

Pathways to Employment

Paper 1



Platforms for Skills-Building

CHALLENGE
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EMPLOYMENT

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Author

Nimrah Karim

Editor & PTE Series Advisor

Justin van Rhyn

Case Study Research & Authors

Sarah Ebady (GoMyCode, Green Circle)

Niek van Dijk (Sprints, Digital Marketing Skill Institute, Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme)

Implementing Partner Data Analysis

Nico Prescott, Lena Verwilghen & Anna KissPal

Youth Survey Analysis

Ilaria Blasi

Youth Survey Field Team

Majina Mwasezi & Janske van Eijck (Leads), Mohammed Almas (Kenya), Caren Kimeli (Kenya), Hannah Silas (Nigeria), Umar Abdullahi (Nigeria)

Technical Review and Country Validation

Emily Waters, Niek van Dijk, Nour Serry, Mark Rolls, Geja Roosjen, Marlou Rijk, Njeri Mwaura, Amarachi Okori (Nigeria), Issam Khorchani (Tunisia), Lina AlKhawaja (Jordan), Beatrice Gichohi (Kenya), Ola Farrag (Egypt)

Design and Layout

Machiel van Wijngaarden, Too Many Words

Design Support

Faatimah Clarke and Ilaria Blasi

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CHALLENGE FUND FXR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

CFYE is a €134 million initiative funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Our goal: **create, match, and improve jobs for 230,000 youth—at least half of them women—across 11 countries in MENA, Sahel & West Africa, and the Horn of Africa.** Since 2019, CFYE has issued competitive “Calls for Solutions,” inviting private-sector companies (typically part of a consortium of partners) to submit ideas for addressing the youth-employment challenge in partnership with the Fund.

CFYE has co-invested - via matching grants and complementary technical assistance (TA) - in **132 IPs**. Partner IPs commit to creating, matching or improving a certain number of decent jobs for youth over a 2-3 year project duration. The programme supports the Netherlands' *Youth@Heart* strategy and the UN SDGs on education and employment.

What is CFYE aiming to achieve?

CFYE adopts a market-driven approach to address both supply and demand side youth employment barriers:

Supply side: Targeted upskilling and career-readiness initiatives that meet fast-changing labour-market needs and overcome gender barriers - for example, partnering with Nigerian digital-service providers to train young women in coding and entrepreneurship.

Demand side: Job creation and job quality improvements through business support - such as Uganda's Balloon Ventures, which offers micro-loans and advisory to women-led firms so they can grow and hire other youth.

CFYE's Outcome Pathways

CFYE supports a range of pathways that enable young people to access decent work⁶. These pathways fall under three job outcomes:



Create: Young people gain employment through new work opportunities created as a direct result of CFYE support.



Match: Young people are connected to existing jobs through job placements and matchmaking services.



Improve: Young people already employed experience enhancements in job quality, such as better pay, improved working conditions, access to social protection, and career growth.

Results-based Payment Approach

CFYE operates a Payment by Results (PbR) model. 10% of funds are released on finalising the project Theory of Change; 12.5% through quarterly and annual reporting; 37.5% for activities leading to jobs (outputs); 40% via annual job reports.

⁶ This follows the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s definition of decent work. This is defined as work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for all, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organise and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men. For CFYE, all jobs supported through the programme must respect fundamental labour rights, as set out in the ILO core standards.

The Pathways to Employment (PTE) Learning Series

Youth unemployment across Africa and the Middle East is a complex and urgent challenge. With over 60% of the population under the age of 25, the region faces a demographic surge that, if not matched with economic opportunity, risks deepening cycles of unemployment, underemployment, and exclusion, particularly for women and marginalised youth.

Each year, more young people enter the labour market than there are jobs to absorb them, especially in less developed economies. Formal employment remains out of reach for most: In 2023, only about one in five youth in low-income countries could expect to secure regular paid employment and nearly three-quarters of young adults in Sub-Saharan Africa remained trapped in insecure work¹, underscoring the persistent gap between demographic potential and economic opportunity.

Despite growing interest in youth employment programmes², many interventions remain fragmented and overly focused on supply-side solutions such as upskilling. While important, this narrow focus often overlooks the demand-side of the employment equation. In other words, *what are the requirements, commercial motivations, and constraints faced by employers who ultimately create and sustain jobs?*




This highlights a critical gap: the need for more evidence and investment in programmes that directly engage employers and respond to labour market realities with demand-driven solutions.

The **Challenge Fund for Youth Employment (CFYE)** seeks to address this gap through the **Pathways to Employment (PTE) Learning Series**. Drawing on standardised data collected over 6 years of implementation and targeted case study research with selected partners, the PTE series aims to generate practical lessons on how different business models can create and sustain decent work for youth.

To better understand the types of businesses in CFYE's portfolio and their contribution to job outcomes, we have segmented our 132 implementing partners (IPs)³ into the following business model categories:⁴

- 1 ILO (2024). *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024: Decent Work, Brighter Futures (20th Anniversary Edition)*. International Labour Organization. Retrieved from <https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/global-employment-trends-youth-2024>
- 2 Donors such as Germany (GIZ), European Union, multilateral banks (World Bank, African Development Bank), foundations such as MasterCard, and private sector companies like Accenture, Microsoft, and Adecco Group have prioritised youth employment in their strategies.
- 3 IPs are private sector led consortia or single companies contracted by the Challenge Fund for Youth Employment (CFYE) to design and deliver projects that create, match, or improve jobs for young people. IPs are selected through competitive calls for solutions and are responsible for implementing their proposed business models.
- 4 In this paper, we use "business models" as shorthand for the broad categories of enterprises that CFYE partners with. Our categorisation is informed by the Dutch Good Growth Fund (DGGF) report *Segmenting the Missing Middle*. The assumption is that DGGF's fourth category—Livelihood Sustaining Enterprises—is reached through CFYE's fourth category, Intermediaries.

Table 1. CFYE Portfolio Categorisation

	Category*	Model	Definition
   	Social Enterprises*	Social Enterprises	Businesses that combine commercial incentives with an explicit social and/or environmental mission, aiming to create both financial sustainability and measurable impact.
	High-growth Ventures*	Platforms for offline work**	Platforms that connect general and blue-collar workers to in-person, non-digital jobs and gigs
		Platforms for digitally-delivered work**	Platforms that train and connect young people to digitally-enabled and digitally-delivered jobs
		Platforms for Skills-Building**	Platforms that offer training and skills development to enhance workers technical capabilities
		Digitizing Micro-enterprises**	Online platforms that connect potential buyers and sellers and helps to sell or buy products or services
	Dynamic Enterprises*	Agribusinesses	Businesses that produce, or provide support services to the sourcing and/or processing of agricultural products, provided they generate revenue from these activities
		Non-agri SMEs	Businesses that operate in typical “bread & butter” industries
	Intermediaries	NGOs	Conventional non-profit organizations that set up projects to support micro-entrepreneurs and/or self-employment
		Intermediaries	Organisations that combine capital deployment with technical assistance to support the growth of small and growing businesses. Rather than creating jobs directly, they work through the businesses they finance and support, meaning they have an indirect impact on employment through the businesses in their portfolios.

* Our categorisation is informed by the Dutch Good Growth Fund (DGGF) report *Segmenting the Missing Middle*. The assumption is that DGGF’s fourth category—Livelihood Sustaining Enterprises—is reached through CFYE’s fourth category, Intermediaries.

** Subcategories within the High-Growth Ventures category broadly align with the classification used by the Jobtech Alliance.

Four Promising Business Models

The PTE series offers a reflective, practitioner-led inquiry into how these business models are performing within the CFYE context. It aims to surface trends, generate insights, and inform the decisions of actors in the youth employment ecosystem.

For this learning series, we have selected four promising business models for deeper analysis:



1. Platforms for Skills-Building:

Platforms that train and connect young people to digitally enabled and digitally delivered jobs.



2. Social Enterprises:

Businesses that combine commercial incentives with an explicit social and/or environmental mission (for example waste management services or health products), aiming to create both financial sustainability and measurable impact.



3. Agribusinesses:

Businesses that produce or provide support services to the sourcing and/or processing of agricultural products, provided they generate revenue from these activities.



4. Intermediaries:

Organisations that combine capital deployment with technical assistance to support the growth of small and growing businesses. Rather than creating jobs directly, they work through the businesses they finance and support, meaning they have an indirect impact on employment through the businesses in their portfolios.

Importantly, this is not an evaluation of CFYE's net impact, nor an academic study establishing causal relationships. Rather, it is a learning initiative designed to support donors, investors, practitioners, and private sector actors in designing more connected, market-grounded youth employment programmes that are more effective, scalable, and inclusive.



Platforms for Skills-Building

Pathways to Employment Paper 1

Executive Summary

PTE 1: Platforms for Skills Building

Labour markets across Africa and the Middle East are undergoing rapid transformation driven by digital technologies. However, sectors with the potential to scale rapidly, such as e-commerce, educational technology (EdTech), and IT services, often struggle to find talent⁵.

These digital sectors face a persistent mismatch between employer needs and the available talent pool. Addressing this challenge requires demand-driven approaches that not only equip young people

with relevant skills but also ensure that training is directly connected to real job opportunities through structured pathways into employment.

In this context, Platforms for Skills-Building have emerged as a promising model, providing technical and soft skills training, mentorship, and job matching services to prepare youth for two key job types: digitally enabled jobs (e.g. retail staff using point of sale systems) or digitally delivered jobs (e.g. online customer support).

Table 2. The case study IPs featured in this paper are as follows:

IP	DIGITAL MARKETING SKILL INSTITUTE	SPRINTS	SERIANU CYBER SHUJAA PROGRAMME	GOMYCODE	GREEN CIRCLE
CFYE Project Snapshot	Women-focused digital marketing training combining practical learning, mentorship, and job matching via a proprietary platform	Tech academy offering training through a proprietary platform. Innovative use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for navigation and course development	Cybersecurity training delivered through a university-industry partnership. Offers tailored curriculum and flexible formats	Coding school delivered via a digital platform. Includes career counselling, internships, and employer partnerships to support workforce transition	Cybersecurity and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) firm integrating youth upskilling with service delivery
Country	Nigeria	Egypt	Kenya	Tunisia	Jordan

PTE Paper 1 explores Platforms for Skills-Building through the following research questions:

- ▶ How do platforms partner with employers to improve youth employment outcomes?
- ▶ What drives scale and commercial sustainability?
- ▶ How can platforms design for inclusion and improve access for young women and marginalised youth?
- ▶ What constraints persist, and how can funders and platforms address them?



⁵ World Bank. (2023). Digital jobs for youth: Young women in the digital economy. World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/39796>



Key Insights from CFYE

- 1. Market-responsiveness is a key differentiator:**

Platforms that align training with employer demand are more likely to achieve improved youth employment outcomes. This is being achieved through co-designed curricula, applied learning (such as internships, apprenticeships, and project-based work), and clearly defined hiring pathways. Increasingly, platforms are moving beyond training to integrate employer engagement throughout the learner journey, strengthening the link between skills acquisition and employment. For example, Kenya-based IP *Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme* developed its cybersecurity training in response to a surge in cyberattacks on Kenya's financial sector, thereby ensuring graduates had skills that reflected market demand.
- 2. Platforms are evolving from providing training to enabling employment:**

Successful models extend beyond upskilling to include career services, job matching, outsourcing, and Employer of Record solutions. These wraparound services support the transition from training to work, improve employment outcomes, and create additional revenue streams for platforms. For example, platforms like *GoMyCode* and *Sprints* have expanded into placement and talent services, reflecting a broader shift toward demand-driven, outcome-oriented models.
- 3. Soft skills are essential, not optional, for successful job outcomes:**

Employers frequently highlight interpersonal and workplace readiness skills as critical for youth employability. Platforms that embed soft skills such as career coaching, communication, and time management training are better positioned to meet employer expectations. *Sprints*, an IP in Egypt integrates teamwork and communication skills into group assignments and business simulation projects.
- 4. Technology enables scale and customisation, but access gaps persist:**

Digital tools allow platforms to personalise learning pathways, monitor learner progress, and deliver cost-effective training at scale. Innovations such as AI-driven assessments (which analyse learner performance and pinpoint strengths and gaps) and adaptive learning systems (which adjust content and pace in response) are making this increasingly precise. Tunisia-based IP *GoMyCode* uses an online platform to track student progress and adapts learning pathways to learner needs.
- 5. Inclusivity requires intentional design:**

Women and marginalised youth are often underrepresented in digitally enabled roles and face structural barriers including mobility constraints, care responsibilities, and limited digital access. Platforms are responding with subsidised pricing, women-only cohorts, and flexible scheduling which can help to improve participation, however, reaching these groups can increase costs, creating trade-offs between inclusion and commercial viability. In an example from Jordan, *Green Circle* launched *SheHacks*, a women-only cybersecurity training programme with flexible schedules to attract and retain female talent.
- 6. Commercial sustainability is evolving:**

Platforms are experimenting with hybrid revenue models such as income-sharing agreements (ISAs) and business-to-business (B2B) partnerships to balance commercial viability and inclusivity. However, in some cases, thin margins, limited recurring revenue, and delayed returns continue to constrain profitability. As a result, some models may move toward sustainability over time, while others are likely to require ongoing subsidy. Nigeria's *Digital Marketing Skill Institute (DMSI)* is piloting an income-linked repayment model *EduPayLater* to make training more accessible, while ensuring business sustainability.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of Platforms for Skills-Building will depend on how effectively they align with labour market demand, integrate employer partnerships, and balance inclusivity with commercial interests. Continued innovation in delivery and financing models will be critical to unlocking their long-term impact on youth employment.



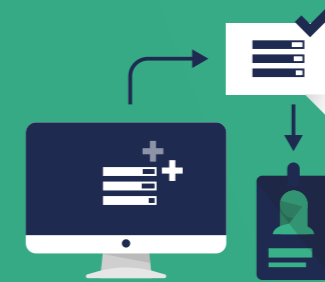
Pathways to Employment 1 Platforms for Skills-Building



Labour markets are changing due to digital technology.

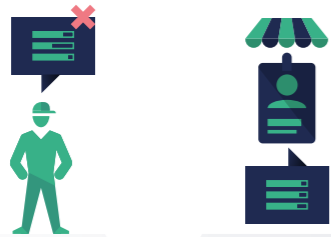


Growing sectors like e-commerce, EdTech, and IT services struggle to find skilled workers.



Skills-building platforms help. They train, mentor, and connect youth to jobs.

KEY INSIGHT



Technology enables scale and customisation, but access gaps persist

KEY INSIGHT



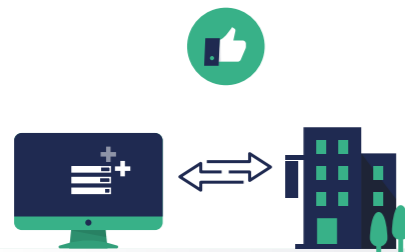
Platforms are evolving from providing training to enabling employment

KEY INSIGHT



Soft skills are essential, not optional, for successful job outcomes

KEY INSIGHT



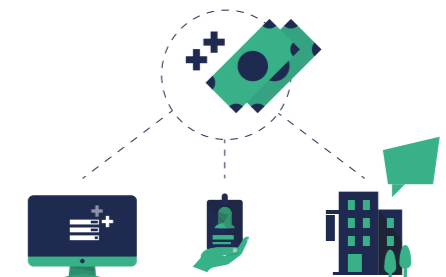
Market-responsiveness is a key differentiator

KEY INSIGHT



Inclusivity requires intentional design

KEY INSIGHT



Commercial sustainability is evolving



Section 1

Introduction

Defining the Challenge

“I think taking the course alone doesn't necessarily equip me with the things I need to learn in order to secure the job... the job openings I saw have some huge expectations that I didn't think I have enough experience on.”⁷

This reflects the experience of many young people across the Middle East and Africa who are caught between completing training and meeting the realities of the labour market. At its core, the challenge is twofold: **young people struggle to access quality jobs, while employers struggle to find and retain suitable talent.** This points to a deeper disconnect between how skills are developed and how jobs are structured, particularly in fast-growing, tech-driven sectors where demand is evolving rapidly.

On the **supply side**, the issue goes beyond access to training. A key constraint is the gap between education and industry needs, as formal systems often lag behind emerging fields such as ICT. In Egypt, for example, employers report shortages in specialised skills like data analysis, AI, and cybersecurity despite a steady pipeline of graduates. This is compounded by a persistent ‘experience gap’, where many young people face the paradox of requiring experience to get a job, but needing a job to gain experience in the first place. While factors such as limited access to information, networks, and digital infrastructure continue to shape how youth navigate labour markets, structural barriers - particularly for young women - further constrain participation. Mobility restrictions, care responsibilities, and limited representation in technology sectors all influence both access to, and progression within these roles.

On the **demand side**, employers face parallel constraints in translating labour demand into effective hiring and retention. Recruitment processes are often informal or underdeveloped, making it difficult for firms to identify and integrate young talent. In Tunisia for example, the absence of structured hiring and onboarding systems limits firms’ ability to absorb the growing pool of ICT graduates. At the same time, high turnover reduces incentives for employers to invest in training, while workplace environments are not always designed to support retention, particularly for women. In Jordan and Egypt, firms report that young workers frequently leave for better-paying opportunities, reinforcing a cycle of short-term hiring and underinvestment in workforce development.

Together, these dynamics point to a systemic disconnect between the supply of young talent and the demand for labour. Experiences from the five labour markets featured in this paper shows that traditional universities and vocational training centres often struggle to keep pace with rapidly evolving employer demands. Their curricula are frequently misaligned with market demands, leaving many young people with technical qualifications but low job readiness. In contrast, ‘next-generation’ skills-building platforms, when designed to be market-responsive and paired with job-matching interventions, offer a promising solution to bridge this gap.

⁷ Youth participant for Youth Survey in Kenya and Nigeria. Pathways to Employment Research (2025). Challenge Fund for Youth Employment.

What are Platforms for Skills-Building?

We define Platforms for Skills-Building as businesses that offer market-oriented, employment-linked training at scale, often through tech-enabled solutions. Within CFYE's portfolio, these platforms have emerged as a response to the labour market challenges outlined above, particularly where they are aligned with employer needs and focused on job outcomes.

In this paper, we focus on platforms that are showing potential to fill the skills-to-employment gap in fast-growing, digitally enabled sectors in the Middle East and Africa, by preparing young people for two main types of roles:

1. Digitally-enabled jobs

Roles that combine in-person work with digital tools, such as retail staff using point-of-sale systems or health workers using mobile health applications.

2. Digitally-delivered jobs

Roles performed entirely online, such as freelance developers, graphic designers, and remote customer support staff.

The featured businesses prepare youth for employment by offering digitally delivered upskilling, coaching, and certification. Content ranges from technical skills (such as coding, design, cybersecurity) to soft skills (such as time management and presentation skills). Delivery models include self-paced (often gamified) e-learning and live or cohort-based hybrid classes. Many platforms are mobile-first to support remote learners, and offer wrap-around services such as mentorships, apprenticeships, and credentialing to verify skills and enhance job-readiness.⁸

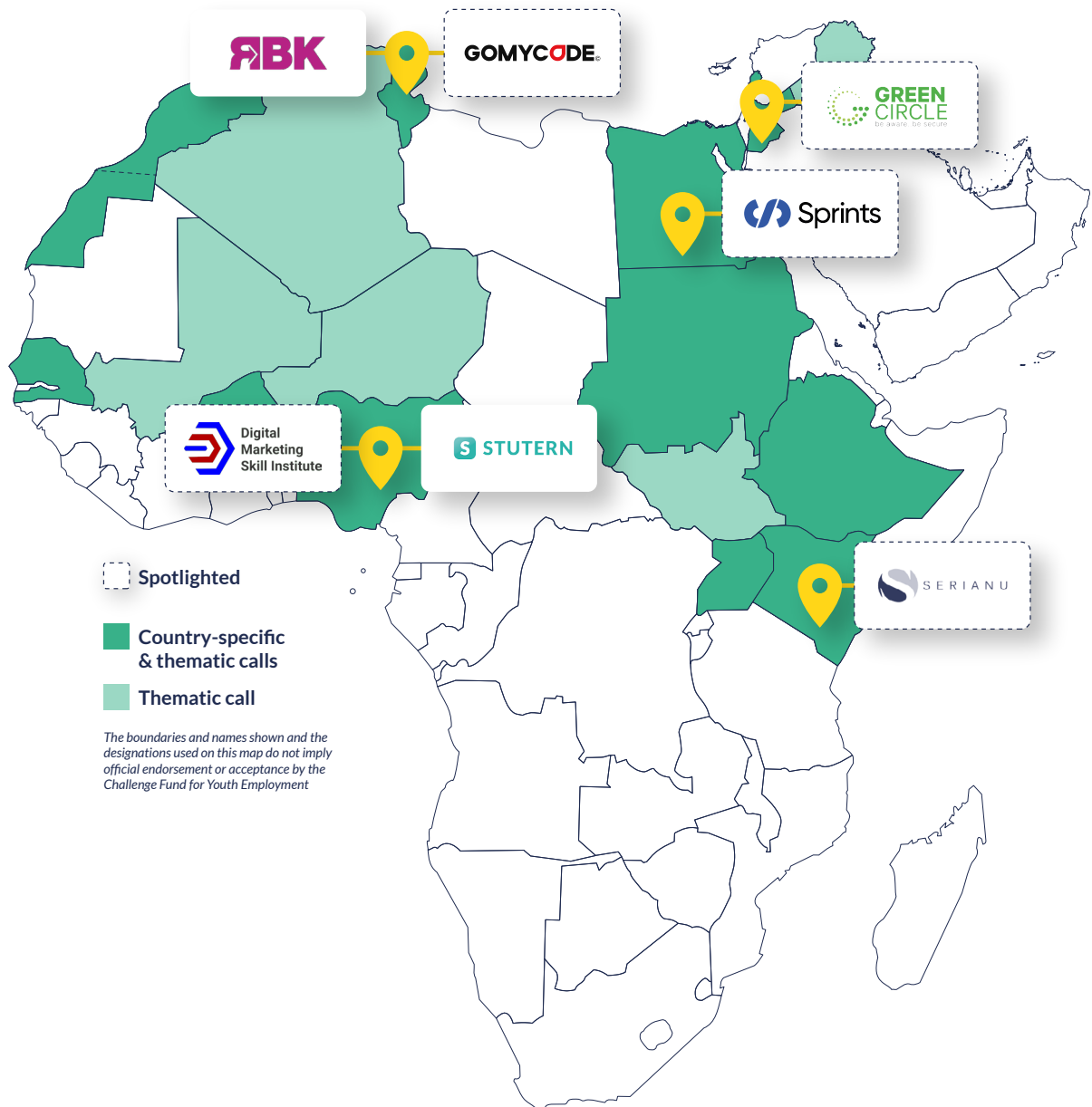
The primary users of these platforms are typically urban and peri-urban youth, including unemployed graduates and underemployed young people seeking better paying jobs. This group represents a significant underutilised talent pool that can transition into higher-value work when equipped with the right training. Notably, women, rural, and marginalised youth have typically remained underrepresented as users of these services.

While the core business of the IPs in the Platforms for Skills-Building category is upskilling, many also offer value-added services and diversify their revenue streams through mentoring, internship programmes, job search & placement support, career support services, Employer of Record services⁹, and outsourcing. IPs typically engage employers early in the project lifecycle to ensure strong alignment with job placement outcomes.

The ability of these platforms to scale, due to lower marginal costs compared to traditional employment interventions, combined with promising results in job outcomes and inclusivity within the CFYE context, makes them a compelling focus for deeper analysis.






⁸ Adapted from Jobtech Alliance Taxonomy.

⁹ An arrangement where a service provider is the official employer on paper - handling contracts, payroll, and legal obligations - while the worker does their job for the client company.



Who are the Featured Skills-Building Platform IPs?

Table 3. The five case study IPs featured in this paper.¹⁰

					
IP	DIGITAL MARKETING SKILL INSTITUTE	SPRINTS	SERIANU CYBER SHUJAA PROGRAMME	GOMYCODE	GREEN CIRCLE
CFYE Project Snapshot	Women-focused digital marketing training combining practical learning, mentorship, and job matching via a proprietary platform	Tech academy offering training through a proprietary platform. Innovative use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for navigation and course development	Cybersecurity training delivered through a university-industry partnership. Offers tailored curriculum and flexible formats	Coding school delivered via a digital platform. Includes career counselling, internships, and employer partnerships to support workforce transition	Cybersecurity and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) firm integrating youth upskilling with service delivery
Country	Nigeria	Egypt	Kenya	Tunisia	Jordan

Scope of the Research

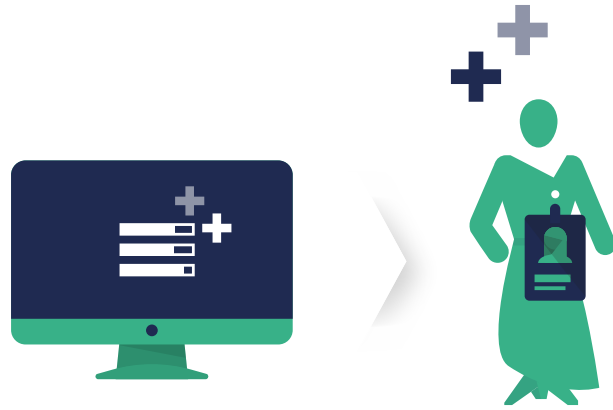
This paper draws lessons from eight¹¹ partner Skills-Building Platforms operating in Kenya, Nigeria, Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia. We take an exploratory, mixed-methods approach, drawing on five in-depth case studies, a rapid stratified youth survey in Nigeria and Kenya, and key-informant interviews with IPs, selected employers, investors and ecosystem actors (see Annex 1 for details on Methodology). The research addresses:

- ▶ How do platforms partner with employers to improve youth employment outcomes?
- ▶ What drives scale and commercial sustainability?
- ▶ How can platforms design for inclusion and improve access for young women and marginalised youth?
- ▶ What constraints persist, and how can funders and platforms address them?

¹⁰ See Annex 3 for a list of IPs in this category, their CFYE grant investment data, and job outcome results.

¹¹ See Annex 3 for a list of IPs in this category, their CFYE grant investment data, and job outcome results.





Section 2

How do Platforms for Skills-Building Contribute to Improved Youth Employment Outcomes?

As illustrated in the diagram¹² below, skills-building platforms contribute to all three of CFYE’s outcome pathways: *Match, Create, and Improve*. Their primary emphasis, however, is on *Match*: connecting youth with existing job opportunities through partnerships with employers.

The key challenge that CFYE addresses through the *Match* pathway is aligning supply-side interventions (skills development) with demand-side needs (employer hiring). Effective matching requires training that is demand-driven, practical, and tailored to local business needs.

Through CFYE’s intervention with IPs that are categorised under Platforms for Skills-Building, the Fund impacts youth jobs under the following three outcome pathways:



Match

(youth hired into existing roles at non-IP businesses):

Youth acquire market-relevant skills and, with job placement and career support from IPs, pursue employment opportunities. Employer partnerships enable businesses to recruit trained youth, bridging the gap between labour supply and demand.

Example: GoMyCode equips youth with coding skills and connects graduates to roles in firms.



Improve

(youth experience improvements in existing waged or self-employed roles):

Youth enhance their employability through upskilling, leading to promotions or salary increases. This can also take the form of extra benefits such as transport, child-care facilities, or medical insurance. Self-employed youth apply new skills to boost productivity or expand their income streams (e.g. via freelancing).

Example: Kenya’s Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme trains staff from partner banking institutes to take on roles in cybersecurity within their workplace.



Create

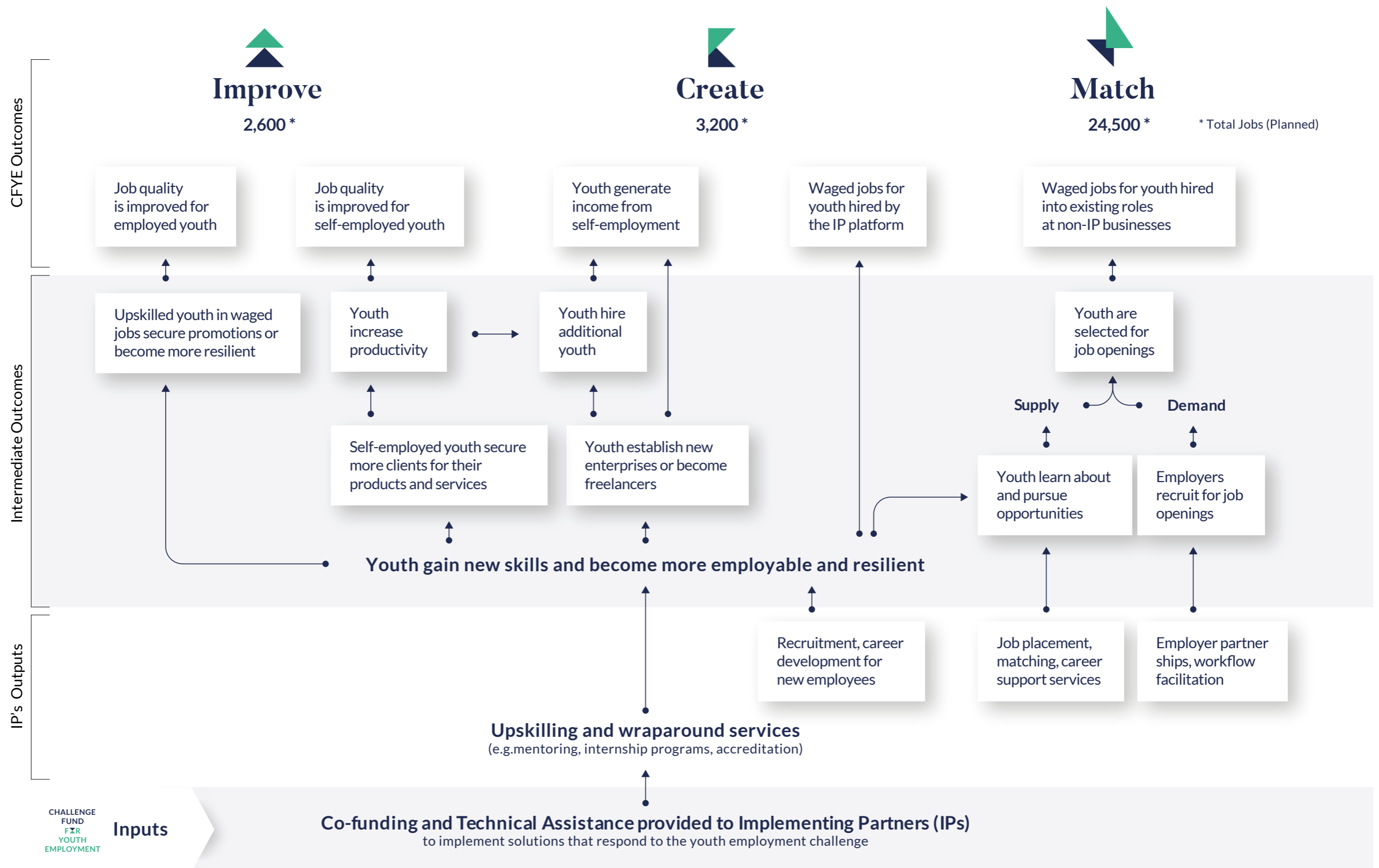
(youth who become self-employed or are hired by the IP):

Youth gain skills to launch new enterprises or work as freelancers. Others are hired directly into roles created by CFYE-supported platforms.

Example: Nigeria’s Digital Marketing Skill Institute (DMSI) trains youth to become freelance online marketers. Their 60-day challenge offers practical guidance on setting up a freelance business.

12 For CFYE’s programme-wide Theory of Change, see Annex 2.

Theory of Change for
CFYE's Partnership with Platforms for Skills-Building





Section 3

Business Models in Focus

This section analyses the common elements of the business models of CFYE's portfolio of Platforms for Skills-Building. We identify converging trends and innovations that are shaping how these businesses evolve and consider the constraints they face. Taken together, these insights highlight how platforms are moving beyond training-only approaches to become more integrated employment enablers.

What is the Business Model for Platforms for Skills-Building?

While each IP has its own sectoral focus and operating model, their business strategies can be mapped to common pillars. The overview below highlights how Platforms for Skills-Building are delivering value, structuring their key activities, engaging customers and employers, and experimenting with revenue models.

Business Model Pillar	What is Working Across IPs?	Challenges to Watch Out For
Value Proposition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Applied learning (end of assignment 'capstone' projects, apprenticeships, internships) ▶ Flexible delivery formats for greater inclusion ▶ Employer co-created curricula 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Slow curriculum revision where gaps exist ▶ Balancing inclusivity with commercial viability
Key Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Curriculum updates to reflect market needs ▶ Delivery via hybrid/digital formats ▶ Outreach through community channels ▶ Post-training alumni networks ▶ Building partnerships with employers for job placement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Uneven digital access among low-income youth ▶ Scaling outreach to rural areas remains commercially difficult
Customers & Beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Urban and peri-urban youth, including graduates and underemployed seeking better jobs ▶ SMEs and larger employers seeking vetted talent ▶ Donor-funded segments e.g. greater inclusion of women, rural, or marginalised youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Employers reluctant to pay for placements ▶ Small businesses show lower willingness to pay vs. larger firms
Revenue & Cost Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Diverse revenue streams (business to business (B2B) services, Income Share Agreements (ISAs) and 'freemium' models) ▶ Blended finance models (e.g. donor funds bridging low-income segments) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Dependence on donor funding for low-income youth ▶ Cash flow delays from ISAs ▶ Limited recurring revenue as most learners enrol only once ▶ Difficulty tracking graduates and verifying job outcomes

Converging Trends & Innovations

A closer look across the CFYE portfolio reveals several converging trends that mark an inflection point where business model innovations intersect, creating new opportunities for impact. These converging trends shape the direction in which the broader skills-building ecosystem is moving, and the opportunities and risks this presents for youth employment.

1 Affordability pressures are accelerating the push towards deferred learner payments, employer-linked payments, and hybrid revenue models

Affordability is a key factor shaping young people's access to skills-building platforms. In response, providers are testing flexible pricing and financing models that ease the burden on learners, cost-share with employers, and embed inclusion into their revenue strategies. This reflects a broader challenge around who is able and willing to pay for training, and how platforms are adapting to reach different user segments.

Affordability constraints are reshaping who pays, when they pay, and how risk is distributed

Platforms report operating in contexts where many young people – especially those from low-income backgrounds – cannot afford to pay high fees. Amongst respondents to the Pathways to Employment Youth Survey¹³ conducted by CFYE, 16% mention financial constraints as a significant challenge for completing the program.

“In the educational field, if you want to drive impact, it is really hard to just rely on a B2C market. By definition, in Egypt, you don't pay for education. People expect the government to support. The only way to make an edtech work from a B2C (Business to Consumer) perspective, is to focus only on the highest socio-economic classes, but this group is small and the impact low.”

– Ayman Bazaraa, CEO Sprints

According to CFYE IPs, mid-career professionals tend to be more willing and able to pay for upskilling services, as they typically face a shorter and clearer path to return on investment, such as promotions or job transitions. In contrast, fresh graduates and entry-level job seekers show significantly lower willingness to pay upfront - even for relatively low-cost training - due to more limited disposable income and a longer, more uncertain path to career progression.

In response, businesses are experimenting with models that shift the immediate financial burden away from learners. These include ISAs, freemium content (where basic services are provided free of charge while more advanced features must be paid for), donor-backed subsidies, and in some cases, business to business (B2B) sales. Rather than relying on upfront learner fees, these approaches aim to align payment more closely with employment outcomes or distribute costs across other actors in the system.

- ▶ In an effort to explore a more optimal pricing model, Egyptian EdTech *Sprints* adapted their pricing for bootcamps from a 'guaranteed employment or money back' model to dividing payments into instalments: 20% down payment followed by another 20% after first month of training. This 40% was non-refundable in compensation for the bootcamp experience. The learner would pay the remaining 60% within 9 months of training completion.
- ▶ To address the challenge of customer acquisition, Nigerian EdTech *DMSI* launched an innovative financing model, *EduPayLater*. This instalment-based system links repayment to job placement, lowering upfront costs for learners and improving access for low-income youth while still generating revenue for the platform. Since its introduction, *DMSI* has seen a significant increase in platform uptake: from 802 learners in Year 1 to 2,362 in Year 2, and 5,277 in Year 3—suggesting

¹³ The PTE Youth Survey draws on primary interviews and questionnaires with young people engaged in CFYE-supported businesses, conducted alongside case study research to capture youth perspectives on job access, quality, and progression. The survey is intended to complement qualitative analysis rather than provide statistically representative findings.

EduPayLater played a role in expanding outreach. Results from the PTE Youth Survey further highlight the importance of offering affordable and flexible payment options. Twenty-seven percent of respondents who used DMSI's platform reported that the affordability was a key reason for choosing the service. A key challenge for DMSI remains verifying employment outcomes, as the model disincentivises participants from reporting when they get a job.

Profitability constraints led to piloting alternative payment mechanisms

Despite improving affordability and access, common challenges weaken commercial sustainability across these models. Most learners enrol only once, creating one-off revenues and a mismatch between customer acquisition costs (CAC) and lifetime value (LTV)¹⁴. Margins remain thin, as CFYE's priority groups - youth, women, and marginalised jobseekers - are highly price-sensitive. In addition, three out of our 8 IPs flagged cash flow delays as a potential risk to the delivery of their project. In response:

- ▶ DMSI experimented with flexible financing mechanisms through Income Share Agreements (ISAs) and instalment-based models. These approaches improve access but delay revenue collection due to high default rates and delayed repayments, highlighting the trade-off between inclusivity and financial sustainability.
- ▶ Tunisian EdTech *ReBootKamp* piloted a system in which students provided pre-signed cheques, leading to very low non-payment rates. However, a local law issued in 2024¹⁵ imposed significant restrictions on cheque payments, effectively ending the practice of staggered repayments with post-dated cheques.

¹⁴ CAC is the cost of marketing and sales to gain a new customer, while LTV is the total revenue expected from that customer over time. For a business to be sustainable, LTV needs to be higher than CAC.

¹⁵ New Law on Cheques in Tunisia, <https://www.zawya.com/en/economy/north-africa/new-law-on-cheques-in-tunisia-uukgsfn1>. Accessed 24-08-2-25.

Hybrid revenue models are emerging to balance sustainability and inclusion

Platforms for Skills-Building in the CFYE portfolio have diverse monetisation strategies, ranging from learner-paid training and employer-pays

arrangements, to income share agreements (ISAs) and employer-sponsored job placements. As payment responsibility becomes more distributed, platforms are increasingly combining multiple revenue streams to sustain operations while continuing to serve low-income and marginalised groups.

Table 4. Revenue Model Approach

Revenue Model Approach	Description	Case Study IPs using this approach	Associated Challenges
Subscription / platform fees	Learners or employers pay recurring fees for access to a job-matching or training platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ DMSI (<i>Accredital platform</i>) ▶ GoMyCode 	Hard to retain paying users after initial placement; requires continuous value add to user
Employer-funded training or project-based corporate contracts	Employers pay for upskilling to meet specific talent needs; may include co-designed curricula; Revenue from customised training projects for corporates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ DMSI ▶ GoMyCode ▶ Sprints ▶ Green Circle ▶ Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme 	Revenue is project-dependent; requires high capacity for business development
Income-sharing agreements (ISAs) / Pay later models	Learners pay once employed, often a proportion of salary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ DMSI (<i>EduPayLater</i>) ▶ Sprints 	Difficult to track graduates; risk of non-payment
Donor-funded outreach / subsidies	Grants used to subsidise participation for marginalised groups (women, rural youth)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ DMSI ▶ GoMyCode ▶ Sprints ▶ Green Circle ▶ Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme 	Donor-dependent
Recruitment / placement fees	Revenue from employers for successfully placing trained graduates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ DMSI ▶ Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme 	Low willingness of small business to pay

Expansion is driven by capital, cross-subsidisation, and entering new markets

Each of the profiled IPs is in the process of adapting their business models to sustain growth. Strategies range from expanding to B2B markets, attracting external investment, cross-subsidising new services, and seeking overseas customers.

- ▶ DMSI launched *Accredital*, a subscription-based platform, which provides companies with full-time digital marketing specialist capacity. This helped the IP to offset costs in its training business. *Accredital* has grown considerably since its launch in 2022, reaching Nigerian businesses as well as international clients.
- ▶ *Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme* gained recognition in the financial services industry and this credibility translated into a 2024 partnership with Microsoft to train 100 unemployed youth with a commitment to connect graduates to job opportunities.

Large employers are increasingly willing to invest in upskilling their workforce where return on investment is clear

Within expansion strategies, employer-linked payments have emerged as a particularly important growth pathway for Platforms for Skills-Building. CFYE IPs *have piloted models where employers cover part or all of the training costs. For example:*

- ▶ The Kenya ICT Authority (ICTA) sponsored their staff's training with *Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme*, enabling graduates to conduct their roles with updated skills in cybersecurity. The IP trained over 700 youth under this partnership, of which over 200 youth secured roles in government institutions.
- ▶ *Sprints* secured a partnership with Vodafone to match up to 100 youth under a single agreement, demonstrating how employer-ready talent pools can lower transaction costs for large firms and increase confidence in platform-mediated recruitment. Building on this success, the IP engaged a Nigerian market expert to design a B2B entry strategy and build new client partnerships. Furthermore, the IP is exploring models to offer instalment payments to employers with *Shariah-compliant*¹⁶ financing options. This is aimed at easing payment against high inflation and the significant currency devaluation.
- ▶ This model is most likely to work where employers face clearly defined skills gaps across large numbers of employees or roles, can see a near-term return from training, and have sufficient scale or budget to absorb the costs.

Inclusion efforts are sustained through Corporate Social Responsibility and sponsorships

- ▶ Reaching marginalised youth is not always commercially viable—particularly for private sector-led training providers. As a result, some initiatives are better positioned as corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts or rely on external sponsorships to remain sustainable.

- ▶ *Sprints* trained 1,000 refugee learners through full sponsorship from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), enabling access to digital skills training that would not have been viable under its standard fee-based model. The demonstrated impact prompted IOM to plan a larger follow-on round, signaling how CSR-backed pilots can derisk inclusion models and unlock repeat funding.

- ▶ *DMSI* focused exclusively on women learners under its partnership with CFYE, delivering heavily subsidised digital marketing courses to address gender gaps in access to tech-enabled employment. While this focus expanded outreach to young women, including those outside major cities, it also underscored the limits of learner-paid models, reinforcing *DMSI's* reliance on grant funding and sponsorships for marginalised groups.

Key Takeaways:

- ▶ Pure learner-paid models are not always viable for early-career and low-income youth.
- ▶ Customer affordability and business revenue constraints are pushing platforms toward blended and deferred-payment approaches that redistribute risk across learners, employers, and donors.
- ▶ Scaling is increasingly driven by cross-subsidisation and strategic partnerships rather than organic growth from training revenues alone. Commercial sustainability is about sequencing and blending revenue streams over time.
- ▶ Limited recurring income and high price sensitivity constrain profitability, reinforcing trade-offs between financial sustainability and inclusive outreach.

¹⁶ Following Islamic economic principles, such as payments without interest



Unlocking Investment in Skills Platforms

The Current Investment Landscape

From a total of just over EUR 1.84 billion in 2020, investment in African tech companies grew to a peak of EUR 5.98 billion in 2022 before sliding back to EUR 2.94 billion in 2024. Investment in Platforms for Skills-Building, at EUR 31.8 million in 2024 (down from EUR 268 million in 2021), remains limited - less than 1% of total investment volume in African tech.

CFYE investees such as *GoMyCode* (EUR 7.4 million Series A), *Sprints* (EUR 3.9 million raised 2022–2024), and *Shortlist* (EUR 1.84 million) demonstrate that deals are possible, but they remain the exception. A small group of entrepreneurship support organisations (ESOs), impact investment funds, and venture capital firms (e.g. *Acumen*, *Flat6Labs*, *JobTech Alliance*) currently shoulder the bulk of early-stage risk.

There is limited investor attention on employment, which is mostly considered to be an impact metric that is measured and is often not further segmented for youth. Some impact investors do consider employment as a key investment decision factor, with due diligence looking at the ability of companies to create employment at a certain scale.

Investment Challenges

Platforms that purposefully serve youth, women, and lower-income learners face thin margins and long repayment periods. Peter Wamburu, Investment Manager at Vested World adds, *“the problem in scalability and investor interest is one of supply-demand mismatch...You work hard to build the supply of talent, but on the other end you do not have the demand to place them all.”*

Even with support, Platforms for Skills-Building face constraints: limited local job creation, dependence on government regulations, and unclear exit pathways. As Mohammed El-Ghannam, Investment Principal at Egyptian-headquartered Flat6Labs puts it: *“Maybe investments are difficult to exit. Who is going to acquire these companies? A traditional HR or IT business can create their own platform for a fraction of the investment needed to acquire.”*

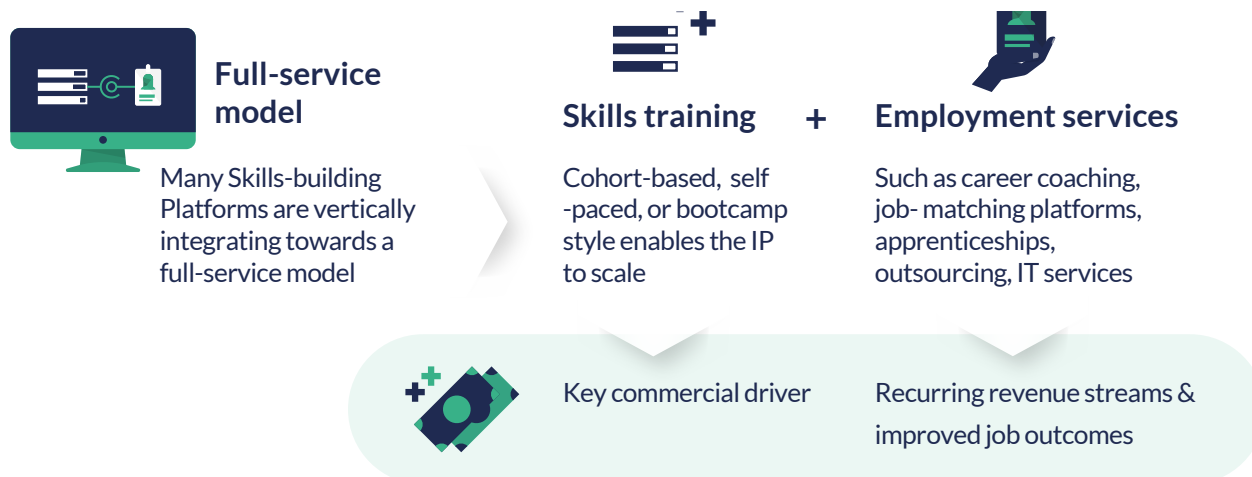
How the Market is Responding

- 1. Product & revenue innovation:**
Income-share agreements, employer co-pay models, and training-to-hire contracts are emerging to align cash flows with learner success.
- 2. Specialisation & scale:**
Investors such as Flat6Labs back first movers with a clear competitive advantage (e.g. *GoMyCode*'s coding focus, *Sprints*' youth-centric marketing).
- 3. Investor coordination:**
JobTech Alliance's 60-member network educates angel investors, venture capitalists (VCs), and philanthropies, building a pipeline of opportunities.
- 4. Blended capital:**
Impact funds such as Senegal-based *WIC Capital* place employment impact at the centre of their investment theses.

2 Platforms are evolving from training providers into enablers of employment

Skills-Building IPs in the CFYE portfolio are evolving beyond training-only models to become **employment enablers**. This shift is marked by the addition of wraparound services such as job placement, outsourcing, and Employer of Record solutions—extending their role from skill development to direct employment facilitation (see diagram, right).

Figure 1. Full-service Model



IPs are shifting toward demand-responsive models that strengthen employment pathways, and unlock new revenue streams

All five case study IPs have extended their offerings beyond training to include career development and employer engagement services. These wraparound services are designed to build long-term value for youth and employers.

- ▶ GoMyCode has established a career services department that supports graduate job placement and provides alumni access to paid apprenticeships and employer networks. In their annual report, GoMyCode notes that their placement rate of graduates increased from 10% to 35% by the end of Year 2, citing CFYE support as a key enabler of this improvement.



Youth survey data reinforces the impact of these adaptations:

- ▶ 62% of respondents secured new or different work post-training
- ▶ 43% rated the training as having a major impact on their career (5 out of 5).

From training providers to ecosystem enablers

Evolution of Platforms for Skills-building

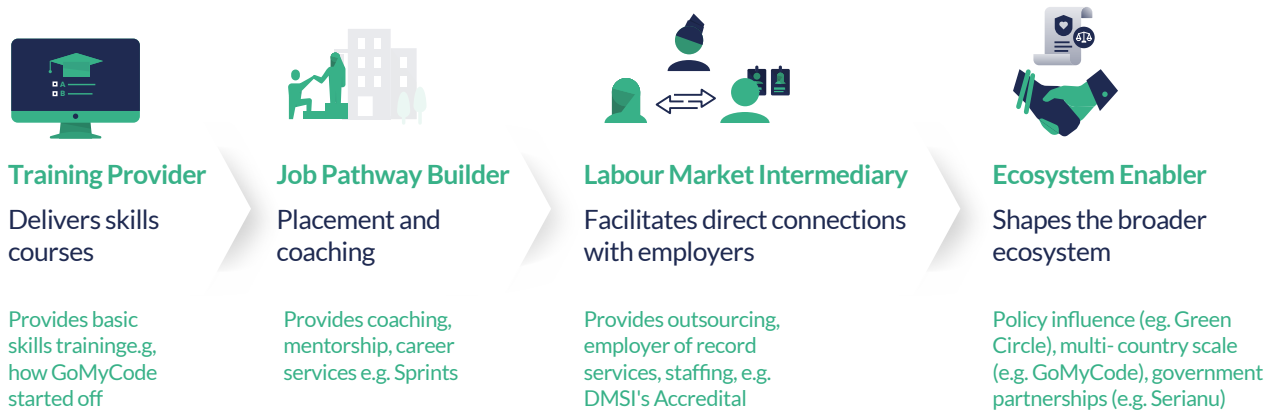


Figure 2. Platforms for Skills-Building are undergoing a strategic evolution. No longer focused solely on upskilling, many are expanding into job placement, outsourcing services, and recruitment. Notably, the trajectory is not necessarily linear nor uniform across platforms, but the broader trend highlights a strategic shift. This shift reflects both a market response to employer needs, and a proactive strategy to strengthen revenue models. This improves CFYE job outcomes and anchors these implementing partners more deeply in the employment ecosystem.

Talent services, when bundled with recruitment solutions, can boost small businesses' willingness to pay

IPs report that small and growing businesses (SGBs) often lack the capacity to recruit and onboard talent independently and may be sceptical of the value added by training services. While they require fewer hires, their sheer numbers make them a key target segment for Platforms for Skills-Building. Case study interviews reveal that when recruitment is bundled into a fully managed Employer of Record solution, SGBs' willingness to pay increases.

- ▶ Sprints' platform Hiremoters, which connects freelancers to clients through an Employer of Record model, has outperformed its training business in revenue generation. By absorbing recruitment, contracting, and compliance costs, the model reduces hiring risk and transaction costs for SGBs, shifting demand away from standalone training towards bundled, outcome-oriented talent solutions that firms are more willing to pay for.

Key Takeaways:

- ▶ Platforms for Skills-Building are evolving from training providers into employment intermediaries, reflecting a shift toward demand-responsive models that prioritise placement over upskilling alone.
- ▶ Bundling training with placement and employment services is improving employment outcomes while unlocking more resilient revenue streams.



Broader Skills-Building Initiatives in the CFYE Portfolio

While this paper focuses on businesses with skills-building as their core business model, a number of CFYE IPs that do not fall squarely into this category have also delivered skills training through the programme. These IPs fall into two separate categories, where skills-building is not the central driver of their operations or commercial sustainability:

1. Business Development Support Providers, or Intermediaries:

Some IPs offered training as part of the CFYE project despite their primary focus being on business development services. In these cases, setting up a full-fledged training function and linking graduates to the labour market within the project timeframe proved overly ambitious. Several of these IPs struggled to deliver sustainable outcomes, with some projects ultimately being terminated. The gap often lay in underestimating the time, partnerships, and operational systems required to run effective, market-relevant training at scale with strong employability outcomes.

2. Placement-focused IPs with Strategic Training Offers, or Platforms for Digitally Delivered Work:

A second group of IPs provides training not for commercial return, but as a value-add to their placement or recruitment services. Here, the intent of the business in providing upskilling is typically to increase the job readiness and long-term impact of youth in the roles secured, such as through soft skills coaching, rather than to monetise training as a central business activity. While these interventions can boost performance and retention, they do not represent a standalone skills-building business model.

3 Digitisation is enabling scale, personalisation, and new delivery models

Digitisation has become central to the business models of CFYE's skills-building platform IPs, driven initially by the COVID-19 pandemic and now reinforced by the rapid rise of AI-based technologies. It enables scale, inclusion, cost-efficiency, and curriculum agility, while supporting personalised learning and sustained learner engagement.

Platforms are updating curricula with greater speed and agility

In fast-evolving fields like digital marketing and cybersecurity, platforms rapidly update content based on employer feedback and market trends. IPs align curricula with employer demand, co-develop training, offer internships, and communicate this value strategically through targeted marketing campaigns and events.

- ▶ *Green Circle* adapted its cybersecurity programmes (e.g. *Cyber Zero to Hero*) in direct response to employer feedback, integrating hands-on assignments, apprenticeships, and updated technical content to address gaps between academic qualifications and practical competence. This agility has enabled the platform to keep pace with evolving regulatory and industry standards in Jordan and Gulf markets.
- ▶ *Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme* has maintained a long-standing collaboration with the Kenya Bankers Association and United States International University (USIU)-Africa, both of which support in developing a needs-based cybersecurity offering for the banking sector.

Digitisation is also widening access, though challenges remain

In our youth survey, 30% of respondents identified digital connectivity challenges, such as unstable internet, as the biggest barrier to completing their courses. This highlights the importance of flexible learning formats. Online and hybrid formats are especially valued by stay-at-home mothers and working youth, who appreciate the ability to learn at their own pace, supported by live Q&A sessions. Reflecting this, 85% of *DMSI users* and 90% of *Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme learners* rated hybrid formats as relevant or very relevant to their needs.

IPs are investing in proprietary platforms to personalise learning journeys

These digital systems allow businesses to tailor content, reduce delivery costs, conduct assessments on user satisfaction and employment outcomes, and remain connected with learners beyond training.

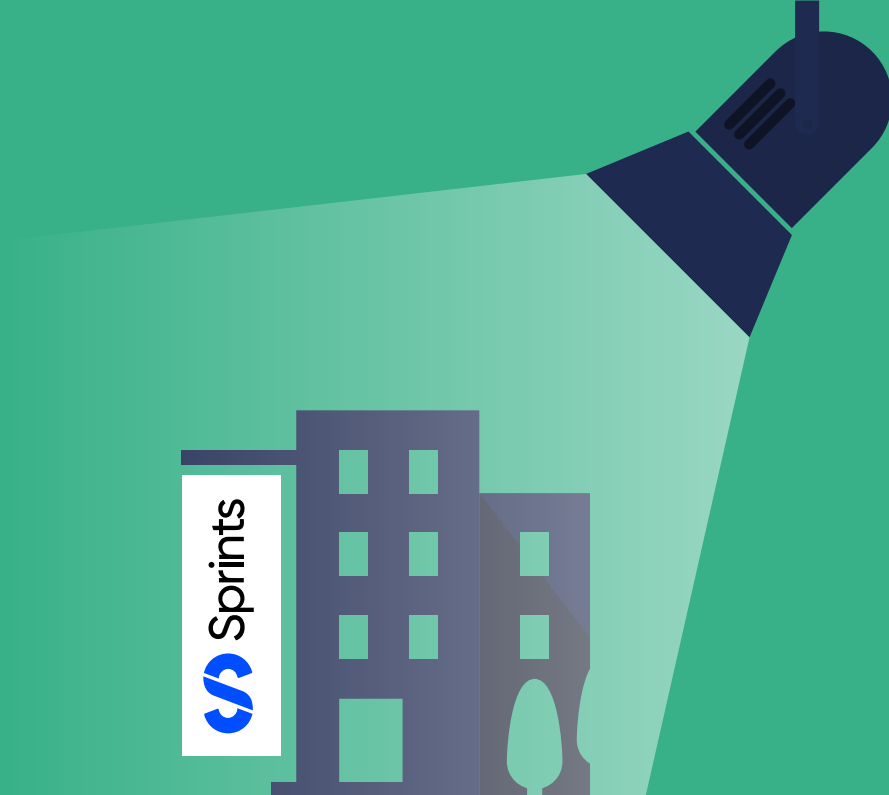
- ▶ *GoMyCode* has invested in modular, dashboard-based learning platforms that allow learners to progress through tailored learning pathways while building project-based portfolios. The platform supports tracking of learner progress, engagement, and posttraining outcomes, enabling *GoMyCode* to follow alumni beyond course completion and strengthen its employer matching and career services offer. This architecture has been critical to expanding into new markets without proportionally increasing delivery costs.

Digitisation is therefore not only a delivery mechanism, but serves as a strategic enabler of scale, inclusion, personalisation, and learner success. By investing in proprietary platforms, IPs are not only expanding into new markets at lower cost, but also deepening their value proposition for youth and employers alike.

Key Takeaways:

- ▶ Digitisation is no longer just a delivery tool but a core strategic enabler of scale and agility in Platforms for Skills-Building.
- ▶ Digital and hybrid formats are widening access and inclusion, but connectivity constraints remain a barrier for some learners.
- ▶ Investment in proprietary platforms is enabling IPs to develop more personalised learning journeys and stronger post-training outcomes.





Innovation Spotlight

SPRINTS

Sprints built their own Learning Management System (LMS) infrastructure to introduce custom functionalities and to make its offering more scalable.

The new LMS features leverage Artificial Intelligence (AI) considerably.

For example, AI tutors and coaches are trained on following and scoring the progress of the learner on the platform. Over a dozen AI agents are currently actively used on the Sprints platform. Sprints is also using AI to iterate content and do quality control.

The next step which Sprints is working on, in collaboration with the University of Maryland (US), is to have AI develop content for entire courses.

Eventually the company also sees opportunities for AI applications that can help develop individual, tailored learning journeys for learners based on the assessments conducted during learner intake.

4 Applied learning and soft skills are becoming central to job readiness

Employability depends on more than technical training. Platforms that emphasise practical application, soft skills, and ongoing employer engagement are better able to prepare youth for sustainable employment.

Applied learning bridges the 'Experience Gap' and improves employability

A cross-cutting insight from the case studies is that youth often struggle to find work not only due to lack of work experience, but also because their training has not equipped them to apply theoretical knowledge in practice. To address this, IPs have introduced applied learning, such as end-of-training projects and internships, enabling learners to showcase practical competencies and build a portfolio of work to help demonstrate competencies.

- ▶ *Sprints'* learners often struggle with critical thinking, teamwork, and translating theory into practice. To counter this, *Sprints* embeds group-based assignments, continuous assessments, and business simulation environments in which learners work on real-life cases. These simulations mirror workplace dynamics, requiring participants to collaborate and solve problems. This approach not only strengthens soft skills and workplace readiness, but also allows youth to signal practical competencies.
- ▶ *GoMyCode* requires learners to complete tech projects that form the basis of a professional portfolio. This helps graduates signal competence to employers in digital sectors where practical skills often outweigh formal qualifications. Projects are closely aligned with market demand and are complemented by mentorship and career services, enabling learners to articulate their skills more effectively in the job market.

"Young people are not interested in learning soft skills only. Soft skills will need to be packaged in more technical training, for instance embedded in demo presentation towards fictive clients."

— Ayman Bazaraa, CEO *Sprints*

Soft skills and career support are important drivers of job readiness

Employers consistently cite that technical skills alone are insufficient. Youth lacking soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, and time management, are often left unprepared for professional work environments.

IPs therefore embed soft skills and career coaching into their services, not viewing them as 'add-on' services, but rather as strategic components of the job pathway.

- ▶ *GoMyCode* complements its project-based technical training with structured career coaching and mentorship, recognising that employability depends not only on skills acquisition but also on how learners position themselves in the labour market. The introduction of career services, including CV preparation, interview coaching, and guidance on navigating job searches, helped learners translate technical competencies into compelling narratives that resonate with employers.

"Cyber Shujaa offered me the relevant skills to excel in cybersecurity. Not just technical but also soft skills... The interview skills that I gained have helped me ace interviews in the job market and i can honestly say Cyber Shujaa is the sole reason why I got my first internship. I'm more confident now in interviews and when negotiating for my remunerations. Additionally, from Cyber Shujaa, I have grown my network through interaction with the instructors and my fellow peers."

— Young male learner
at Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme

Post-training support and employer partnerships strengthen outcome tracking and employment transitions

Across the case studies, IPs are taking deliberate steps to support learners beyond the training period, recognising that the transition to employment often requires continued guidance, accountability, and community. For example:

- ▶ Rather than exiting learners at course completion, *Sprints* continues to engage graduates through employer matchmaking Employer of Record arrangements. This integrated approach enables closer tracking of employment outcomes and reduces friction in the transition from training to work, particularly for employers seeking job-ready talent with both technical and soft skills validated through Sprints' assessment processes.

A key challenge is tracking graduates after their training ends, due to outdated contact information or attrition. This is a significant bottleneck to assessing longer term job sustainability, and is exacerbated when the training provider is independent of the employer. Without direct relationships, data sharing is limited. In contrast, platforms that work in consortium with employers and those with strong alumni engagement strategies have better visibility into post-placement trajectories.

Key Takeaways:

- ▶ Job readiness increasingly depends on applied learning that enables youth to demonstrate practical competence, not just technical knowledge. Project-based training, simulations, and internships help signal workplace-relevant skills to employers.
- ▶ Platforms that embed communication, teamwork, and career coaching within technical training are better able to prepare youth for real workplace demands and employer expectations.
- ▶ Post-training support and sustained employer engagement are strengthening transitions into employment and improving outcome tracking.

Innovation Spotlight

DMSI

DMSI launched a gamified approach to increase employability outcome:
DMSI's 60 Day Job Challenge

Through the platform, graduated learners are encouraged to complete daily tasks, such as writing social media posts, approaching employers, applying for jobs or updating their resumes.

Students earn points for each task completed. Points earned during the challenge lead to deductions on the course fee, an effective incentive to increase commitment to the 60-day challenge and to eventual payment of course fees.

Thirty-seven percent of women taking up the challenge landed a job during the challenge, or shortly after completing it.



5 Targeted design and delivery models are expanding inclusion for young women and marginalised groups, but gaps remain

“For some jobs we prefer women, especially in security operations...as they have more analytical skills”.

– **Mohammad El-Khoudary**
Founder & CEO, Green Circle

Alongside the barriers to digital access discussed above, CFYE’s youth survey also highlighted mobility constraints, domestic responsibilities, and university commitments as key obstacles to participation, especially for women. While challenges remain, several CFYE IPs have adapted their models in innovative ways to expand access for women and marginalised groups.

IPs have deployed targeted outreach strategies to engage women learners

IPs have reached women service users through targeted social media advertising, partnerships with women-focused job sites and groups, and even by word of mouth. IPs recognise that driving women’s presence in digital services means increasing women representation. For example:

- ▶ *Green Circle* has focused on engaging employers to challenge gender biases in hiring for security and operations roles. Some employers have observed that women often perform strongly in analytical and detail-oriented operations tasks. By surfacing these employer experiences and reframing women as a competitive advantage rather than a diversity obligation, *Green Circle* has worked to expand demand for women trainees, demonstrating that inclusion is not only about attracting women learners, but also about reshaping employer perceptions.

Meeting women’s realities and preferences in project design yields stronger job outcomes

IPs tend to adjust to many challenges that disproportionately affect women, including family responsibilities, safety concerns, restrictive social norms, and a lack of female role models in the tech sector. IPs’ responses range from offering childcare benefits to providing women-focused networking opportunities, and women-only training cohorts.

IPs also provide programming tailored for women’s specific needs. For example, trainings on “tech-for-non-techies” and trainings through which women can learn skills in digital marketing, software testing, AI, or tech-related administrative processes.

- ▶ *DMSI* designed its programme for women re-entering the workforce, including pregnant women and stay-at-home mothers. Its hybrid and remote learning model, combined with training aligned to remote digital marketing roles, enabled women to balance care responsibilities with skills acquisition and employment. This flexibility allowed women living outside major cities to access paid work without relocating, expanding the pool of women able to participate.

“[The training] was targeted for stay-at-home mums because of how flexible the learning process is”

– **Young female learner**
DMSI

- ▶ *GoMyCode* offered scholarships, flexible payment plans, and tailored financial services for women in rural areas, alongside hybrid delivery formats that accommodated caregiving responsibilities. These design choices contributed to cohorts with female participation rates of up to 55%.

Key Takeaways:

- ▶ Platforms that align delivery formats with women’s care responsibilities, mobility constraints, and preferences are better able to meet employment outcomes.
- ▶ IPs that actively engage employers to challenge gender biases and demonstrate the business case for inclusion are expanding demand for women trainees and improving placement outcomes.
- ▶ While scholarships, flexible delivery, and women-focused outreach have expanded access for some marginalised groups, digital access constraints and geographic limitations remain significant barriers.



Perspectives on Skills Development & Job Outcomes

The following captures high-level findings of a survey conducted for the Pathways to Employment research with service users of two case-study IPs, *DMSI* and *Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme* (n=100; 50 per IP):

Who are the youth being reached?

- ▶ 65% of survey respondents hold bachelor's degrees, suggesting that many platforms are attracting relatively educated youth
- ▶ Urban-dominant reach (99%), indicating gaps in reach to rural youth. Barriers cited include lack of access to devices, absence of in-person mentoring, and geographic constraints on job matching.

Access for Marginalised youth

While most of the sample was urban and educated, the surveys did identify some outreach to:

- ▶ Mothers and women with family responsibilities who responded positively to targeted marketing
- ▶ Low-income youth who accessed services via scholarships or free platforms (e.g. *Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme*)

Career Impact

- ▶ 51% of surveyed youth were employed after training
- ▶ Average career impact score of training program: 4.2/5, with improvements cited in job access, skill development, and self-confidence
- ▶ Notably, youth with prior vocational training who engaged with skilling platforms reported high placement rates (94.4%), indicating the effectiveness of such platforms for technically trained youth. However, this group comprised only 22% of a sample spanning high school, bachelor's, and master's educational backgrounds."

What do Youth Value?

Most youth joined due to:

- ▶ Career relevance and practical skills (e.g. digital marketing, cybersecurity)
- ▶ Affordable or free access (often via scholarships)
- ▶ Flexible, online formats, with 82% rating the format 4 or 5 out of 5
- ▶ Supportive learning environments with feedback and community support

Key Gaps Identified by Youth

Youth recommended improvements in:

- ▶ Job placement support
- ▶ Internships and real-world experience for clarity on career paths.
- ▶ 1:1 career guidance and mentorship (especially around job offers and CVs): *"When I got a job offer I wasn't sure of the salary expectations, I was expecting a sort of guidance in relation to my employer but I was alone in the journey."*

6 Partnerships have been critical for market access, relevance, and employment outcomes

"DMSI keeps in touch with us from time to time to evaluate the process. This helps to keep us and the candidate on our toes. It makes the whole process more critical."

— **Nnamdi Udemezue**
Miraton Matador Group (Partner Employer)

Partnerships are central to how CFYE IPs create impact. They range from Memorandums of Understanding with employers, to partnerships with industry associations and educational institutions, typically aimed at expanding market reach, enhancing credibility, and improving job outcomes.

Ecosystem partnerships strengthen outreach, curriculum relevance, and policy influence

IPs often rely on support from ecosystem players to de-risk pivots into new markets, for last-mile outreach, to bridge the gap between academia and industry, and to connect on broader ecosystem trends, for example:

- ▶ **Market visibility** is improved through employer collaborations that boost brand recognition and drive youth outreach. For example, *Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme's* graduates enhance visibility of its cybersecurity services, while *DMSI's* partnership with e-commerce firm Mainstack sponsors young women to enrol in trainings.
- ▶ **Collaborations with job sites and community organisations** have been critical for new learner acquisition. For example, *GoMyCode's* partnerships with Jobberman, Wuzzuf, and a network of NGOs and ambassadors aim to help overcome cultural barriers to women's participation. For *Sprints*, the National Council of Women was instrumental in attracting over 1500 female learners from the more remote and poor governates in Egypt.
- ▶ **Universities and trade associations** play an important role in curriculum co-creation. *Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme's* collaboration with USIU-

Africa, for instance, enabled accreditation of its cybersecurity programme and strengthened its relevance to industry needs.

- ▶ **Partnership with government bodies** has provided an avenue for policy influence. IPs such as *Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme*, *Green Circle*, and *DMSI* have contributed to shaping digital and employment-related policies through these relationships. In the experience of *Sprints*, collaboration with public institutions was at times constrained by rigid education systems that favour traditional education over more flexible, applied learning approaches. Over time, *Sprints* was able to convince government actors on the importance and effectiveness of blended, problem-based learning.

Key Takeaways:

- ▶ Collaborations with employers, job platforms, universities, and community organisations help IPs access learners, co-create relevant curricula, and improve placement outcomes.
- ▶ Engagement with industry bodies, academic institutions, and government bodies allows IPs to de-risk market entry and contribute to broader employment policy agendas.

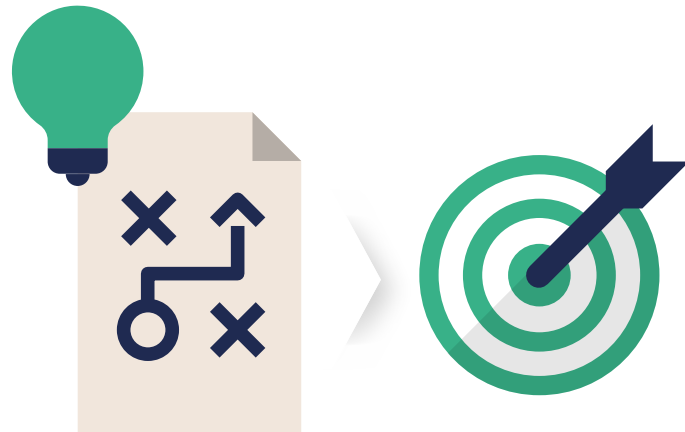


Innovation Spotlight

SERIANU

Serianu has embedded a 'market-driven' focus across three phases of the training programme





Section 4

Lessons Learned and Looking Ahead

This section distils lessons from CFYE engagement with Platforms for Skills-Building, highlighting what worked, where gaps remain, and offering practical recommendations for future partnerships aimed at inclusive employment.

1 Platforms for Skills-Building can support youth employment outcomes, but not all are ready

Successful IPs in this business model category tended to have clear business models with viable unit economics, strong operating systems and unique market advantages, such as a niche sector focus (e.g. *Green Circle's* cybersecurity focus in Jordan and the Gulf) or a differentiated pedagogy (e.g. *Sprints'* AI-based delivery model). They also demonstrated agility, such as *Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme* responding to cybersecurity crises or *DMSI* and *GoMyCode* adapting quickly to market trends.

IPs without these foundations sometimes struggled to meet targets. In some cases, the core commercial model of for-profit IPs didn't naturally support inclusive employment outcomes. CFYE's requirements (e.g. deeper employer engagement, outreach to marginalised groups) were not always feasible within existing business models. These tensions often surfaced during inception, when developing milestone frameworks revealed gaps between profit-driven operations and CFYE's employment goals.

Implications:

- 1. Donors/Implementors:**
Screen rigorously for business viability and employer networks. Prioritise organisations with scalable training models and niche strengths. Avoid steering non-training organisations into skills-building.
- 2. Platforms for Skills-Building:**
Assess readiness honestly before expanding into new training lines. Significant investment in systems, digital tools, and employer engagement is required - curriculum design alone is not enough.

2 Employment outcomes largely depend on employer demand

The case studies highlight the importance of responding to employer demand, for example through co-designed curricula, applied projects, and defined hiring pathways. Some of the featured IPs have also demonstrated agile responses to changing demand, for example *GoMyCode* and *Green Circle* updating content weekly. In contrast, IPs with weaker employer engagement sometimes struggle to connect trained youth to jobs, revealing the risks of supply-driven training. Sustained, structured employer partnerships are therefore not optional extras but sit at the centre of effective Skills-Building Platforms.

Implications:

- 1. Donors/Implementors:**
Require employer participation in design and implementation, and fund TA that improves curriculum alignment, placement systems, and responsiveness to market shifts. Build flexibility into projects to help platforms pivot quickly to high-demand areas.
- 2. Investors:**
Look beyond enrolment numbers. Strong employer partnerships signal demand for services, lower recruitment costs, and higher placement credibility, all of which improve commercial viability. Seek evidence of these partnerships during due diligence.
- 3. Platforms for Skills-Building:**
Formalise employer involvement through key performance indicators (KPIs), such as on co-designed curricula, pre-course assessments, internships, or direct hiring. Treat employer partnerships as a strategic asset that builds trust and opens new revenue streams.

3 Grants and Technical Assistance (TA) can be effective tools in this business model category when tailored to IPs' real-world needs

Grants and TA played complementary roles in supporting IPs. Grants created the financial space to test new models, expand reach, and absorb early risks, while TA addressed operational and strategic gaps that platforms could not yet resolve internally. Generic or standardised TA proved less effective, underscoring the need for support that is tailored to specific challenges and rooted in IPs' real-world needs. The topics and formats that proved most valuable included:

1. Gender-focused TA

that directly strengthened IPs' capacity to reach female targets and was delivered by a provider with private sector credibility. In one example, following this support *Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme* implemented women-targeted recruitment, training 883 women and placing 548 through women-only cohorts, tailored courses, and soft skills training.

2. Peer-to-peer learning.

IPs from Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, and Egypt joined a cross-country TA event on scaling, gaining practical solutions from peers facing similar challenges.

3. Follow-up one-to-one coaching

ensured lessons were applied in practice. In Tunisia, CFYE's impact measurement TA with *GoMyCode* combined group sessions and coaching, helping the platform track outcomes and engage donors.

4. Learning events and workshops

were most appreciated when rooted in daily operations, offering practical, real-world examples directly relevant to IPs' work.

Implications:

1. Donors/Implementors:

Design TA to match real-world demand. Prioritise support on gender, M&E (see below), and employer engagement when supporting Platforms for Skills-Building, delivered through blended formats (group workshops, peer learning, one-to-one coaching). Fund follow-up engagement to help ensure lessons are applied in practice.

2. Platforms for Skills-Building:

Treat TA as strategic, not a donor obligation. Dedicate leadership time to embedding lessons into systems and strategy, boosting credibility with employers, investors, and funders. Take a proactive approach to engaging with programmes to shape TA content and formats to the needs of the business.

Where was the Challenge Fund Model Most Additional?

CFYE's grant financing and TA accelerated the maturity and ambition of business models, in some cases enabling companies to evolve from training providers into more integrated, employment-focused service providers - changes that may not have happened, or not as quickly, without CFYE support.

Financial Additionality of CFYE Grant Funding for the IP

CFYE's grants allowed IPs to test new business lines, establish new functions, expand into underserved markets, strengthen staff capacity, subsidise learner costs, and upgrade digital platforms.

- ▶ GoMyCode used CFYE funding to establish its first career services department, offering individualised coaching, employer networking, and soft-skills workshops. This pivot has been a turning point in improving placement outcomes.
- ▶ CFYE's support enabled *Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme* to deepen its partnerships with Cisco, EC-Council, and Microsoft. On the back of its Year 3 success, Microsoft asked the IP to double its student intake, leading to the launch of the Microsoft Africa Development Centre (ADC) Cybersecurity Skilling programme.

TA Additionality for Improving Business and Operations of the IP

CFYE's TA was leveraged by IPs to design and align programmes with market and policy needs, strengthen impact measurement and donor engagement, and improve systems for monitoring job quality and results.

- ▶ *Green Circle* developed new diploma tracks aligned with employer needs and national qualification frameworks as a direct result of TA support.
- ▶ *Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme* used TA support to set up a robust system to define metrics and measure job quality and job improvement, which in turn convinced other funders and sponsors to support Cyber Shujaa.

Impact Additionality in Outreach and Inclusion of Youth

CFYE's support enabled IPs to integrate outreach, inclusion, and job decency goals into their operations, focusing on women, marginalised youth, Tier 2 cities, and meaningful youth participation.

- ▶ CFYE funding enabled *Sprints* to test pricing models that lowered financial barriers for underserved youth. Absorbing the upfront risk of offering ISAs at scale would have been challenging without CFYE's grant funding.
- ▶ *DMSI* combined grant funding with targeted TA to increase women's participation through stipends, women-led cohorts, and gender-sensitive delivery design, directly increasing women's participation rates and job outcomes.

In each of these cases, CFYE's support enabled strategic pivots, de-risked innovation, and helped platforms consider (inclusive) employment outcomes as core business objectives rather than peripheral social goals.

4 Achieving profitability while delivering inclusive outcomes at scale remains a central challenge for Platforms for Skills-Building

Reconciling commercial viability with inclusion remains challenging. Platforms targeting higher wage roles and young people with higher levels of formal education tend to find it easier to reach commercial sustainability, but risk excluding lower-income or marginalised groups. CFYE IPs have experimented with a range of approaches to increase access, including ISAs, stipends, and women-only cohorts, as seen with *DMSI* and *GoMyCode*. These models can improve access, but sustaining them without ongoing subsidy is difficult given thinner margins and longer payback periods. CFYE grants helped de-risk early pilots, but commercialisation is likely to require at least some cross-subsidisation, revenue diversification, or patient investment.

Implications:

- 1. Donors/Implementors:**
Treat funding like investment capital, not subsidy. Model the costs and revenues of tools for inclusion to test their ability to sustain and scale. Provide early support to test these tools but require clear pathways to sustainability. Avoid imposing unrealistic participation targets that clash with market realities.
- 2. Investors:**
Accept that more inclusive models may take longer to reach profitability. Look for models that can demonstrate demand, test and replicate tools and tactics for inclusion, and diversify revenues to cross-subsidise.
- 3. Platforms for Skills-Building:**
Combine tools like ISAs, scholarships, or women-only cohorts with revenue generators such as outsourcing. Position inclusion as a driver of new markets and brand value, not only as a social good.

5 Measuring success requires going beyond placement numbers

Employment outcomes remain difficult to track. Platforms often lose contact with graduates, limiting data on job quality and sustainability. Those investing in alumni engagement and employer partnerships fared better: *DMSI*'s '60-day job challenge' both tracked and boosted women's employability, while *Serianu Cyber Shujaa Programme* monitored graduate performance with employers. *GoMyCode*, supported by TA, developed improved M&E systems to report to donors and attract new capital. Standardised gender targets (the requirement for 50% or more women participants) were not always realistic or applicable across all sectors and business cases, underlining the need for more flexible, context-driven metrics.

Implications:

- 1. Donors/Implementors:**
Fund outcome tracking and alumni engagement as core project deliverables. Support platforms to measure job quality, retention, and gender outcomes flexibly, avoiding rigid quotas that don't fit local contexts.
- 2. Platforms for Skills-Building:**
Build graduate engagement into business models through alumni groups, challenges, or systems for capturing employer feedback. Use M&E not just for reporting but for continuous improvement and market positioning.
- 3. Investors:**
Require outcome visibility during due diligence but set realistic expectations. Prioritise data on retention and job quality where available, recognising that overly burdensome requirements can drain investee resources.



Looking Ahead

As this paper has shown, Platforms for Skills-Building have demonstrated potential to close the skills-to-employment gap when they are aligned with market demand, anchored in employer partnerships, and designed to balance inclusion with commercial sustainability. Yet sustaining these outcomes at scale, particularly for women and marginalised youth, will require more than short-term projects. It calls for longer-term, joined-up support that combines:



1. Catalytic grants and TA.

Grants provide space to innovate and absorb early risks, while TA strengthens core business functions such as employer engagement, M&E, and gender strategies. Their impact is greatest when catalytic, time-bound, and explicitly aimed at testing models and attracting follow-on capital.



2. Patient capital.

Platforms need early, risk-tolerant capital to pilot and scale innovations such as new pricing models or job-matching services, and to expand into new markets. Such investment has so far been limited by perceptions of risk, unproven returns, and the absence of employment outcomes in most investors' performance metrics.



3. Ecosystem services.

Beyond training delivery, platforms often need support in areas such as customer acquisition, revenue diversification, and employer partnerships. Providing 'wraparound' services in these areas can help viable models reach scale and sustain inclusion.



4. Policy and regulatory alignment.

Startups face common regulatory hurdles, but skills-building platforms also face sector-specific issues, including rules on financing instruments (e.g. ISAs) and access to training subsidies. Addressing these barriers can make inclusive models more feasible.

In a fast-evolving labour market, the challenge is not simply to equip young people with skills, but to enable systems where these skills translate into durable pathways to employment. This paper offers a starting point for that effort.





Annexes

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Annex A

Methodology

Research design

A mixed-methods research design was used to provide a more complete understanding of the featured business models.

- ▶ Quantitative analysis measured the scale of impact – for example, how many jobs had been created, matched, or improved as a result of supporting these business models and IPs.
- ▶ Qualitative analysis explored the reasons behind these changes, particularly which factors might have contributed to success (e.g. financial performance and social impact), sustainability, and challenges.

Data sources

Secondary data

(CFYE portfolio data and other secondary sources)

- ▶ Provided quantitative information on results and trends at an aggregate (business model) level and at the level of the individual IPs and projects.
- ▶ Provided qualitative insights (e.g. on labour market barriers for young people, success factors and challenges experienced by IPs, the effects of CFYE's support, etc.).

Primary research

- ▶ IP case studies provided insights into business models, the role of CFYE's support, challenges, and success factors. The cases combined quantitative data (e.g. financial and usage information) with qualitative insights, and the report included both within-case and cross-case analysis. Case study IPs had been selected for their innovative approaches to project design, scalability, targeted support to young women, early signs of commercial viability, and willingness to share data and learning with the CFYE team for the purposes of this study.
- ▶ Rapid youth survey: a random, stratified, non-representative survey of young people in Nigeria and Kenya with experience using DMSI's and Serianu's services respectively (n=50 per IP).
- ▶ Key informant interviews (KIIs): semi-structured discussions with IP representatives, employers, and investors/ecosystem support organisations generated insights on the inner workings of featured business models, the impact on employers of using these services, and the investment ecosystem and dynamics relating to these business models and IPs.

This learning initiative was led by an internal, multi-disciplinary learning team working on CFYE. The insights drew on diverse implementation experiences (geographically and across functions) to support joint learning across the Fund.

Annex B

CFYE Skills-Building Businesses Portfolio

Country	Project	Short Description of Project	CFYE Contract Value	Achieved Jobs**		
				Created	Improved	Matched
Egypt	iCareer	Virtual career centre, connecting youth to employers through demand-driven digital career services.	€ 767,758	42	-	6,386
	Sprints LLC*	Partners with private sector employers to embed youth-centred practices and inclusive talent pipelines.	€ 600,378	325	577	974
Kenya	Serianu (Cyber Shujaa programme) _x *	The programme trains youth on industry-aligned cybersecurity skills and directly links them to internships, jobs, and entrepreneurship opportunities through a strong employer consortium	€ 300,250	41	977	1,020
Jordan	Green Circle _x *	The programme trains youth on cybersecurity skills and matches them to jobs through paid apprenticeships, internships, and flexible employment pathways.	€ 625,380	634	85	380
Nigeria	Digital Marketing Skill Institute (DMSI) _x *	DMSI supports youth by providing practical, employer-oriented digital marketing training and job-matching support, with a focus on underserved groups.	€ 897,750	1,492	-	2,898
	Stutern Limited	The programme has digital skills training and job placement services that enable youth to transition into demand-driven tech roles across software, data, and digital design sectors.	€ 500,000	368	142	733
Tunisia	ReBootKamp	Immersive coding bootcamp, preparing youth for employment as software engineers through intensive training, employer engagement, and improved inclusion of women in tech.	€ 784,665	7	224	918
	GoMyCode _? *	The programme offers market-aligned digital training, scholarships, and direct internship pathways that connect young graduates.	€ 402,960	68	-	564

* Case study IP

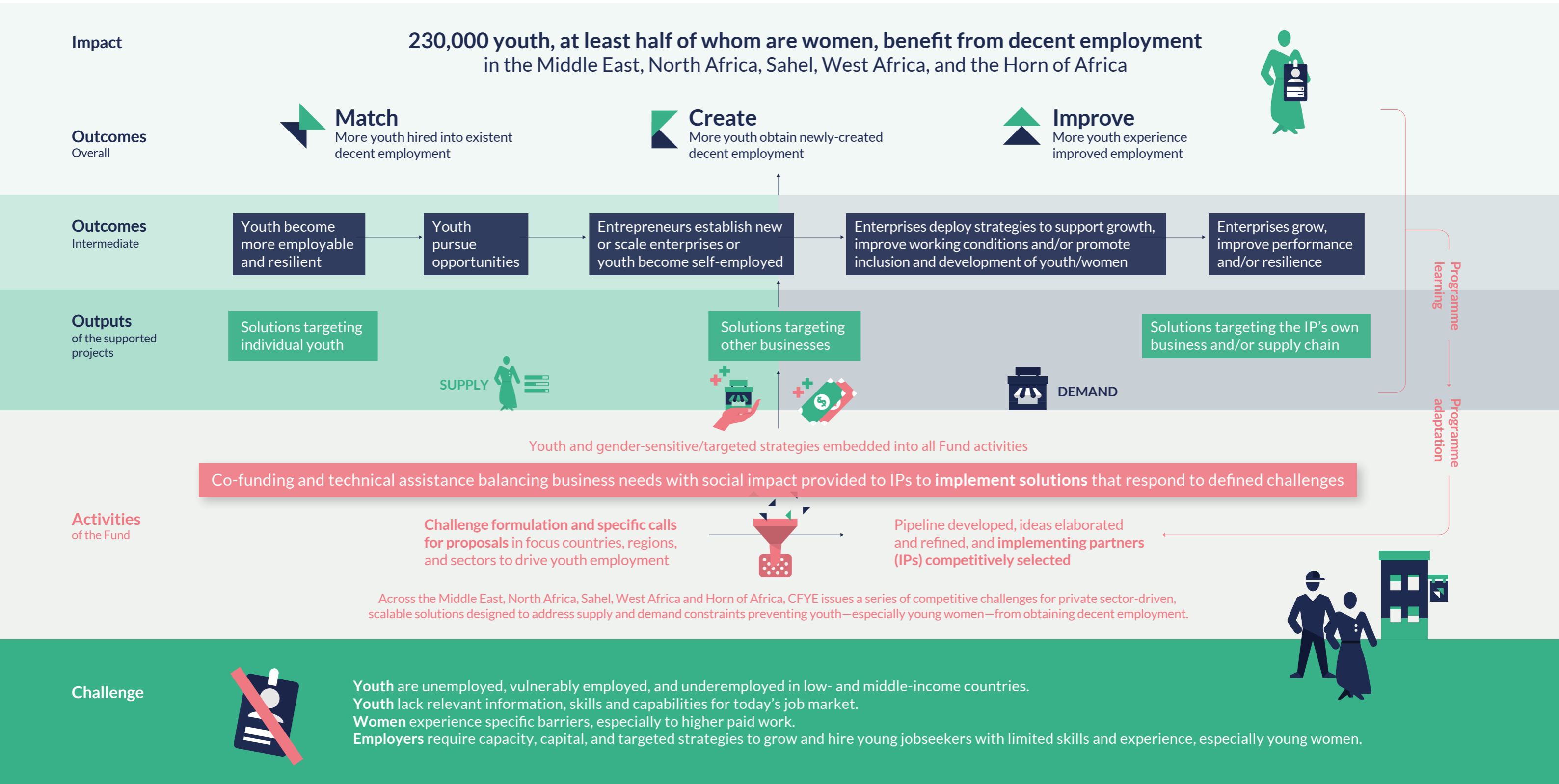
** Project timelines varied across the portfolio, with some projects completed and others ongoing at the time of publication (x). Reported job figures for ongoing projects are provisional and expected to increase at final reporting.

Annex C

The CFYE Fund Level Theory of Change

CFYE's Theory of Change (ToC) reflects a shared understanding of the project's intended impact and the pathways through which that impact will be delivered. The logic underpinning the ToC draws on available evidence about what works in youth employment and job creation programmes across the focus countries.

Moreover, the Fund ToC provides the basis for assessing the Fund's results and informs learning activities. Rather than a static hypothesis, the ToC is expected to evolve as the Fund generates new insights through implementation.





Case Studies

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Case study 1

DMSI

Case Study Author: **Niek van Dijk**
Editors: **Nimrah Karim and Justin van Rhyn**

This case study is part of the Challenge Fund for Youth Employment's Pathways to Employment (PTE) Learning Series Paper 1: Platforms for Skills-Building. The PTE series explores how different business models support youth employment outcomes, by creating new jobs, improving job quality, or strengthening pathways into work, based on evidence from CFYE-supported initiatives across Africa and the Middle East.



Key takeaways

Diversifying the revenue model increases commercial viability: Platforms for Skills-Building struggle to rely on one-off course fees, as most learners are not repeat customers. DMSI addressed this by launching *Accredital* in 2022, a subscription-based service providing companies with digital marketing capacity. This has created a recurring revenue stream, and the business has expanded to international clients.

Challenging learners to continue the job hunt: Not all learners secure jobs immediately after training. DMSI's 60-day job challenge keeps graduates engaged through structured tasks and links participation to course fee incentives. This has improved outcomes, with 37% of participants securing employment during or shortly after the challenge.

The development of own IT infrastructure: DMSI's investment in its own IT infrastructure enables it to integrate training, job matching, and payments in one system. This has improved learner engagement, enabled services like the job challenge, and increased course fee recovery in a context where willingness to pay is low.

1 Introduction

DMSI is a professional training institute headquartered in Lagos, Nigeria, that offers hybrid courses to learners of all levels, with a specific focus on the digital marketing landscape.

"Many companies came to us with the question: how can you help our business move online, migrate business activities and attract clients to our online business? This has really increased the demand for our services"

— **Tobi Asehinde**
DMSI Founder

The shift to online commerce during the COVID-19 pandemic exposed a gap in the digital marketing capabilities of Nigerian SMEs, which account for 84%

of employment in Nigeria.¹⁷ Many of these firms were challenged by the acceleration of online shopping due to the pandemic, while many young people with traditional marketing and sales skills lost their jobs due to this digital shift. While the demand for digital marketing services increased, the shortage of well-trained digital marketing professionals widened.

After founding a digital marketing agency in 2012, Tobi Asehinde identified sustained demand for skilled talent, prompting a strategic pivot toward training and the establishment of the Digital Marketing Skill Institute (DMSI). The institute initially targeted business owners before expanding to individual learners

¹⁷ Uyi Akpata, *Moving from Caterpillar to Butterfly: Growth Strategies for SMEs in Nigeria* (presentation, PricewaterhouseCoopers, December 2018).

As DMSI's reputation grew, large Nigerian firms began engaging the institute to train graduates with the explicit intent of absorbing jobready youth. This

demand enabled DMSI to diversify beyond training, expanding into job placement services and the outsourcing of digital marketing work.

Key Details

Year founded:	2017
Location	Lagos, Nigeria
Employment outcomes	Total 4390 jobs (2898 matched, 1492 created)
Annual revenue	€ 574,487 (2021)
Staff	24

2 The business model

DMSI centres its business on training of digital marketing, with its flagship six-month course as the main product. Most graduates become digital marketers, but the skills taught also help them succeed in a wider range of roles, including non-digital ones.

Training Packages: The core course is delivered online, accredited by the American Council of Training & Development, and offered in two tiers:

- ▶ Professional: costing €387 for international learners, and ₦300,000 (€186) for Nigerian learners.
- ▶ Master: costing €590 for international learners, and ₦480,000 (€298) for Nigerian learners. The Master course also includes 1:1 coaching and a capstone project, and is comprised of nine core modules and ten optional ones.

Through the Digital Marketing Women Employability & Entrepreneurship Programme (DMWEEP) in partnership with CFYE, DMSI provides two subsidised courses for young women:

- ▶ Social media management & advertising (for job seekers)
- ▶ WordPress & Search Engine Optimisation (for aspiring entrepreneurs) These cost ₦100,000 (€62), with scholarships available; selected learners pay a ₦20,000 (€12) commitment fee.

Beyond training, DMSI has expanded into job placement and outsourcing, serving a broad mix of clients, especially SMEs. One standout sector is education, where private schools frequently hire DMSI to train their staff in digital marketing.

- ▶ **Value Proposition:** DMSI aims to deliver practical digital marketing training aligned with real labour market demand. Its six-month hybrid courses combine structured modules, hands-on projects, capstone assignments, and daily tutor access to ensure applied skill acquisition rather than theoretical learning. Beyond training, DMSI looks to differentiate itself through active job placement support, employer engagement, and post-placement follow-up to ensure performance and retention.
- ▶ **Key Activities:** DMSI's core activities include curriculum delivery, learner engagement and retention management, job placement and employer matchmaking, and outsourcing of digital marketing professionals through *Accredital*. The company also operates its own learning and job-matching platform, hosts the 60-day job challenge, and manages integrated payment systems through *EduPayLater*. Developing partnerships with employers, platforms, and government institutions has supported both recruitment and placement outcomes.
- ▶ **Revenue Streams:** Revenue is primarily generated through course fees, with subsidised

models under partnerships such as CFYE. Additional income is derived from recruitment and placement fees, alumni network contributions, sponsorships, and corporate training contracts. Since 2022, *Accredital* has introduced recurring subscription-based revenue of approximately €693 per month per client, contributing around 15 percent of total revenue and positioned for long-term growth.

- ▶ **Customer Segments:** On the supply side, DMSI targets young women and broader youth cohorts seeking digital marketing skills, including non-university graduates, stay-at-home women, and individuals outside major urban centres. On the demand side, the company serves Nigerian SMEs, educational institutions, corporate clients, and increasingly international businesses seeking digital marketing capacity. Through *Accredital*, DMSI also serves foreign companies requiring managed digital marketing talent.
- ▶ **Key Resources:** These include DMSI's proprietary learning and job-matching platform, its curriculum accredited by the American Council of Training & Development, employer partnerships, and its growing alumni network. Human capital—trainers, placement officers, and technical staff—underpins delivery and employer engagement. The development of infrastructure such as *EduPayLater* and *Accredital* has strengthened operational control and scalability.
- ▶ **Channels:** DMSI reaches learners through digital marketing campaigns, email marketing, partnerships with job platforms such as Jobberman, collaborations with women-focused organisations, and annual conferences. Employers are engaged through Ministry of Labour career fairs, corporate partnerships, direct SME outreach, and weekly masterclasses for business owners.
- ▶ **Cost Structure:** Costs include curriculum delivery, trainer compensation, platform development and maintenance, marketing and acquisition expenses, partnership management, and placement support services. Investments in proprietary IT infrastructure, including *Accredital* and *EduPayLater*, represent significant upfront costs but enable recurring revenue and improved payment compliance.

Evolution of Business Model

DMSI began primarily as a digital marketing training provider responding to the surge in online commerce during the COVID-19 pandemic. While training demand was strong, reliance on one-off course fees and placement fees limited commercial scalability, particularly among SMEs with low willingness to pay for recruitment services.

In response, DMSI experimented with multiple placement revenue models, including salary-percentage fees and fixed placement charges. After encountering operational complexity and low market acceptance, the company launched *Accredital* in 2022 as a separate outsourcing and subscription-based service. Through this model, companies pay a monthly fee for managed digital marketing capacity, generating predictable recurring revenue

Simultaneously, DMSI strengthened its digital infrastructure, developing its own job-matching system, integrating the 60-day job challenge, and introducing *EduPayLater* to improve course fee recovery. These shifts marked a transition from a training provider to a technology-enabled workforce and outsourcing platform.

Support from CFYE and Impact of Technical Assistance

Reflecting on the relevance of CFYE's support, DMSI confirms that the financial support helped to provide the trainings to young women at discounted rates, and de-risked some of the business model pivots DMSI made over the years, such as the introduction of *Accredital*.

DMSI received TA on topics such as Gender Inclusion, Meaningful Youth Participation, Sales & Marketing, and Investment Readiness.

"Where the grant helps to fund the project, "fuel" it and helps to take on the associated risks, the TA helps to make it successful and makes the funding come out with a return."

— **Tobi Asehinde**
DMSI Founder

3 Results

For the CFYE programme, DMSI focused on job outcomes for young women. Throughout its collaboration with CFYE, DMSI has trained 6,461 young women on digital marketing, of which 3,030 (approximately 45%) have subsequently found employment. While DMSI overachieved on outputs (against a target of 5,000 trainees), it underachieved on matched jobs (target of 4,500). The initial expectation of 90% conversion from trained to employed proved overambitious.

Of the 3,030 jobs eventually matched, around 640 were facilitated through *Accredital*, with the remaining 2,400 through DMSI's placement services and partnerships such as *SkilledUp*.

DMSI observed that young women were sometimes reluctant to actively pursue job opportunities due to low confidence or lack of external support. In response, it introduced additional employability support, including coaching, peer groups, and the

60-day job challenge, in which graduated learners are encouraged to complete daily tasks, such as writing social media posts, approaching employers, applying for jobs, or updating their resumes. This improved outcomes, with 37% of participants securing employment during or shortly after completion.

A significant share of results were realised later in the project, with 2,466 jobs created in the third and final year. This acceleration was driven by attracting more global clients, productising digital marketing services through *Accredital* (e.g. large-scale placements under single contracts), strengthening partnerships, and introducing the 60-day job challenge.

Currently, the course fees for this group of young women are subsidised by the CFYE project. To keep this approach financially viable beyond CFYE's lifetime, DMSI is aiming to lower the cost of acquisition and improve the course fee payment system.

4 Success Factors and Challenges

To attract female learners, DMSI implemented targeted outreach strategies, including industry-led career sessions, virtual job fairs, influencer marketing, platform partnerships (e.g. *Mainstack* and *BellaAfricana*), and collaborations with the Ministry of Labour and the OA Foundation. It also hosts an annual conference attended by over 500 women from the digital sector.

DMSI primarily relies on email marketing and online advertising for learner acquisition. Through testing different approaches, it has refined its conversion strategy and now achieves a return of approximately €2 in revenue for every €1 spent on acquisition—significantly improved from initial performance due to strategic partnerships. For example, a €400,000 (€225) discounted campaign with *Jobberman* generated 4,000 applicants, converting into 200–300 enrolments and €4–6 million (€2,400–€3,700) in revenue.

Moreover, sharing success stories and case studies—such as via DMSI's YouTube channel—has strengthened trust among learners and employers alike. Employers are able to trial graduates through short internships before hiring, while DMSI's weekly online masterclasses in digital marketing have supported the growth of its SME client base.

One of the aspects DMSI struggled mostly with is charging the learners under the CFYE project. Initially, it had set up an Income Share Agreement (ISA) arrangement, where learners would (re)pay for the course after completion and when a job was secured. The course fee would then be repaid through DMSI taking percentages of monthly income generated from jobs secured. However, learners expressed reluctance to participate due to concerns about future income repayments, and 66% of the 2,016 women who agreed with the ISA eventually failed to pay.

"We had the challenge of the young women being reluctant to complete their profile on the job-matching platform after completing the program, which is in a way to avoid our job-matching process and thus they won't be paying us back since we didn't get them their desired job."

— **Tobi Asehinde**
Founder of DMSI

DMSI was supported by CFYE with TA on pricing strategies and based on this, decided to stop the ISA arrangement. The tested an upfront, regular payment model, but eventually moved to a system where a small commitment fee of ₦20,000 (€12) is charged at the beginning and the remaining subsidised fee is paid when learners land a job. DMSI also included an application process for the courses, to filter out uncommitted learners.

DMSI confirms that the learnings during the CFYE project have been instrumental in receiving a grant from African Development Bank (AfDB) and further developing the platform's functionality. The IP also used their learnings on the development of the payment structure to inspire other Implementing Partners in the CFYE Nigeria portfolio during peer-to-peer exchanges.

5 Future outlook

In terms of business growth, DMSI sees several promising perspectives, one being geographical expansion. As the IP is currently able to attract learners from ten African countries, including Kenya, Ghana and South Africa, DMSI proves to be on a trajectory to attract foreign learners through organic growth.

A second perspective for growth is the expansion of DMSI's infrastructure, through *Accredital* and *EduPayLater*. DMSI wants to further invest in *Accredital*'s functionalities, ramp up its brand awareness, and attract more foreign clients. The founder believes that integrating AI and machine learning will further enhance the platform's efficiency and effectiveness. Moreover, DMSI's participation at the 2024 Web Summit in Lisbon, co-organised by CFYE, helped in gaining more exposure to European clients.

The growth of *Accredital* can also help in driving the existing project beyond CFYE funding; revenues generated from *Accredital* are recurring and already outweigh the revenue generated from the CFYE co-sponsored courses and can offer a form of cross-subsidisation.



Case study 2

Go My Code

Case Study Author: **Sarah Ebady**

Editors: **Nimrah Karim and Justin van Rhyn**

This case study is part of the Challenge Fund for Youth Employment's Pathways to Employment (PTE) Learning Series Paper 1: Platforms for Skills-Building. The PTE series explores how different business models support youth employment outcomes, by creating new jobs, improving job quality, or strengthening pathways into work, based on evidence from CFYE-supported initiatives across Africa and the Middle East.



Key Takeaways

Integrating career services strengthens employment outcomes:

GoMyCode's shift from a purely training-focused model to one that embeds structured career counselling, employer engagement, and job matching has improved graduate transitions into employment. This pivot demonstrates that technical skills alone are insufficient; structured employability support is critical to converting training into decent work outcomes.

Inclusion requires deliberate financial and community strategies:

Through targeted scholarships, flexible payment models, and community-based outreach, GoMyCode has expanded access for women and marginalised youth. Dedicated partnerships with donors and ICT companies enabled cohorts with female participation rates as high as 55%, showing that inclusion is not automatic but the result of intentional design.

Project-based learning enhances labour market alignment:

GoMyCode's emphasis on hands-on, portfolio-driven training ensures that graduates leave with demonstrable, employer-relevant experience. By aligning curricula closely with market demand and embedding real-world projects, the programme strengthens both employability and employer confidence in graduates.

1 Introduction

Founded in 2017 by brothers Yahya and Amine Bouhlel, GoMyCode (GmC) was created to bridge the critical gap between traditional education and employment readiness in Tunisia. Despite high numbers of university graduates, many young people remain underemployed or unemployed.

GmC intended to transform this by offering accessible, practical, and market-relevant digital education. Since its launch in Tunisia, the company has expanded operations to Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, and Côte d'Ivoire, with the aim to equip youth with skills for the digital economy, empowering them to secure stable employment in sectors with high demand for skilled labour.

The model integrates project-based learning, mentorship, and employer partnerships. Courses are delivered online, in-person, or through hybrid formats which helps to broaden access for learners in both urban and rural communities. They provide training on market-aligned technology skills including web development (fullstack javascript), digital marketing, data science, machine learning, and AI- among others. GmC typically places young job seekers in a role within three months of graduation.

Throughout Tunisia and the region, female participation in tech education is generally lagging behind that of men. Despite this, GmC has achieved over 35% female participation in its training programmes since 2017. They have been able to lead on more than six scholarship programmes with

donors such as USAID, Drosos Foundation, Expertise France, and the US Embassy, in partnership with ICT companies including Talan, Open Bee, Codix, Synapsys, Sofrecom, Oyez, Kyalis, Linedata, Global

View. Through these programmes, GmC has trained around 1,000 young graduates, 55% of which were women, and have recorded an average job placement rate of 62%.

Key Details

Year founded	2017
Location	Headquartered in Tunis, Tunisia. Training centre locations in: Morocco, Egypt, Nigeria, Algeria, Kenya, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Saudi Arabia.
Employment Outcomes	Total jobs 656 (588 matched, 68 created)
Annual Revenue	€436,000 (2021)
Staff	~274

2 The Business Model

GmC’s business model is built on a tuition-based approach focused on delivering blended, market-aligned digital training that combines online and in-person learning. A core component of this model is its cohort-based system, enabling rotation of students through intensive training cycles. This maximises the use of physical spaces and instructors, with 50% self-paced online learning complemented by 50% live, instructor-led sessions. This approach has allowed the organisation to expand from a single location in Tunisia to 17 training centres, referred to by GmC as hacker spaces, across eight countries. To date, GmC has trained over 12,000 students.

The business model is strengthened by a diversified communication and marketing strategy, combining digital channels (TikTok, LinkedIn, Facebook) with local outreach and field marketing to reach both urban populations and underserved communities, including regions with limited connectivity.

- ▶ **Value Proposition:** Affordable, flexible digital training that equips learners with immediately applicable skills through hands-on projects tailored to employer demands.
- ▶ **Key Activities:** Curriculum design, training delivery, platform management, learner support, job placement, employer engagement, community events, and job fairs. CFYE’s support enabled the establishment of a career services department.

- ▶ **Revenue streams:** Primarily tuition-based, with course fees ranging from €200 to €1,000. Flexible payment plans, discounts, and scholarships reduce barriers for low-income learners. GmC is also growing its business to business (B2B) revenue through tailored corporate training packages.
- ▶ **Customer Segments:** The customers GmC reaches are unemployed or underemployed youth, professionals reskilling or changing careers, corporate clients seeking digital upskilling for staff, children aged 8–18 through coding camps.
- ▶ **Key Resources:** Learning platform, network of instructors, outreach teams, and employer partnerships. A key strength is GmC’s agility: new modules on AI, DevOps, and cybersecurity are developed sometimes in under a week, based on direct employer feedback.
- ▶ **Channels:** GmC combines in-person training centres, online platforms, and hybrid learning. Recruitment is driven by digital marketing on TikTok, LinkedIn, and local platforms, as well as offline campaigns and community outreach.
- ▶ **Cost structure:** Core costs include staff salaries, technology development, rent and utilities for physical learning spaces, and outreach efforts. Main cost drivers are human resources, as their educational model relies on the quality

of instructors, product and content team. To help lower costs, part of the development and the management of the platform development project is run in-house by the GmC product team.

Evolution of Business Model

While GmC's early model focused on technical training alone, it became clear that many graduates lacked the professional networks, job-readiness skills, or support systems needed to transition into meaningful employment. Recognising this gap, GmC made a strategic pivot to integrate comprehensive wrap-around career services into its business model. The company recognised that technical skills alone do not guarantee employability, particularly for first-time jobseekers. This led to the integration of soft skills training, job readiness support, and mentorship into the core offering.

"Our model is really different from other models because we focus on practical...It's an active learning methods, project based learning with real support from our sectors and strong links to the job market... We are offering a platform, but you will have structure, and you will learn by making."

— Zeineb Baazaoui
General Manager, GmC

Support from CFYE and Impact of Technical Assistance

GmC received €202,960 in co-funding from CFYE. Funding and TA was used towards launching a formal career services department providing individualised career counselling, job readiness workshops, direct employer engagement through events, field visits, and networking sessions; and mentorship programmes to build professional confidence.

TA on Impact Measurement and Management (IMM) strengthened GmC's ability to monitor, evaluate, and communicate the outcomes of its interventions.

3 Results

The outcomes of the CFYE partnership are becoming increasingly visible. More than 1,000 young people have gained skills in high-demand areas such as software development and data analytics. Many young people have successfully transitioned into new careers, while others have found employment through GmC's growing network of employer partners. A new job-matching platform, launched in early 2025, already connects more than 600 graduates with recruiters. Activities introduced through CFYE, such as job fairs and employer matchmaking, have become permanent features of GmC's service offering.

From a financial perspective, GmC remains largely self-sustaining through tuition fees, though CFYE's support was instrumental in building key structures and testing inclusive models. The organisation has also attracted additional investment, most notably from the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation, and continues to apply for new funding to scale specific initiatives.

4 Success Factors and Challenges

GmC has faced challenges in attracting and retaining women learners, due to socio-cultural expectations and limited awareness of opportunities in the tech sector. Even though there is significant enrolment (over 35% of all students trained since 2017 have

been women, rising to 55% in some scholarship cohorts), many encounter barriers in converting new skills into employment, often lacking networks or confidence in male-dominated industries.

In response, GmC adopted different approaches to gender inclusion:

- ▶ Targeted scholarships and women-focused programmes, such as USAID's Upskill/Reskill, removed financial barriers and created safe, supportive learning environments.
- ▶ Flexible payment and scheduling options enabled greater participation by accommodating women's time constraints and financial circumstances.
- ▶ Community-based outreach with local ambassadors and partnerships with NGOs and schools helped build trust with families and communities, directly addressing cultural resistance to women pursuing careers in tech.
- ▶ Gender-sensitive training content and female mentors provided relatable role models and increased engagement among women learners.

GmC has also faced challenges around issues such as the digital divide and connectivity gaps. Reaching learners in rural areas like Tataouine, Siliana, or Beja remains difficult due to weak digital infrastructure. Their blended model requires reliable internet access, which is often inconsistent or unaffordable outside major cities. Furthermore, many students, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds, struggle with professional communication, confidence, and navigating corporate cultures, issues

5 Future Outlook

The company plans to further personalise its career coaching services and expand its matching platform into a full-fledged recruitment marketplace connecting graduates with local and international employers. The platform will start with high-demand junior and mid-level tech roles but is expected to expand into additional career tracks over time.

Training content will increasingly integrate entrepreneurial and freelancing modules to support self-employment pathways, especially important in Tunisia's constrained formal job market. New digital versions of training programmes are also planned to extend reach to youth who cannot attend physical spaces.

that technical training alone cannot solve. This soft skills gap is a key area that GmC's career services is working to support with.

Partnerships have also been a key strategy for GmC. Through company sponsorships, GmC offered six-month internships to 300 high-potential students from vulnerable backgrounds, selected through a highly competitive process. Successful candidates received scholarships covering their training costs and participated in tailored training programmes aligned with the specific skills needs of GmC's consortium partners.

Organisationally, collaboration with employers has helped GmC institutionalise expertise in professional inclusion. Involving staff across departments (Impact, Operations, Product and Content, Marketing) ensures that the skills and knowledge gained through this project become embedded in GmC's long-term strategy. Additionally, partnerships with ICT companies, SMEs, and multi-nationals ensure that training content is demand-driven, and that students gain access to real-world opportunities such as internships, trial employment, or freelance gigs. As Zeineb noted:

"It's demand driven training...sometimes we don't have the training that an employer is asking for, and we can make it in just one week. We can customise the training as we are working with different content creators."

Ultimately, GmC aims to replicate and adapt its integrated model of market-aligned training, career coaching, and job matching across its training centres in other African countries, scaling its impact and helping bridge the digital skills and employment gap continent-wide.



Case study 3

Green Circle

Case study author: Sarah Ebady

Editors: Nimrah Karim, Justin van Rhyn

This case study is part of the Challenge Fund for Youth Employment's Pathways to Employment (PTE) Learning Series Paper 1: Platforms for Skills-Building. The PTE series explores how different business models support youth employment outcomes, by creating new jobs, improving job quality, or strengthening pathways into work, based on evidence from CFYE supported initiatives across Africa and the Middle East.



Key Takeaways

Employer co-design strengthens labour market alignment: Green Circle's integration of structured apprenticeships through the Cyber Bridge model demonstrates the importance of embedding practical workplace exposure within technical training. By co-designing programmes with industry actors, particularly in highly regulated sectors such as banking, the initiative ensures graduates develop immediately deployable skills aligned with market demand.

Diversified service lines support commercial resilience: Combining managed cybersecurity services, training programmes, and tailored compliance solutions allows Green Circle to balance impact objectives with commercial viability. This dual structure enables cross-subsidisation between corporate services and youth training while strengthening long-term sustainability.

Inclusion in male-dominated sectors requires structured interventions: In a context where cybersecurity remains heavily male-dominated, Green Circle's targeted initiatives such as *SheHacks* and structured mentorship programmes highlight that gender inclusion requires intentional design. Dedicated female cohorts, mentorship, and flexible delivery models proved critical in increasing women's participation and job conversion rates.

1 Introduction

Green Circle, established in 2017 in Amman, operates within a rapidly evolving cybersecurity landscape. The company offers a range of services, including managed security operations, compliance consulting, and training programmes, serving clients across banking, government, and SMEs.

This positioning responds to a broader market challenge. In Jordan, the ICT sector at large, and the cybersecurity sector more specifically, faces a dual challenge: a growing demand for skilled professionals and a limited supply of adequately trained individuals. The Jordan Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship (MoDEE) identifies an acute skills shortage in the sector and notes its limited role in reducing unemployment among tertiary-educated youth, with only 42% of fresh graduates absorbed (MoDEE, 2022).

The country's digital transformation, accelerated by regulatory mandates such as those from the Central Bank of Jordan, has heightened the need for robust cybersecurity measures. Jordan's digital transformation is also being spearheaded by the national digitisation strategy under the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, called REACH2025. According to REACH2025, there is a significant push in digital transformation across the country to reach the digital economy. However, there is undeniably a growing talent gap due to the absence of developing a robust pipeline of local Cyber Security talent in addition to increasing vacancies in Cyber Security market. The existing educational and training infrastructure often falls short in equipping youth with the practical skills required by employers.

To address the skills gap, Green Circle, in consortium with Jordan Design and Development Bureau (JDDB), and Philadelphia University, developed initiatives like the *Cyber Zero to Hero* platform (CZ2HP) and the *Cyber Bridge* programme. These programmes aim to provide hands-on training and bridge the gap between academic knowledge and industry requirements. Collaborations with local universities have led to the creation of cybersecurity diplomas, which support to combine practical training into formal education.

More specifically, CZ2HP works to empower youth and women to be professionals specialised in the cybersecurity field. The value of such a programme is to provide and improve needed skills and capabilities for existing employees, new graduates, and creating new demand for new specialisations which were not available in the market. The programme allows youth participants to gain better experience and understanding of local workplace culture, cybersecurity concepts, local and regional regulations, and industry best practices.

Key Details

Year founded:	2017
Location:	Headquartered in Amman, Jordan, with offices in Saudi Arabia and London
Employment Outcomes:	Total jobs 1,099 (380matched, 634created, 85 improved)
Annual revenue:	€1.8M
Staff:	~65

2 The Business Model

Green Circle’s business model combines revenue from managed cybersecurity services (45%), training programmes (35%), and tailored cybersecurity solutions (20%).

The programme’s revenue stream is based on selling a set of capacity-building initiatives, training courses, online diplomas, soft skills, and professional certificates, boot camps, on-job training, and a Capture the Flag hackathon. Green Circle extended its revenue stream to include revenues from outsourcing staff, portal use, and subscription fees.

CZ2HP, which targets youth aged 18–35, particularly university students, recent ICT graduates, and unemployed jobseekers is central to its business model. The programme combines online learning, practical assignments, and industry placements to support job-readiness. The CZ2HP beneficiaries are consortium members, youth, women, and businesses, while its targeted group includes IT/cyber university students, job seekers, new IT graduates, specialised Human Resources in cybersecurity, public/private universities, private companies, public entities, and NGOs. Another key element in Green Circle’s business model is *the Cyber Bridge* model, which offers structured job placements and apprenticeships

with employer partners. This model was introduced in response to employer feedback, who reported a gap between academic qualifications and practical competence.

The company has also invested in digital infrastructure to scale its operations. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Green Circle adapted to remote and hybrid learning formats, enabling self-paced learning, automated tracking, and broader geographic access—especially to rural and underserved areas. This adaptation not only supported accessibility but also reduced costs per learner.

- ▶ **Value Proposition:** High-quality, localised cybersecurity services; training that matches market needs; bridging academia and employment.
- ▶ **Key Activities:** Cybersecurity education, product Research & Development (R&D), service delivery, compliance advisory
- ▶ **Revenue streams:** Managed cybersecurity services, training programmes, and tailored cybersecurity solutions.

- ▶ **Customer Segments:** Green Circle’s customers include both private sector companies (demanding compliance and security services) and youth. Customers/service users also include local enterprises, government, telecoms, financial institutions, youth aged 18–35, including university students, ICT graduates, and women, especially harder to reach women/youth.
- ▶ **Key Resources:** Training platform, university labs, R&D hubs in Amman, Riyadh, London, Dubai.
- ▶ **Channels:** CZ2HP, university partnerships, consortium networks.
- ▶ **Cost Structure:** Staff and instructional delivery for programmes, platform development and maintenance, employer engagement and placement coordination, curriculum development and fees.

Evolution of Business Model

Over time, Green Circle recognised that theoretical training alone was insufficient to ensure job-readiness. Participants needed practical experience and direct exposure to workplace demands. In response, the company introduced the *Cyber Bridge* programme, an applied apprenticeship initiative that embeds learners directly within industry environments. Under this model, participants are trained under the supervision of experienced cybersecurity professionals and complete real tasks that mirror day-to-day operations.

This was a strategic response to persistent feedback from employers who noticed a gap between academic knowledge and practical skills. Green Circle had to adapt by integrating placements directly into course modules. The outcome resulted in improved job-matching rates for participants and increased confidence from employer partners that the skills taught aligned with their operational needs.

Like many educational and technical organisations globally, Green Circle was forced to pivot and adapt during the COVID-19 pandemic. They responded by scaling up CZ2HP for hybrid delivery. Previously focused on in-person workshops and fully online lectures, the enhanced platform now supports remote onboarding, self-paced learning, and detailed progress tracking.

This digital shift was not only a temporary adaptation. Green Circle has continued to leverage CZ2HP to broaden its geographic reach, targeting underserved youth populations outside Amman, including rural communities and neighbouring Gulf markets. According to Green Circle, CZ2HP prepares youth, particularly women, for demand-driven cybersecurity jobs and achieves long term career growth. The programme is a central pillar of the organisation’s ambition to train over 5,000 youth annually.

Integrating structured placements helps reduce the gap between academic learning and practical workplace experience, addressing a commonly identified labour-market challenge related to workplace readiness.

Green Circle intends to achieve this through the following:

- ▶ Responsiveness to market needs: Adapting curricula and delivery based on employer feedback strengthens both outcomes and credibility.
- ▶ Integrated service pathways: Linking training to direct employment outcomes strengthens the case for additionality and long-term sustainability.
- ▶ Readiness for policy and market shifts: Being agile and platform-enabled allows the organisation to seize emerging opportunities across the region.

“We got [the] students while they are in university and we started doing the practical training, building knowledge, getting them to the actual projects even before they graduate.”

— **Mohammed Alkhudary**
Founder and CEO

Support from CFYE and Impact of Technical Assistance

Green Circle received a €625,000 grant and extensive TA. As part of the CFYE project, Green Circle was able to scale their operational capacity. More specifically, the grant funding allowed them to grow their digital portfolio and grow the teams they have working on their programmes. Through TA support, Green Circle participated in Human-centered Design (HCD) sprints and coaching, business clinics on Market Expansion, and Scaling and

Investment Readiness assignments. Through these TA assignments, Green Circle were able to build their capacity in a number of domains, but particularly with a focus on attracting and retaining young job seekers, which they have now integrated into their business strategies.

With financial and technical support from CFYE, Green Circle intends to amplify the CZ2HP by developing a comprehensive evaluation system to

measure the programme's effectiveness, utilising technology to enhance its delivery and reach, establishing a network of partners to provide additional resources and support, creating a system for tracking and monitoring programme outcomes, developing a plan for sustainability and long-term success, investing in professional development for programme staff, and strengthening the programme's marketing and outreach efforts.

3 Results

Green Circle's approach has yielded strong early results, both in terms of youth employment and company growth:

- ▶ Certification and Training: 2,828 youth completed certified cyber training programmes. After being enrolled in Cyber security training and achieving a passing score, most of the candidates will obtain a job (full time/part time) within GC or one of the consortium companies.
- ▶ Job Matching: 380 youth were matched into placements in 2023, with a goal of 300 matches by 2025.

- ▶ Job Quality Improvement: 85 jobs were improved in terms of security and salary conditions.

Gender Inclusion: Female participation ranged from 30% to 54% depending on the course, reflecting success in inclusive design. Over 1,000 women have been trained via SheHacks and Z2H tracks since 2022, with 45% job conversion.

Financially, Green Circle reported €1.8 million in revenue in 2024, up from €405,000 in 2021. It aims to reach €5.2 million by 2028. The actual cost per job in 2023 was €1,090.10, with a planned reduction to €625.38 by 2025.

4 Success Factors and Challenges

The success factors are largely linked to the branding and flagship CZ2HP, which has become synonymous with cybersecurity upskilling in Jordan, being the first of its kind. This branding helps attract youth, particularly women, seeking credible pathways into the sector. The impact is amplified by the company's diversified consortium model, comprising government bodies, private firms, academic institutions, and NGOs. This coalition facilitates a well-rounded curriculum, with a hands-on, practical approach, and clear job pathways.

The regulatory environment in Jordan also been helpful for Green Circle. New cybersecurity mandates from bodies such as the Central Bank of Jordan have sparked major business demand. This aligns with a broader global trend, as cyberterrorism and advanced cyber threats escalate, companies seek specialists who go beyond general IT knowledge. Moreover, regional labour markets exhibit a distinct shortage of such deep-specialist skills despite

widespread general IT capacities. Green Circle's positioning as a provider of niche, high-end cyber skills enable it to leverage this opportunity, delivering certified training and job placements that resonate with both learners and employers.

Continuous employer engagement is another core success factor. Green Circle works closely with industry partners to update course content, ensuring practical relevance. Post-course support, such as mentorship, coaching, and networking, further enhances graduate employability and helps to ensure training completion and labour market integration.

However, Green Circle has also faced significant challenges. First, reaching young women in conservative contexts remains difficult due to cultural barriers and logistical constraints. While initiatives like *SheHacks* and dedicated mentorship have improved participation, ongoing effort is needed to deepen trust and accessibility.

Secondly, digital literacy gaps among jobseekers, particularly in rural or underserved communities, hinders progress. Many learners require foundational

digital training before they can successfully engage with cybersecurity content.

5 Future Outlook

A central priority will be strengthening financial sustainability by further developing its hybrid revenue model. This includes expanding paid training programmes and corporate upskilling contracts. As regulatory pressures on organisations intensify, demand for end-to-end compliance and workforce solutions is expected to create new commercial opportunities, particularly for providers that can link training directly to employment outcomes.

Gender inclusion will remain a core strategic focus, with increasing emphasis on retention and career progression rather than initial participation alone. Through mentorship, employer engagement, and greater visibility of female role models, Green Circle aims to address structural barriers to women's advancement in the cybersecurity sector.

At the same time, maintaining relevance in a rapidly evolving landscape will require continuous curriculum adaptation. By aligning closely with emerging technologies and regulatory frameworks, and leveraging its regional R&D hubs, Green Circle intends to deliver specialised, high-demand skills while strengthening its long-term value proposition to both employers and young professionals.



Case study 4 Serianu

Case Study Author: **Niek van Dijk**
Editors: **Nimrah Karim and Justin van Rhyn**

This case study is part of the Challenge Fund for Youth Employment's Pathways to Employment (PTE) Learning Series Paper 1: Platforms for Skills-Building. The PTE series explores how different business models support youth employment outcomes, by creating new jobs, improving job quality, or strengthening pathways into work, based on evidence from CFYE-supported initiatives across Africa and the Middle East.



Key Takeaways

Partnerships were key for the model to achieve relevance, scale, and employment outcomes. Serianu Cyber Shujaa was designed as a collaborative initiative, bringing together Serianu, industry players, and sector bodies, which allowed the programme to remain tightly aligned with evolving cybersecurity market needs rather than operating as a standalone training provider.

Diversifying revenue models supports long-term financial viability of non-profits: While the initiative remains non-profit, its reliance on grants and donations creates sustainability risks. To address this, Cyber Shujaa is expanding its revenue base through learner fees, tailored corporate training, commercial partnerships, international expansion, and paid placement services.

Building inclusion in a male-dominated field requires intentional design: Cyber Shujaa initially struggled to attract female learners, but by identifying underlying barriers and adapting its approach through women-led boot camps, flexible scheduling, targeted outreach, and greater involvement of female trainers and mentors, it developed a more gender-inclusive model.

1 Introduction

The Serianu Cyber Shujaa programme is a cybersecurity, data protection, and digital forensics training initiative designed to bridge the cybersecurity skills gap in Kenya.

The programme responds to a rapidly growing market need. Recent attacks on critical information infrastructure have contributed to significant losses in the digital economy, with Kenya experiencing the second-highest impact in Africa after Nigeria. At the same time, many Kenyan companies report difficulties in recruiting sufficient cybersecurity professionals to meet rising demand. Within this context, Serianu Cyber Shujaa responds to an identified and immediate skills need.

Delivered by Serianu Limited as part of a consortium, the programme offers several 12-week training courses tailored to different cybersecurity roles. These combine theoretical learning with hands-on lab exercises to build practical skills, and are delivered through a hybrid model supported by communication channels such as WhatsApp and Discord.

Cyber Shujaa builds on earlier collaboration between Serianu and United States International University (USIU) Africa. Through a grant from SWIFT Foundation in 2019, Serianu and USIU Africa started researching best practices for cyber security risk minimisation in the African banking industry. Their research led to a tripartite collaboration between USIU, Serianu, and the Kenyan Bankers Association (KBA), ultimately leading to the establishment of Serianu Cyber Shujaa with CFYE funding in 2022.

Key Details

Year founded	2011
Location:	Nairobi, Kenya
Employment outcomes	Total 2038 jobs (1020 matched, 41 created, 977 improved)
Annual revenue:	€ 2.3 million
Staff	~58

2 The business model

Cyber Shujaa operates as a cybersecurity training and placement platform that links specialised skills development, certification, employer partnerships, and structured placement services into a single workforce development model. While structured as a non-profit initiative, Cyber Shujaa is increasingly exploring hybrid revenue mechanisms to strengthen long-term financial sustainability.

Value Proposition: Cyber Shujaa delivers market-aligned cybersecurity training that combines theoretical foundations with hands-on lab simulations and industry-driven capstone projects. The programme's twelve week tracks and shorter specialist bootcamps are aligned with globally recognised certifications such as Certified Ethical Hacker (CEH) and Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP), enhancing employability. A defining feature of the model is the integration of structured placement services and direct sector partnerships, particularly within banking, telecommunications, fintech, and government.

Key Activities: Core activities include curriculum development and delivery across fifteen cybersecurity tracks, certification preparation, mentorship and peer learning facilitation, and employer matchmaking. A dedicated placement team engages employers, organises sensitisation forums, and supports graduates through internships and job placements. Continuous sector engagement, particularly through KBA and ICT Authority partnerships, ensures curriculum relevance and employer buy-in.

"The East-African market is very heavy on technology, very low on processes, and at that time it was very pronounced. People were buying technologies but they were not implementing these in the right way and so the number of attacks was very high. So really there was a gap in the market. Coordination between people, technology and access was lacking and that drove the establishment of Serianu."

— **William Makatiani, Founder and CEO of Serianu.**

Revenue Streams: Serianu Cyber Shujaa currently relies predominantly on grants and sponsorships, with most entry-level learners not charged fees. Limited revenues are generated through shorter professional courses, bootcamps for mid-career professionals, and corporate-sponsored training. While training represents a small share of Serianu Ltd's overall revenue (less than 5 percent), the programme creates indirect commercial value through brand visibility, talent pipeline development, and strengthened industry positioning

Customer Segments: On the supply side, Cyber Shujaa targets entry-level graduates and mid-career professionals seeking cybersecurity upskilling, with a deliberate focus on increasing female participation in a male-dominated sector. On the demand side, it serves banks, fintech firms, telecommunications companies, government institutions, and multinational corporations seeking certified cybersecurity talent. The programme's engagement with approximately 70 percent of the Kenyan banking sector reflects strong industry integration.

Key Resources: Key resources include Serianu’s cybersecurity expertise, USIU-accredited curricula, industry partnerships through KBA, and a dedicated placement team. The programme’s learning management system (LMS), alumni network, and sector-specific capstone projects strengthen delivery quality and labour market alignment. Governance structures, including the Cyber Shujaa Principals advisory board, provide strategic oversight.

Channels: Learners are reached through university partnerships, sector networks, digital communication channels such as WhatsApp and Discord, and collaborations with government agencies. Employers are engaged through industry associations, sensitisation forums, and direct corporate partnerships. The consortium model itself functions as a key channel for credibility and market access.

Cost Structure: The cost structure includes curriculum development, certification alignment, trainer compensation, LMS maintenance, placement services, partnership coordination, and programme governance. As most learners are sponsored, funding gaps must be covered through grants and sponsorship contributions. Investments in placement capacity and gender inclusion initiatives represent significant operational costs.

Evolution of the Business Model

Cyber Shujaa emerged from Serianu’s earlier cybersecurity immersion initiatives and research collaborations with USIU-Africa and the Kenyan banking sector. Initially focused on applied cybersecurity exposure, the programme formalised into a structured training and placement model under CFYE funding in 2022

3 Results

Since its launch in 2022, the programme has trained more than 4,000 participants, with 2,550 completing the full course. To date, 2,038 graduates—including over 700 young women—have secured employment. The programme has delivered 32 cohorts across areas such as Cybersecurity Analysis, Cloud and Network Security, and specialised Microsoft Cybersecurity training. Of the 15 training tracks offered, 10 were developed with USIU-Africa accreditation, while five were introduced through

During implementation, job placement mechanisms evolved significantly. The programme’s early reliance on an external digital placement platform proved insufficient in a competitive recruitment market dominated by established firms. In response, the consortium switched to direct placement through a dedicated team, strengthening employer relationships and improving job outcomes. This pivot was instrumental in achieving full placement delivery by the third year of the project.

Parallel to operational refinement, the consortium began exploring revenue diversification to reduce dependency on grants. Options under consideration include charging higher course fees, expanding customised corporate training, introducing paid placement services, and structuring Serianu Cyber Shujaa as a standalone non-profit entity with a hybrid funding model.

Support from CFYE and Impact of Technical Assistance

Serianu Cyber Shujaa received €182,299 in funding from CFYE. This financial support was critical in mitigating the risks associated with launching the programme, particularly given Serianu’s status as a for-profit company requiring shareholder approval for co-investment.

Beyond financial backing, CFYE provided (TA) on Gender Inclusion, Curriculum Development, and Impact Measurement and Monitoring. The TA strengthened curriculum relevance, improved monitoring systems, and sharpened gender inclusion strategies. The structured results framework and focus on job quality also enhanced credibility with additional funders and sponsors.

partnerships with Cisco and EC-Council. These accreditations and certifications contribute to Serianu Cyber Shujaa’s positioning in the market, as most competitors who offer similar trainings, such as ALX, currently do not have similar accreditations.

The programme’s growing reputation led to new partnerships and collaborations. Microsoft approached Serianu Cyber Shujaa in early 2024 to train 100 unemployed youth, including 30 alumni,

with a commitment to connect these graduates to employment opportunities through their partner network. Similarly, a partnership with Safaricom enabled their top engineers to participate in Women's Bootcamps and mentorship sessions. Through ICT Authority (ICTA), Cybershujaa trained over 700 youth, of which over 200 youth secured roles in government institutions.

The programme has also had a broader impact on the sector, due to its strong partnership with the government. Serianu Cyber Shujaa engaged in several dialogues with government officials on cybersecurity, which helped shape their collaboration. Exemplary, one of Serianu's key staff members on Cyber Shujaa, a young person herself, was appointed to the committee for technology and training at the Kenyan Ministry of Labour. Over time, other similar initiatives, such as those funded by GIZ and FCDO, have emerged. Additionally, training providers like ALX are also entering the market for cybersecurity training.

4 Success factors and challenges

Due to project design challenges, particularly matching and placing youth in jobs, Serianu Cyber Shujaa had a slow start in the first year of its CFYE project. However, by focusing on building strong partnerships and placement services, the project turned around significantly. Performance improved in the second year and by the third year it reached full delivery at 101% (2,038/2,000 placements). This attentive focus on bridging the gap between supply (youth) and demand (jobs) has been critical.

Although Serianu Cyber Shujaa performed better than the industry average on gender outcomes—30% female employment in IT roles¹⁸—it did not meet its CFYE target of 50%, placing 719 young women (35% of total jobs). According to the IP, the main reasons for this can be found in persistent cultural norms, limited awareness about opportunities for women in the tech sector, and entrenched gender biases amongst employers. These factors also hindered female trainees' transition and retention into cybersecurity roles.

Serianu Cyber Shujaa made concerted efforts to address these challenges through several dedicated activities, including hosting women-led boot camps, offering flexible course schedules, conducting targeted recruitment campaigns, and increasing the involvement of female trainers and mentors. This helped to increase the percentage of young women participating and completing courses from 30% at the end of year one of the project to 35% at the end of year three.

“One key challenge is placement. Most jobs in the Cyber Security industry prefer candidates with more than 3 years of experience and we have strategies in place to curb that.”

— **William Makatiani, Founder and CEO of Serianu.**

Beyond training, placement is a second key component, important for the project with CYFE and the impact objective of youth employment, but also for the commercial viability of the program. Serianu Cyber Shujaa has worked on addressing two key challenges around placement. The first challenge revolves around the right approach to organise placement services. Initially, the Serianu Cyber Shujaa consortium featured a partner for placement, called Signifide. Through its digital platform, KINDA, placement and matchmaking would be organized. Over time, the consortium realised that KINDA was not the right solution for Cyber Shujaa.

“What we found out along the way: placement is not such an easy task as we had imagined. Companies have their own and preferred ways of recruiting and placement. Large players like Equity Bank and Safaricom use specific services to recruit, such as Beyond the Savannah. It is a cutthroat market, with limited room for new entrants.”

— **William Makatiani, Founder and CEO of Serianu.**

¹⁸ Luvanda, A. (2022). *A policy framework for bridging the gender divide in digital technology courses and careers in Kenya*. Brookings Institution, Africa Growth Initiative & Echidna Global Scholars Program. Retrieved from Brookings Institution.

The market turned out to be highly dependent on a few existing, specialised recruitment firms that work almost exclusively for larger employers. Serianu Cyber Shujaa aims to maintain an independent approach to placement and does not intend to rely on a small group of recruitment firms. This was a key reason for organising the placement function with a dedicated team of three at USIU.

5 Future outlook

Looking ahead, Serianu Cyber Shujaa's strategy centres on strengthening financial sustainability while maintaining its leadership in the sector. A primary objective is to transition toward a hybrid revenue model, gradually increasing income from course fees, customised corporate trainings, and potentially paid placement services. The consortium aims to reduce dependency on grants and sponsorships over time, with the long-term ambition of achieving financial sustainability.

Placement services will remain central to the model, but the revenue structure for these services requires refinement. While employer willingness to pay for standard placement remains limited, there is potential to offer end-to-end recruitment services or cross-subsidise placement through revenues generated from training and corporate partnerships. Structuring Serianu Cyber Shujaa as a standalone, non-profit entity may also create clearer governance and fundraising opportunities.

Placement services offered by the programme have been successful, helping to place over 1,020 youth. The placement team plays a critical role in building relationships with employers, organising sensitisation forums, and aligning graduate skills with market needs, which significantly enhanced placement success. The placement officers provide real-time job postings and graduate support through platforms like the programme's website, WhatsApp groups, and Discord channels.

Expanding geographic reach is another priority. Collaborations with universities outside of Nairobi aim to increase access in secondary cities such as Kisumu and Nakuru, leveraging online delivery through the LMS and digital communication channels. The programme has also attracted interest from neighbouring countries, including Uganda, signalling potential for regional replication.

Finally, continuous curriculum innovation remains essential. Recognising that many graduates pursue gig-based or contract roles rather than traditional employment, the programme has integrated entrepreneurship components into training. This includes modules on service pricing, personal branding, and independent consulting.

By regularly updating foundational and advanced tracks and maintaining strong industry collaboration, Cyber Shujaa aims to remain ahead of emerging cybersecurity trends and sustain its reputation as a leading talent pipeline for the region.



Case study 5

Sprints

Case Study Author: **Niek van Dijk**

Editors: **Nimrah Karim and Justin van Rhyn**

This case study is part of the Challenge Fund for Youth Employment's Pathways to Employment (PTE) Learning Series Paper 1: Platforms for Skills-Building. The PTE series explores how different business models support youth employment outcomes, by creating new jobs, improving job quality, or strengthening pathways into work, based on evidence from CFYEsupported initiatives across Africa and the Middle East.



Key Takeaways

AI as a key enabler for scaling and growth: AI is a core driver of Sprints ability to scale. By integrating AI, from basic support agents to AI-enabled course and pathway development, Sprints is streamlining operations, reducing costs, and expanding access for learners who have limited financial resources.

Applied learning is central to closing the skills gap: Sprints identified that many university graduates struggled to translate theoretical knowledge into practical problem-solving, particularly in areas such as critical thinking and collaborative work. In response, it incorporated hands-on learning, soft-skills development, structured assessments, and a business-simulation environment, enabling learners to apply concepts to real-world scenarios.

Training alone rarely sustains a skills-building business model: Because many young people are reluctant or unable to pay for training, and revenues tend to be one-off, Sprints expanded beyond tuition-based income. By partnering with governments, non-profits, and corporates, and by adding outsourcing and employer-of-record services through Hiremoters, it created recurring revenue streams that now form the core of its business model.

1 Introduction

Sprints operates as an integrated skills-to-employment platform that combines technical training, applied project-based learning, AI-enabled delivery infrastructure, and structured employer intermediation into a single commercial model.

In 2019, Egypt's tech sector was expanding rapidly. Start-ups in fields such as data science, programming, and AI were growing and attracting investment, prompting multi-national firms in similar industries to enter the market. However, the education system faced challenges in meeting the rising demand for skilled talent, and many graduates struggled to apply their academic knowledge in workplace settings. Recognising this gap, Ayman Bazaraa and Bassam Sharkawy founded Sprints with the aim of strengthening the link between education and employment, improving the job readiness of tech graduates, and supporting the development of Egypt's tech sector.

Through their CFYE project *Techleap*, Sprints offers a structured learning approach that includes skills assessment, customised learning and development plans, targeted training, and post-programme hiring support. Its objective is twofold: on the one hand it trains youth on technical skills on popular topics such as mobile and web development, data science, AI, and software testing. On the other hand, it provides practical and applied learning. By offering assessments and assignments within a business simulation environment, Sprints provides practical, applied learning that enables participants to work with global clients and deliver tasks on a weekly basis. Learner fees are minimised through scholarships and payments only need to be made once learners land a job.

Key Details

Year Founded	2019
Location:	Cairo, Egypt
Employment outcomes	Total jobs 1876 (974 matched, 325 created, 577 improved).
Annual revenue:	€338,773 (2021)
Staff	~31

2 The business model

At the core of the model is a hybrid learning system that assesses, trains, and matches young tech talent to labour market demand. Rather than functioning solely as a training provider, Sprints embeds employability, employer access, and workforce deployment into the same operational architecture.

Sprints managed to secure a competitive edge in the market as it was the first to address the skills gap identified. The company fine-tuned their offering to three gaps that it observed in the market:

- ▶ **Technical skills gap:** while graduates learn relevant skills in university, they struggle to apply these skills in practice.
- ▶ **Soft skills or communication skills gap:** employers suggest that graduates are not adequately trained to deal with clients, work in a team, or address challenges or conflicts constructively.
- ▶ **General skills gap:** employers indicate that graduates lack critical thinking skills or struggle with the level of English language skills needed for professional settings.

Over time, the company expanded beyond business to consumer (B2C) training into business to business (B2B), business to government (B2G), and Employer of Record services, creating a diversified and recurring revenue structure.

- ▶ **Value Proposition:** Sprints delivers applied, employment-oriented technical education that closes technical, soft skills, and employability gaps in Egypt's tech labour market. Its structured 10–16 week learning journeys combine assessment-driven pathways, project-based simulations, embedded soft skills scoring, and AI-supported tutoring. This integrated model produces job-ready graduates with validated portfolios and direct employer access.
- ▶ **Key Activities:** Core activities include curriculum design, hybrid training delivery, learner assessment, AI integration, and employer matchmaking. Sprints operates a proprietary LMS with embedded AI agents that support tutoring, scoring, and content development. Through *Hiremoters*, it also manages Employer of Record services for freelance and remote professionals (further details on this service below).
- ▶ **Revenue Streams:** Revenue is generated through three channels: B2B corporate training and employer-of-record margins, B2G government-funded cohorts, and B2C learner payments. While B2C remains a small share of revenue, *Hiremoters* has introduced recurring revenue through margin-based income on deployed professionals. This diversification reduced reliance on one-off training fees.

- ▶ **Customer Segments:** On the supply side, Sprints targets beginners, fresh tech graduates, and young professionals seeking upskilling. On the demand side, it serves multi-national tech firms, Egyptian corporates, SMEs, and international clients engaging remote talent. The model links trained youth directly to labour market demand.
- ▶ **Key Resources:** Key resources include Sprints' proprietary AI-enabled LMS, curriculum design expertise, employer network, and learner performance data. Human capital, trainers, AI engineers, and placement teams, underpins delivery quality. Brand credibility built through government and donor partnerships further strengthens market positioning.
- ▶ **Channels:** Sprints reaches learners through digital marketing, university partnerships, ambassador programmes, and foundation collaborations. Employers are engaged through direct partnerships, recruitment platforms, and corporate networks. Conferences and public sector programmes further expand reach and institutional trust.
- ▶ **Cost Structure:** The cost structure includes curriculum development, trainer compensation, technology development, AI integration, marketing, and employer engagement. Significant upfront investments in platform infrastructure are balanced by lower marginal delivery costs through AI-enabled tutoring. The employer-of-record model also introduces compliance and administrative costs.

Evolution of Business Model

In early 2024, Sprints launched a new activity called *Hiremoters*, inspired by the growing number of graduates choosing to work as freelancers. *Hiremoters* is a platform that connects freelancers with clients, operating under an Employer of Record model. This setup offers significant advantages: freelancers receive insurance coverage, while clients benefit from the credibility and support of a well-established company like Sprints. *Hiremoters* has already surpassed Sprints' training business in revenue generation.

On the technology side, Sprints initially relied on external infrastructure. Rather than building its own platform, it designed simulation-based courses and delivered them through Teachable, a white-label Learning Management System (LMS), while using tools such as Zoom to facilitate live interaction with learners. As demand increased and the need for additional functionality grew, Sprints chose to develop its own LMS to support greater scalability. The new platform incorporates AI-driven tutors and coaches that track and assess learner progress, with more than a dozen AI agents currently active. Sprints is also using AI to support content development:

"Curriculum production is really expensive, working with different learners from different countries using different languages. To produce content for all these audiences, it is very expensive to produce all this content in the studio, we now use avatars for this. Even the content production itself, we use AI to iterate content and do quality control." - Ayman Bazaraa, Co-founder and CEO, Sprints

Support from CFYE and Impact of Technical Assistance

With support from the Challenge Fund for Youth Employment (CFYE), Sprints received €600,378 in grant funding under the *Techleap* programme, within a total project budget of €1,300,301. Under its *Techleap* project, Sprints set up a scholarship system that provided learners with free courses.

Additionally, under this project, the company received TA on Sales & Marketing, Curriculum Development, and Monitoring & Evaluation.

Beyond financial inputs, CFYE's partnership approach supported the transition toward a more diversified and scalable business model, supporting Sprints position as an EdTech and workforce intermediary in Egypt.

After CFYE, Sprints continues a free offering through *SprintUp*, with entry-level trainings on topics such as digital marketing, product management and web development. Over 10,000 learners signed up and completed courses. This "freemium" model helps to engage learners that in the future will take more advanced, paid courses.

3 Results

Since its launch in 2021, the programme has trained 2,097 participants, all of whom successfully completed their courses. The programme impacted 1876 youth jobs for CFYE (974 matched, 325 created, 577 improved). While this demonstrates strong completion and meaningful job outcomes, the project fell short of its target of 2,500 jobs, particularly due to underperformance in female employment (25% vs a target of 50%).

The programme achieved its strongest results in training delivery and scale, supported by partnerships that expanded its reach. Collaborations with platforms such as Almentor generated over 9,400 enrolments and more than 3,500 graduates, while government engagement, particularly through the Ministry of Communications and IT, enabled large-scale training delivery and assessment. However, conversion from training to verified employment outcomes remained uneven, and challenges in tracking placements, particularly with large employers, limited the ability to fully capture results.

4 Success factors and challenges

The *Techleap* project demonstrated that Sprints' applied learning model is broadly aligned with labour market demand. The integration of technical training with project-based simulations, soft skills development, and employer engagement has proven effective in producing job-ready graduates.

A key success factor was the strengthening of partnerships across public and private actors. Collaboration with universities supported recruitment and curriculum alignment, while partnerships with organisations such as the National Council for Women enabled outreach to underserved female learners. Engagement with private platforms such as Wuzzuf and Almentor significantly expanded reach and reduced customer acquisition costs, while government collaboration enhanced Sprints' credibility as a national EdTech provider.

The project also contributed to the evolution of Sprints' commercial model. Initial reliance on B2C payments proved insufficient in a context where education is often perceived as a public good. Through *Techleap*, Sprints expanded into B2B and B2G markets and laid the foundation for *Hiremoters*. This diversification improved financial sustainability while maintaining an employment-focused model.

However, the project faced several structural challenges. The most significant was the underperformance on female employment outcomes, driven by low participation in technical fields, competition from free public programmes, and persistent cultural norms. While targeted outreach and female-focused initiatives were introduced, these were not sufficient to close the gap. In addition, job verification proved complex, particularly with multinational employers that were unable or unwilling to share detailed documentation. This created a trade-off between maintaining employer relationships and meeting CFYE reporting requirements. Finally, collaboration with public institutions was at times constrained by rigid education systems that favour traditional, theory-based instruction over more flexible, applied learning approaches.

5 Future outlook

Sprints' strategy focuses on scaling its integrated workforce platform beyond Egypt while deepening its technological advantage. The company sees strong potential for expansion across Africa and the Middle East, where youth unemployment, skills mismatches, and rapid digitalisation create similar market conditions. Early steps have already been taken in countries such as Jordan and Nigeria, signalling a shift toward regional growth.

Increasing female participation remains a strategic priority. Sprints is adapting its portfolio to include courses that have demonstrated stronger uptake among women, such as digital marketing and product management, while leveraging the growing cross-sector relevance of AI skills. At the same time, the company aims to deepen institutional integration by pursuing certification pathways and exploring opportunities to embed its model more formally within university systems, should regulatory reforms allow greater flexibility.

Following successful fundraising rounds during and after the Techleap engagement, Sprints intends to invest in platform development, market expansion, and partnership growth. The long-term objective is to transition from a national EdTech provider into a regional technology-enabled workforce intermediary.

Technology will play a central role in this expansion. Building on its proprietary LMS, Sprints is investing further in AI to automate curriculum development, personalise learning journeys, and reduce marginal delivery costs. The IP is currently working on this with the University of Maryland in the United States. The ambition is to move toward increasingly AI-generated content and adaptive learning pathways that tailor training to individual learner profiles from intake through to employment.



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