

THE MISSING BRIDGE TO IMPACT

The importance of (pre-)incubation to turn young changemakers into successful impact entrepreneurs



Global study and pilot project 2025-2026

Why now? Young changemakers are ready, but early support is missing

Young Changemakers are already building locally rooted ideas to address real problems in their communities. But many remain **stuck at an early stage** because they lack **structured support**, **funding access**, and the **tools** to turn ideas into sustainable ventures.

“
- "If your idea doesn't sound crazy or ridiculous, it's just not bold enough. Your vision must be ambitious because the world we live in is crazy, and only bold ideas will help us change it."
– Adel



1.8B young people globally - The largest youth generation in history, close to 90% living in developing countries.

(UN Youth and the SDGs)



More than half of young workers are in informal employment - Many young people are working, but without stable income, protection or clear pathways to economic security.

(ILO, Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024)



USD 1.571T impact investing market - Capital for impact is growing, but early-stage changemakers often cannot access it.

(GIIN, Sizing the Impact Investing Market 2024)

This creates a clear opportunity:

Young people have ideas and local knowledge, but they need support to turn early initiatives into viable, sustainable ventures.

The Opportunity Gap for Young Changemakers

1.2B

young people face widening skills gaps

Many young people lack access to skills, career pathways and opportunities in fast-changing green, digital and AI-driven economies.

Source: Generation Unlimited

46%

of young people in the EU would consider starting a business

Almost half of young people aged 15–30 in the EU say they would consider setting up their own business, but only few have taken active steps.

Source: Flash Eurobarometer 513, Social Entrepreneurship and Youth

45%

of young people in the EU report fear of failure as a barrier

Nearly half of young people say fear of failure prevented them from starting a business.

Source: OECD, The Missing Entrepreneurs 2023

40%

cite lack of capital and resources as a barrier

Access to start-up finance remains one of the greatest barriers faced by young entrepreneurs.

Source: OECD / European Commission, The Missing Entrepreneurs 2023

Bottom message

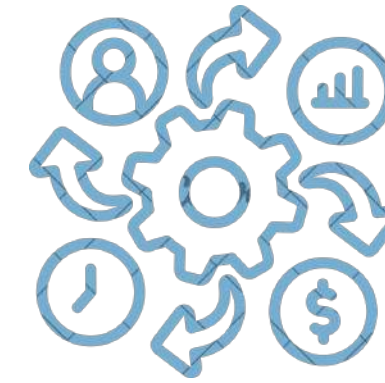
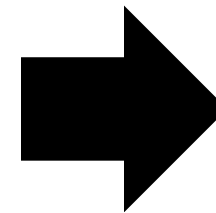
This is where #YCM can make a difference: helping young changemakers build the skills, confidence and structure they need to turn early ideas into viable impact ventures.

Impact Entrepreneurship is the new Normal



From environmental impact ventures...

...most sustainable or regenerative business models are already profitable: solar energy, renewable agriculture, etc



...to social impact ventures

...more and more social goals/SDGs offer opportunities for business models: health, education, access to affordable housing,...

Young Changemakers - An **Unrealized** Potential?

Young changemakers (16-27) are driven by deep **empathy** and **sense of responsibility** to act as **Planetary Citizens**.

**Source: The Possibilists (2023)*

In events like the [global #YCM Challenge](#), every year they develop **meaningful, innovative** solutions to issues they see around them.



Eyes on Access

Offline AI app for smartphone-based glaucoma screening in underserved regions.

→ Brings low-cost early eye diagnostics to communities with limited access to specialists.



Ecofrige

School-based urban gardening using repurposed plastic waste in Bamenda, Cameroon.

→ Improve nutrition, environmental education, and waste reduction through a frugal, scalable model.



KET - Academy

Student-led platform offering free learning resources and remote e-learning support in Cameroon.

→ Improve success to quality education for underserved students.



Bloof

Biodegradable personal care products made from textile and agricultural waste in Bangladesh.

→ Replace plastic-based products while creating green jobs for women and youth.

Some **common characteristics** of grassroots #YCM projects

A recurring pattern across early-stage changemaker teams*

Community proximity - Young changemakers often work on problems they know first-hand, which gives them strong contextual understanding and trust within their communities.

Frugal innovation - Solutions are often simple, low-cost and built with locally available resources, making them more realistic for low-resource settings.

Education as impact multiplier - Many projects include awareness, training or peer learning, meaning their impact goes beyond the direct solution.

High motivation, low support infrastructure - Teams show initiative and early momentum, but often lack the structures needed to move from prototype to implementation and growth.

*Source: *The Possibilists* (2023)

Young Changemakers - What **drives** them?

Young changemakers (16-27) are driven by a deep **sense of responsibility** for their communities*



Young Changemakers - An **Unrealized** Potential?

However, in face of adversity, only **few** changemakers manage to turn their ideas into lasting impact ventures, and even fewer from **underprivileged backgrounds** get the support they need to sustain them over time.

“
"I don't want to regret in the future
for not pushing a little harder to
make a difference."
– Sarah
”


“
"Let's empower young people to
amplify the voices of the unheard
and represent their communities in a
new and impactful way."
– Manan
”

70% cite lack of personal
financial security as a key hurdle.

Source: YCM survey and expert interviews 2026

*Source: The Possibilists (2025)

innova

7.1%*

can fully cover their
necessary income through
their initiative work.

1 in 3*

changemakers (33.1%) now report
experiencing some form of
burnout, up from one in four
(26.4%) in 2023.

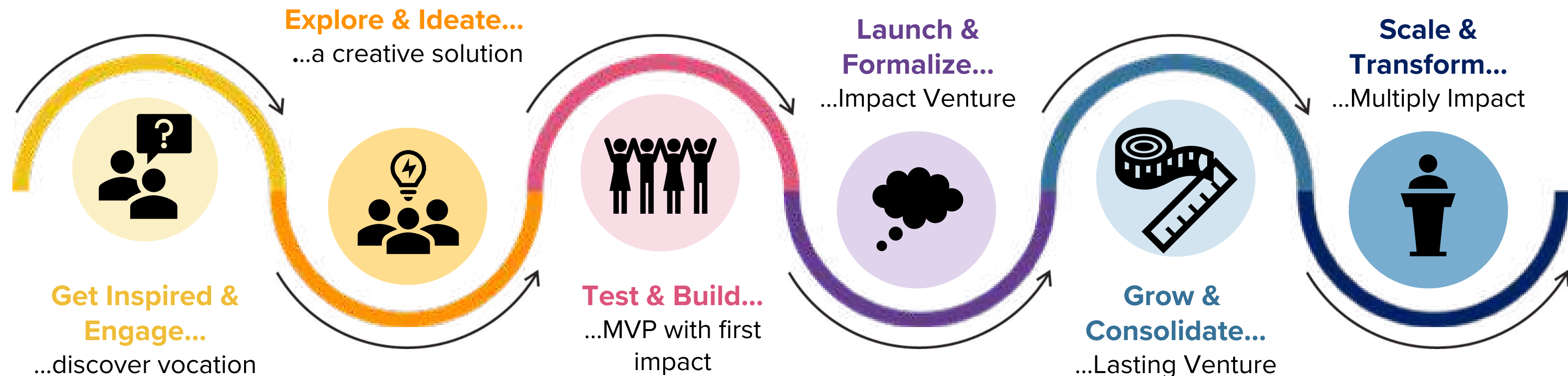


The journey of emerging young changemakers is a rollercoaster with many challenges

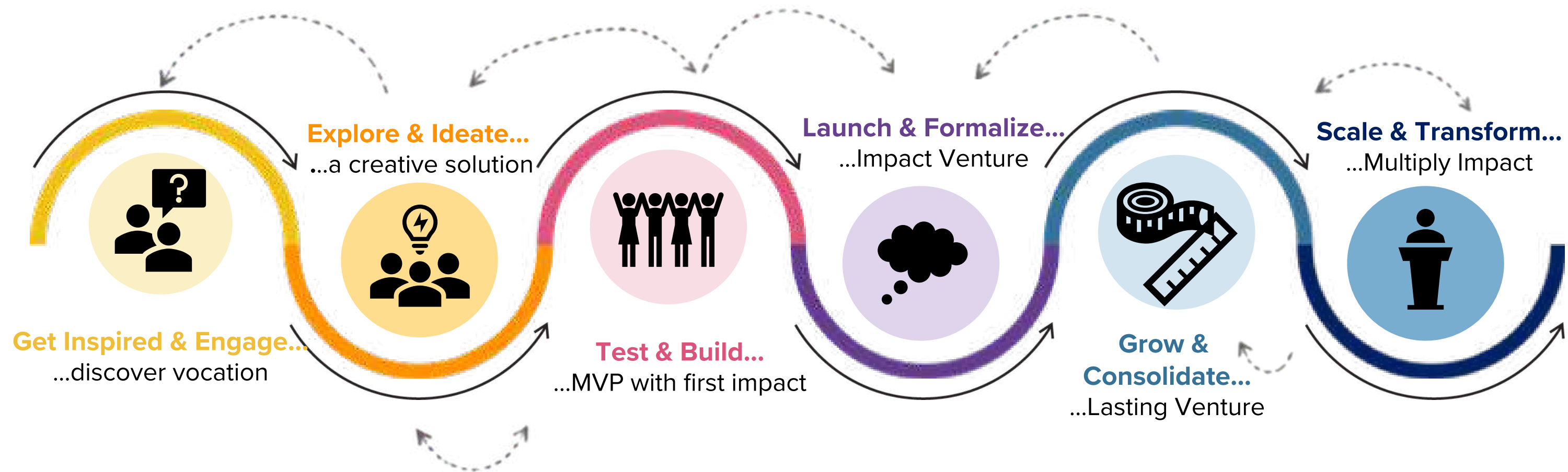
Only very few changemaker “make it” all the way to viable and scalable impact ventures.

“Opportunities often reach those with better education and connections. Young people from rural areas or less privileged backgrounds face significant challenges in accessing these opportunities.”

– Myriam



The journey of young changemakers



This journey is...

Not linear
You move forward, backward, sideways.

Messy
There is no perfect order.

Personal
Every changemaker's journey looks different.

Worth it
Because real change takes time, courage and persistence.



SKILLS (You develop as you go)

- Problem solving
- Project management
- Financial literacy
- Leadership
- Resilience
- Impact thinking
- Communication
- Impact thinking



COMMUNITY & NETWORK

- Peers
- Mentors
- Experts
- Partners
- Supporters
- Opportunities

What You Need Along the Way

 Safe spaces

 Mentortship & guidance

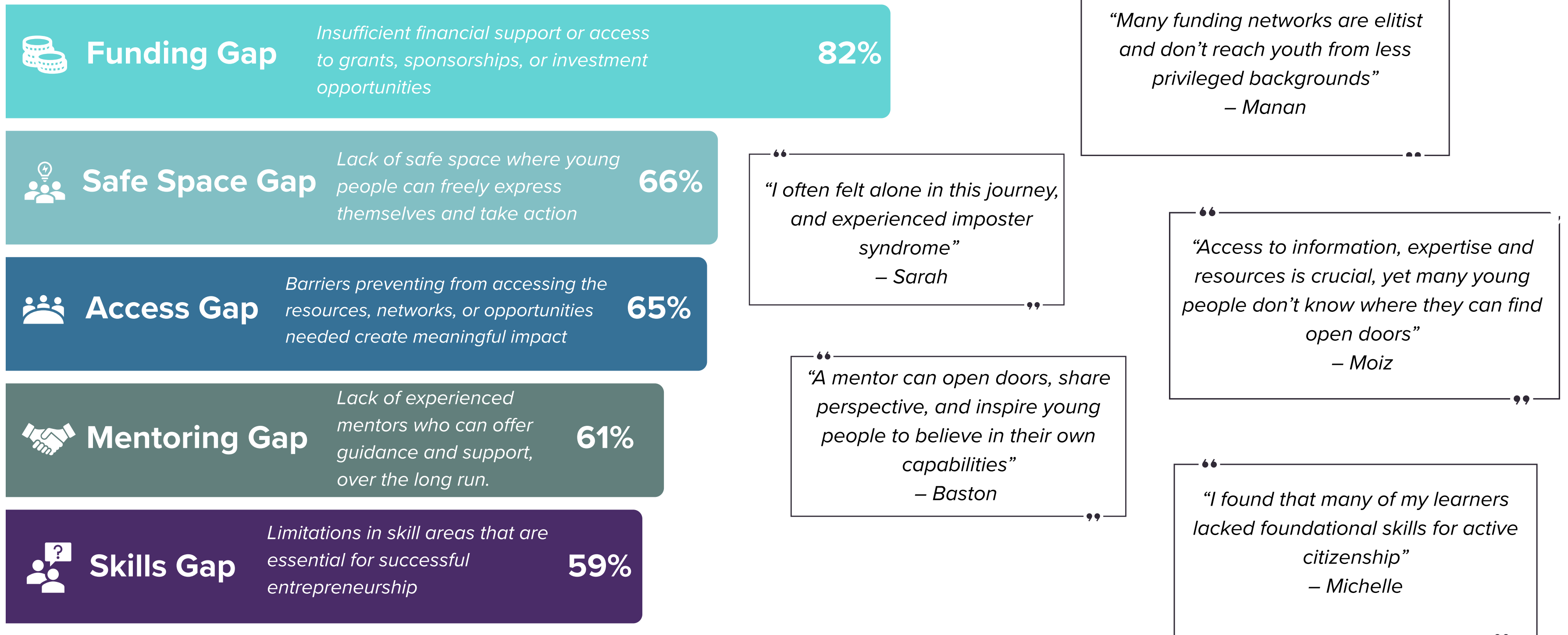
 Access to resources

 Small funding & opportunities

 Recognition & visibility

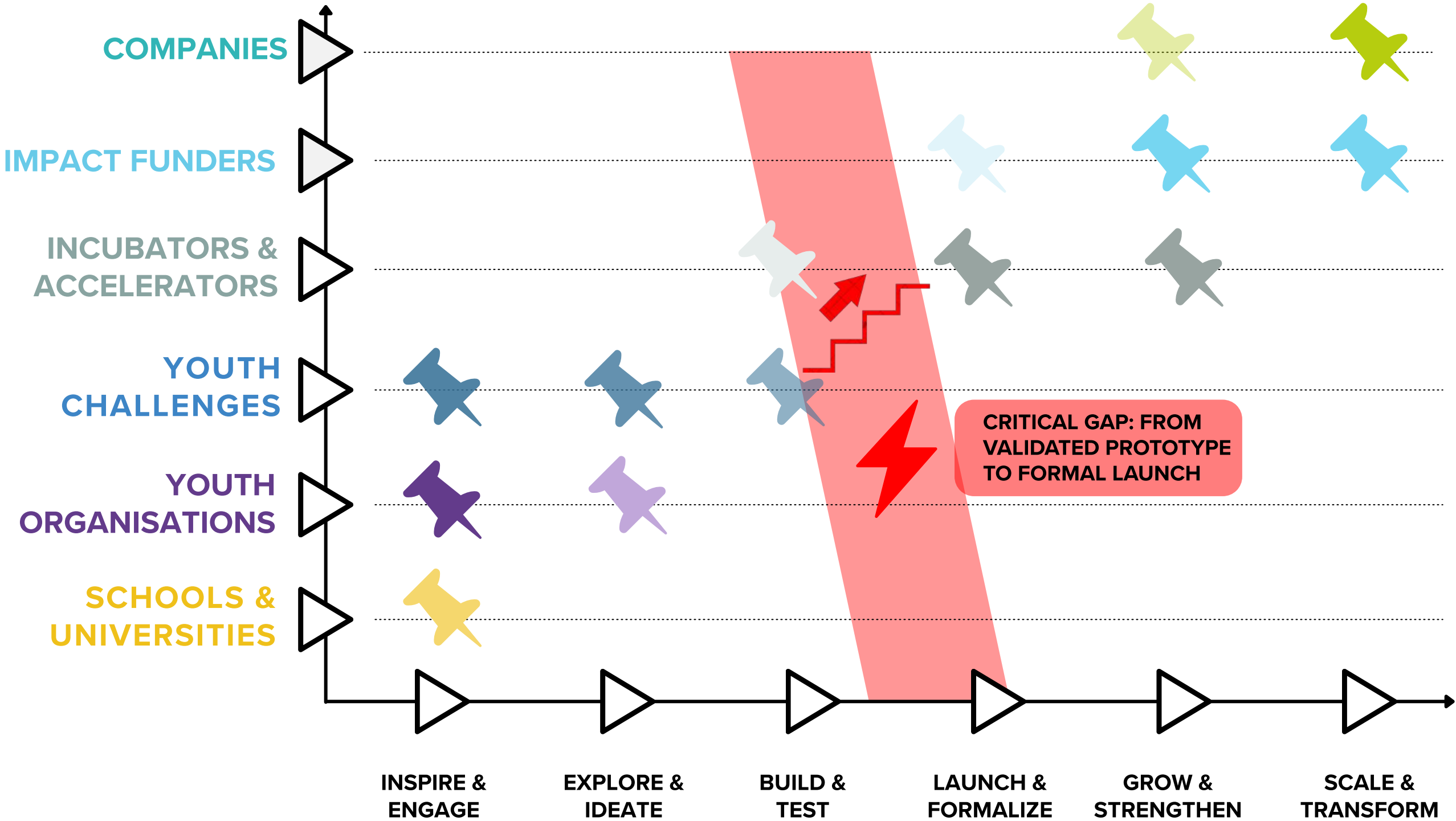
 Time & patience

Significant Gaps in the Ecosystem For Young Changemakers



Source: YCM survey and expert interviews 2026

The current ecosystem for young changemakers is **highly fragmented**



While numerous isolated initiatives exist, we observe a **lack of continuity** in the support provided to young changemakers, as well as a clear absence of early-stage funding opportunities.

"Many funding networks are elitist and struggle to reach entrepreneurs from less privileged backgrounds."
– Lisa

So how can we overcome **this chasm** and capture the opportunities of **young impact entrepreneurship**?



STRONGER CONNECTIONS

Between changemakers, ecosystem players, investors, corporates, universities and policymakers.



EARLY & FLEXIBLE FUNDING

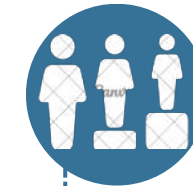
More patient capital and smaller tickets at the right time (pre-seed to seed).

The bridge is built together



LONG-TERM SUPPORT SYSTEMS

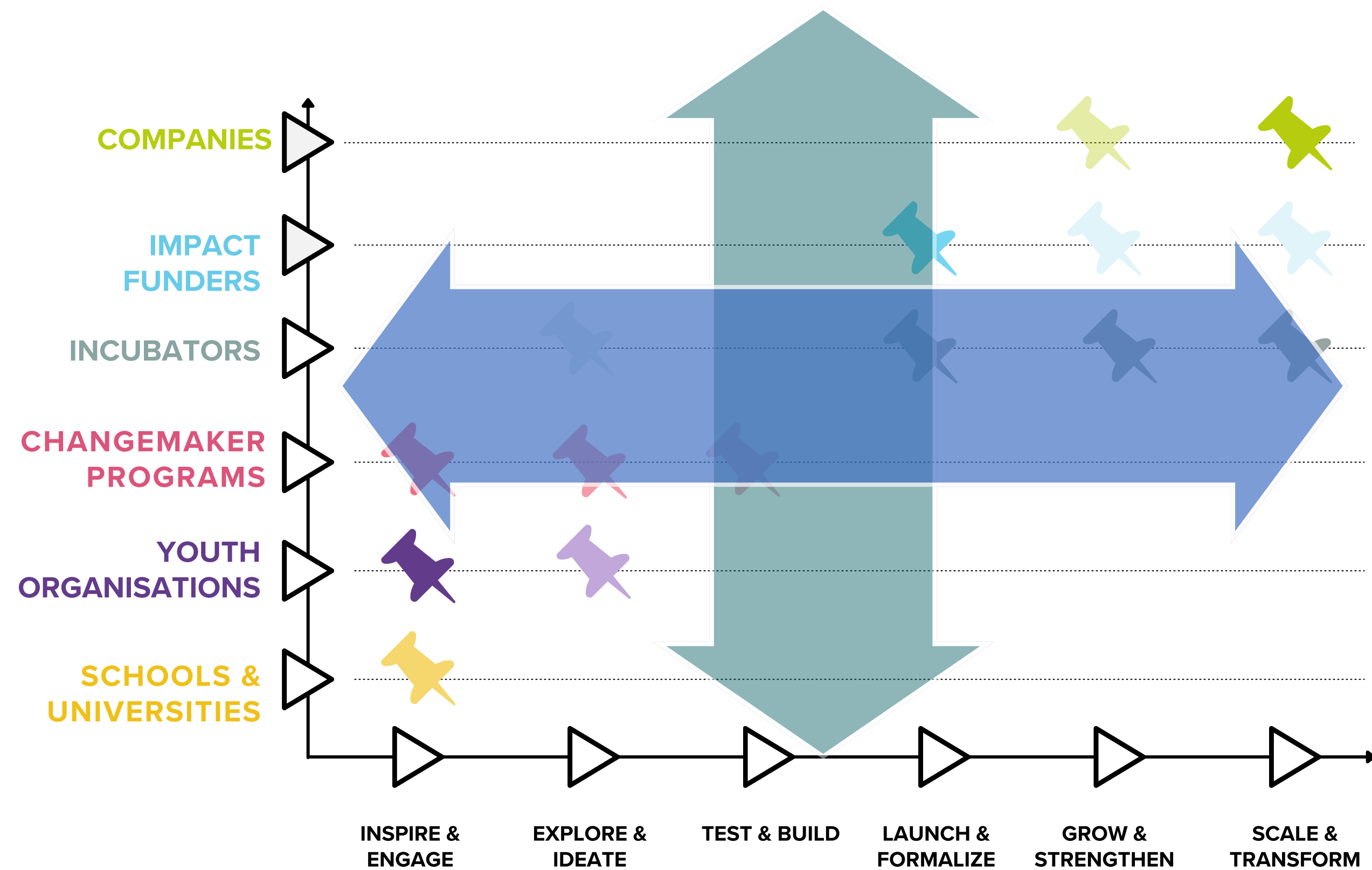
From project-based to journey-based support that adapts to real life.



INCLUSIVE & EQUITABLE ECOSYSTEMS

Reaching beyond elite networks and major cities to ecosystem deserts.

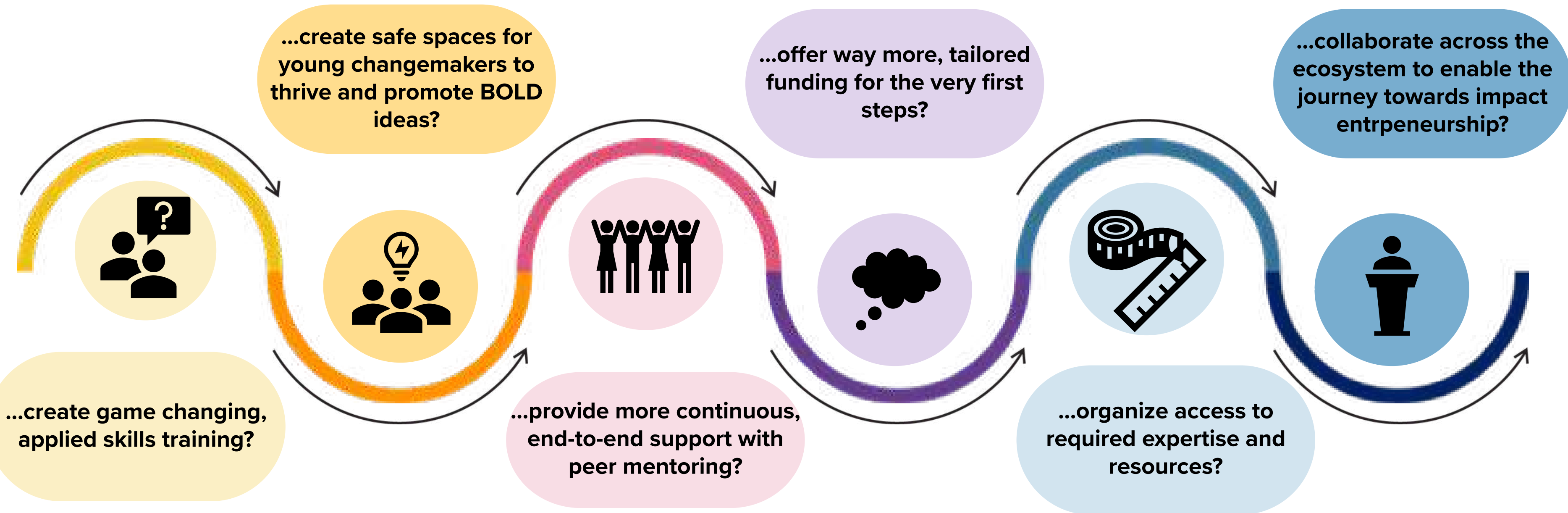
Working Towards a More Connected Ecosystem



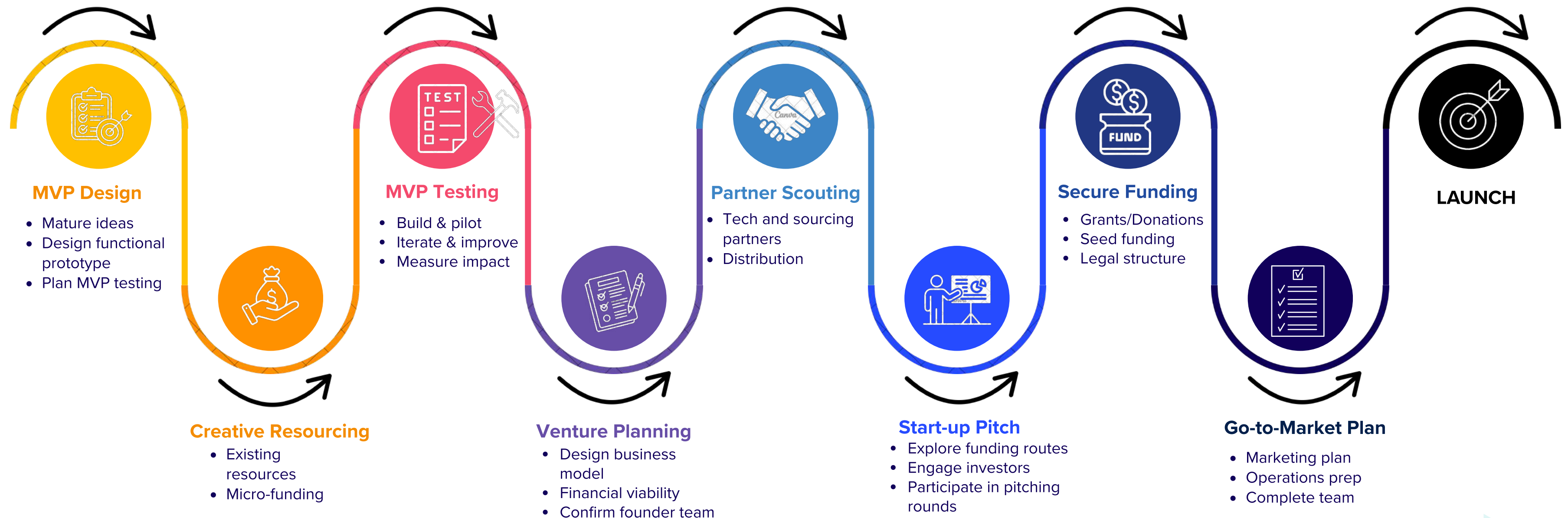
To help young changemakers take their first steps and build the **credibility** required to access formal incubation and funding opportunities, we need a more **continuous and cross-collaborative approach** among the ecosystem players - at **local, regional and global level..**

"Those in power should provide platforms for youth engagement and mentorship, making it easier for young people to bring their voices to the table."
– Maryam

To achieve this, how Might **We** ...



Pre-incubation journey: From grassroots ideas to impact ventures



Step-by-step upskilling in business basics, entrepreneurship, technical and transversal skills



Continuous mentorship by peer mentors and experts

Project: EcoRevive (Nepal)

#YCM Challenge 2026 – Case Study of a Pre-incubated Project



- ➡ **PROBLEM:** Women often lack access to affordable, high-quality hair care products designed for their specific needs. Existing products are either too expensive or rely on ingredients that are harmful to both people and the environment.
- ➡ **SOLUTION:** Ecorevive develops natural, locally produced hair care products that celebrate textured hair while promoting sustainable consumption and supporting local value chains.
- ➡ **TARGET:** Women with curly hair seeking affordable, effective, and environmentally responsible hair care solutions.
- ➡ **MVP:** Two natural hair care products developed and tested with early adopters to validate product quality, customer satisfaction, and market demand.

WHAT THEY HAVE ACHIEVED

- Successfully transformed an idea into market-ready products.
- Engaged real users to co-create and improve the formulations.
- Demonstrated demand for sustainable alternatives in an underserved market.
- Built the foundation for a local green beauty brand.

WHAT THEY NEED TO SCALE

- Scale production to reach more customers.
- Strengthen distribution channels and brand visibility.
- Secure investment to increase manufacturing capacity and market reach.

Project: VeriMap (Bangladesh)

#YCM Challenge 2026 – Case Study of a Pre-incubated Project



- ➡ **PROBLEM:** Millions of people in need remain invisible to donors due to fragmented information and limited transparency, making charitable giving less efficient and impactful.
- ➡ **SOLUTION:** VeriMap creates a digital platform that connects verified beneficiaries with donors, improving transparency, trust, and the effectiveness of humanitarian support.
- ➡ **TARGET:** NGOs, donors, charities, and vulnerable communities across Bangladesh.
- ➡ **MVP:** A functional prototype demonstrating transparent beneficiary mapping and donor matching.

WHAT THEY HAVE ACHIEVED

- Built a working platform validating the feasibility of the concept.
- Demonstrated how technology can improve transparency in philanthropy.
- Collected stakeholder feedback to refine the user experience.
- Created the foundation for a scalable social impact platform.

WHAT THEY NEED TO SCALE

- Launch and test the platform with NGOs and donors.
- Expand partnerships with NGOs and humanitarian organisations.
- Increase user testing and platform adoption.
- Secure resources for technical development and scaling.

Project: YCD (Cameroon)

#YCM Challenge 2026 – Case Study of a Pre-incubated Project



- ➡ **PROBLEM:** Smallholder farmers often lack access to timely agricultural information, resulting in lower productivity, crop losses, and reduced incomes.
- ➡ **SOLUTION:** YCD leverages AI and local-language technology to provide farmers with accessible agricultural advice, disease detection, and climate-smart farming recommendations.
- ➡ **TARGET:** Smallholder farmers in Cameroon, particularly those in underserved rural communities.
- ➡ **MVP:** An AI-powered prototype tested with around 100 farmers, integrating multilingual voice support, crop advice, weather information, and disease detection.

WHAT THEY HAVE ACHIEVED

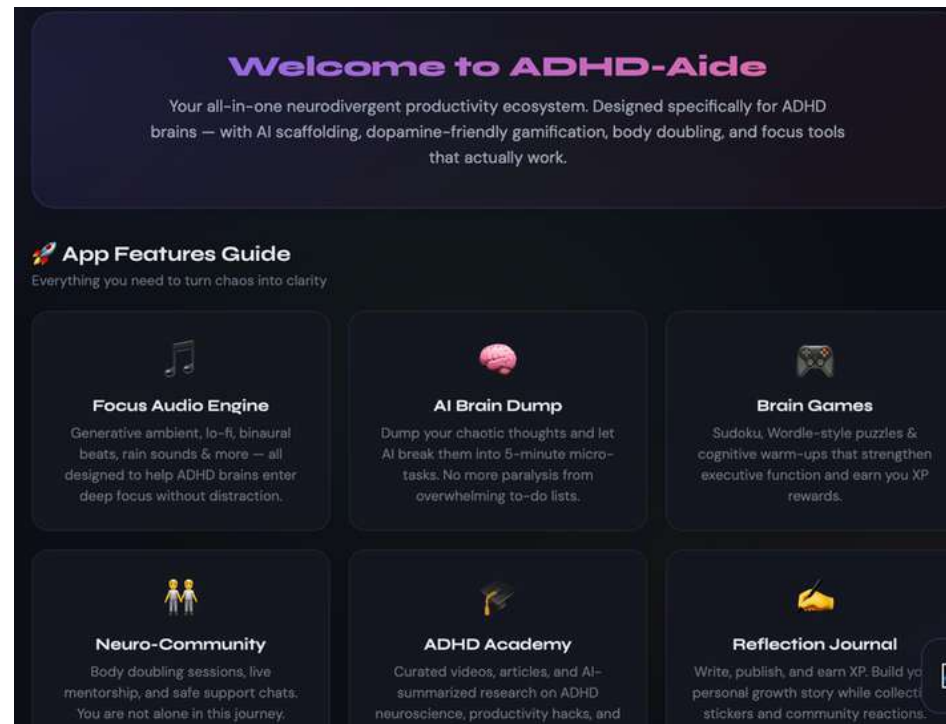
- Validated the solution directly with farming communities.
- Reached approximately 100 farmers during initial testing.
- Improved accessibility through local-language integration.
- Demonstrated technology's potential to strengthen food security and climate resilience.

WHAT THEY NEED TO SCALE

- Expand field testing to additional communities.
- Strengthen AI capabilities and data accuracy.
- Build partnerships with agricultural institutions.
- Secure funding to scale the platform nationally.

Project: ADHD-Aide (Azerbaijan)

#YCM Challenge 2026 – Case Study of a Pre-incubated Project



- ➡ **PROBLEM:** People living with ADHD often struggle to access affordable, practical, and integrated support that combines productivity tools, education, and community in one place.
- ➡ **SOLUTION:** ADHD-Aide is a digital platform designed to empower people with ADHD through personalised support tools, educational resources, AI-assisted features, and peer connection.
- ➡ **TARGET:** Young people and adults with ADHD seeking accessible daily support.
- ➡ **MVP:** A web platform including AI Brain Dump, focus music, ADHD Academy, and community features, tested with an initial group of users.

WHAT THEY HAVE ACHIEVED

- Developed a functional platform tailored to real user needs.
- Validated the concept through early user testing.
- Improved features based on direct community feedback.
- Created an accessible support ecosystem for neurodivergent individuals.

WHAT THEY NEED TO SCALE

- Expand the user community.
- Continue feature development.
- Build partnerships with healthcare professionals and ADHD organisations.
- Prepare for a broader public launch.

Project: Teens4Forest (Nigeria)

#YCM Challenge 2026 – Case Study of a Pre-incubated Project



- ➡ **PROBLEM:** Young people are deeply affected by climate change but are often excluded from meaningful environmental decision-making and action.
- ➡ **SOLUTION:** Teens4Forest empowers young people to become environmental leaders through education, tree planting, and community-led conservation initiatives.
- ➡ **TARGET:** Teenagers, schools, and local communities committed to environmental sustainability.
- ➡ **MVP:** Pilot awareness campaigns and hands-on environmental activities led by young volunteers.

WHAT THEY HAVE ACHIEVED

- Mobilised youth to take direct climate action.
- Increased environmental awareness within local communities.
- Demonstrated the power of youth-led conservation initiatives.
- Built a growing network of young environmental advocates.

WHAT THEY NEED TO SCALE

- Expand activities to additional schools and communities.
- Strengthen partnerships with environmental organisations.
- Secure funding for larger conservation projects.
- Increase long-term community engagement.

Project: Grassroot Climate Warriors (Uganda)

#YCM Challenge 2026 – Case Study of a Pre-incubated Project



- ➡ **PROBLEM:** Many households rely on firewood and charcoal for cooking, contributing to deforestation, air pollution, and the inefficient use of agricultural waste.
- ➡ **SOLUTION:** Grassroot Climate Warriors produces cleaner eco-briquettes made from agricultural waste, providing a sustainable alternative to traditional cooking fuels.
- ➡ **TARGET:** Households and communities seeking affordable, cleaner, and more sustainable cooking fuel.
- ➡ **MVP:** Eco-briquettes produced from locally sourced agricultural waste and tested with early users.

WHAT THEY HAVE ACHIEVED

- Developed eco-briquettes using agricultural waste.
- Validated the product with early users.
- Demonstrated a sustainable alternative to traditional cooking fuels.
- Promoted waste reduction and cleaner energy solutions.

WHAT THEY NEED TO SCALE

- Scale production capacity.
- Expand distribution to reach more communities.
- Build partnerships with local organisations and retailers.
- Secure funding to grow the business.

Project: GreenPack Eco Solutions (Ghana)

#YCM Challenge 2026 – Case Study of a Pre-incubated Project



- ➡ **PROBLEM:** Plastic packaging continues to generate significant environmental pollution, while sustainable alternatives remain inaccessible or unaffordable for many businesses.
- ➡ **SOLUTION:** GreenPack Eco Solutions develops environmentally friendly packaging that helps businesses reduce plastic waste without compromising affordability or functionality.
- ➡ **TARGET:** Small businesses, retailers, and environmentally conscious consumers.
- ➡ **MVP:** Sustainable packaging prototypes developed and tested with potential customers.

WHAT THEY HAVE ACHIEVED

- Demonstrated demand for eco-friendly packaging solutions.
- Refined product designs based on customer feedback.
- Validated the business model for a circular economy solution.
- Positioned the venture to contribute to waste reduction and responsible consumption.

WHAT THEY NEED TO SCALE

- Move into pilot production.
- Build manufacturing partnerships.
- Expand market validation.
- Raise investment to scale production and increase environmental impact.

Project: Tsenam Eggs (Cameroon)

#YCM Challenge 2026 – Case Study of a Pre-incubated Project



- ➔ **PROBLEM:** Many local poultry farmers lack affordable packaging that protects eggs during transport, leading to breakages and financial losses.
- ➔ **SOLUTION:** Tsenam Eggs develops shock-absorbent egg crates that reduce egg damage while supporting local poultry producers.
- ➔ **TARGET:** Local poultry farmers, egg distributors, and small agricultural businesses.
- ➔ **MVP:** A prototype of a shock-absorbent egg crate, currently being refined and tested alongside the development of a production machine.

WHAT THEY HAVE ACHIEVED

- Designed an innovative egg crate for local poultry farmers.
- Built a machine to support product manufacturing.
- Conducted prototype testing and product refinement.
- Validated the solution's potential to reduce egg losses.

WHAT THEY NEED TO SCALE

- Complete machine development.
- Expand product testing with poultry farmers.
- Scale manufacturing capacity.
- Secure funding to launch and commercialise the product.

The Opportunity Ahead

Every year, young changemakers develop solutions that address pressing local and global challenges, from climate resilience and sustainable agriculture to healthcare, education, and inclusive technology.

What they often lack is not motivation or ideas, but **the ecosystem needed to transform early initiatives into sustainable impact ventures.**

By investing earlier, connecting ecosystem actors, and providing continuous support, we can unlock the enormous potential of young people to become the entrepreneurs, innovators, and leaders our societies need.

The challenge is not creating more ideas, it is creating more opportunities for those ideas to thrive.

Innovation
Impact Sustainability
Empowerment Action
Leadership Entrepreneurship
Opportunity Mentorship
Purpose Collaboration
Youth Inclusion
Changemakers

Building the Bridge Together

Let's build an ecosystem where every young changemaker has the opportunity to make an impact!



Want to learn more or continue the conversation?

Discover typical projects and the impact they are creating by visiting our website
ycmchallenge.org!

For questions or more information about the #YCM approach and our global study,
contact us at:
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