localise
Quality standards and minimum thresholds	Assessment of local market realities and data gaps
Results verification and fund accountability	Partner identification, sourcing, and pipeline development
Legal and fiduciary compliance	Consortium structuring and partner selection decisions
Cross-portfolio learning and benchmarking	Portfolio adaptation and re-prioritisation
Standardised reporting frameworks	TA strategy, sequencing, and expert selection
Donor relationship management	MEL interpretation and context-specific indicators

INNOVATION SPOTLIGHT

Localised Technical Assistance as a Portfolio-Wide Enabler

EdVentures - Egypt

KEY OUTCOMES



Standardised service delivery & built internal frameworks for tracking



Strengthened pricing & operational policies



Institutionalised Venture Capital Studio Model capable of high-quality support

Across the CFYE portfolio, **locally driven technical assistance has proven to be a high-impact lever** for partner performance and sustainability. By enabling country teams to shape TA based on close knowledge of partner and market realities, and by working with local experts, CFYE supported more relevant, trusted, and actionable support across a wide range of implementing partners, strengthening systems and delivery well beyond programme timelines.

Local MEL representatives played an important supporting role in this. By embedding monitoring and evaluation capacity at country level, CFYE was able to **track TA uptake and absorption in ways that were sensitive to local reporting norms and partner constraints**, and to **adapt TA plans based on real-time evidence** from the field.

In **Egypt**, CFYE supported **EdVentures** to address a structural constraint: the **lack of systems to deliver consistent, scalable support to early-stage EdTech businesses**. The Egyptian EdTech ecosystem is characterised by a high volume of early-stage ventures with significant ambition but weak institutional infrastructure for scale. Without deep familiarity with how Egyptian EdTech startups are built, funded, and supported, a generic Venture Studio model would have missed the specific gaps in HR systems, financial sustainability, and milestone tracking that these businesses face.

Through locally shaped technical assistance, including a dedicated Venture Studio consultant placed by Venture& who understood this context, CFYE supported EdVentures to:

- **Standardise service delivery for HR, marketing, and financial planning**
- **Build internal frameworks for consultant allocation, milestone tracking, and outcome measurement**
- **Strengthen pricing, cost structures, and operational policies aligned with decent work and inclusion**
- **Transition the Venture Studio from a grant-dependent model toward a self-sustaining, revenue-generating unit**

INNOVATION SPOTLIGHT

As a result, EdVentures institutionalised a Venture Studio model capable of delivering repeatable, high-quality support and sustaining services beyond the CFYE lifecycle.



The CFYE partnership has been truly transformative, not only for the scale-ups we support, but for EdVentures as an organisation. CFYE has enabled us to rethink our systems, deepen our impact, and build a scalable, gender-inclusive model for youth employment in Egypt.

– EdVentures



This example matters not only for what it achieved for EdVentures, but for what it enabled elsewhere in the portfolio. The success of the EdVentures engagement **became a knowledge asset**, one that the central team was able to draw on when a similar need emerged in Sudan. The 249Startups engagement, described in Key Insight 3, was shaped in part by this precedent: same provider, different ecosystem, but with a layer of cultural and linguistic familiarity that made the cross-border application both logical and genuinely effective.

Together, these two cases illustrate a broader principle: when TA is designed and delivered with genuine local grounding, and when that experience is captured and shared across the portfolio, **it generates compounding value well beyond the original engagement.**



LOOKING AHEAD

Across CFYE experience, a clear conclusion emerges: **localisation is about placing programme decision-making authority closer to markets and partners**, rather than merely decentralising implementation.

Future private sector development programmes should move beyond broad localisation commitments and instead **define which decisions must be locally driven by default**, particularly across design, partner selection, portfolio adaptation, and technical assistance. The central vs. local framework presented above offers a starting point for making this distinction operationally concrete.

The strongest programmes will be those that invest in both dimensions simultaneously: building capable, trusted local teams with genuine decision-making authority, and maintaining a central function that connects, learns from, and supports those teams rather than overriding them. When judgement sits closer to markets and context, and when central and local teams work in genuine partnership, **programmes are better positioned to deliver relevance, resilience, and sustainable results.**

