CASCADOR

Cascador Whitepaper

THE MULTIPLIER MODEL

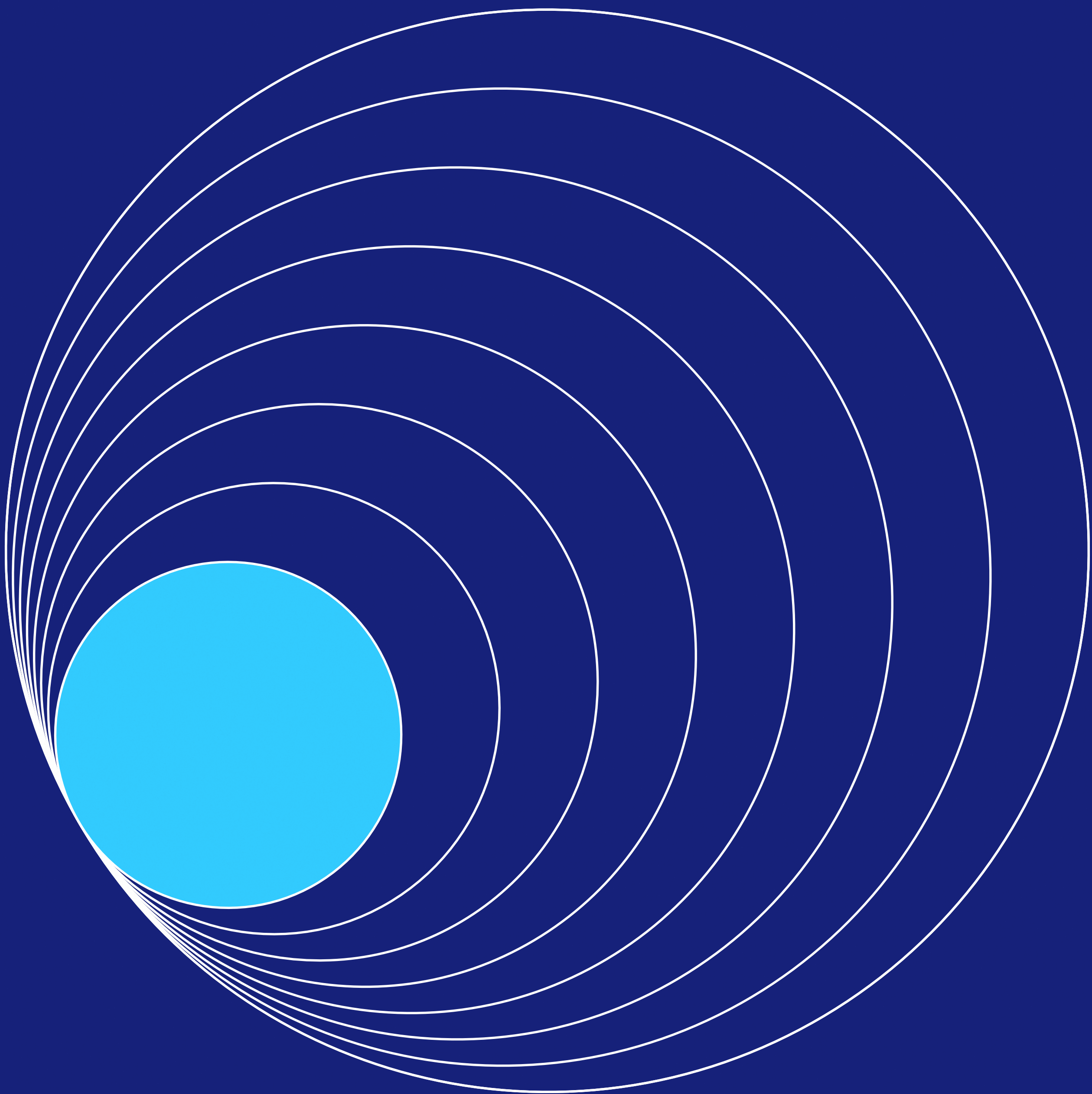


Table of Contents

Foreword

The difference between a venture that endures and one that stalls is rarely the size of the cheque it received. It is the quality of the judgement applied to it. The thousand daily decisions a founder makes about where to spend, what to build, whom to hire, when to hold, and when to move. Capital may be an input to those decisions, but it cannot substitute for them.

This is not a comfortable position to hold in an industry organised almost entirely around deploying capital. It implies that a great deal of well-intentioned funding produces less than it should, not because there is too little of it, but because it arrives in the hands of founders who have not yet been equipped to multiply it. Cascador's interventions reflect the conviction that this is the binding constraint, and that it can be addressed directly.

We have now been operating on that conviction long enough to set out the model in full: what we select for, how we decide, where capital goes and why, and what we have learned from the founders who have been through it. This whitepaper is that account. It is not a prospectus and it is not a case for support. It sets out a position, and we are publishing it because a position of this kind is better held in the open, where it can be tested and examined, than asserted quietly.

We ask one thing of the reader: test it. Set what follows against your own experience of how capital moves through African markets and what it produces when it lands. If our diagnosis is right, then the implications extend well beyond Cascador, and there is a great deal of work to do.

The Multiplier Model is simple:
Build founders who multiply capital, not just raise it.

01
SELECT
Identify founders with exceptional capacity to learn.

02
DEVELOP
Build founder capability through mentoring, peer learning, and practical support.

03
FUND
Provide the right capital, at the right time, and in the right structure for each business.

04
INVEST
Strengthen the wider ecosystem through relationships, governance, and shared infrastructure.

Capital is abundant, Multipliers are not.
Our edge is building the few who become many.

1

The Landscape: African Entrepreneurship and the Ecosystem Gap

Africa's entrepreneurial ecosystem has grown substantially over the past decade, helped by a rising flow of domestic and international capital. But growth in the supply of capital has outpaced growth in the ecosystem's ability to allocate it well. The result is a continent that has become markedly better at financing early entrepreneurial activity, and not yet as good at converting that activity into scalable, enduring companies.

1.1 Capital has become more available in Africa

Capital has become markedly more available to early- and growth-stage African firms over the last decade. Private capital deal volumes rose from 370 transactions in 2019 to 957 in 2025, according to the Stears Private Capital Database. Venture funding shows the same trajectory: total VC funding in Africa grew from $2.37 billion to $4.06 billion over the same period, and Series A deal value nearly tripled, from $208 million in 2018 to $611 million in 2025, per Partech's 2025 Africa Tech Venture Capital Report.

1.2 Capital availability has not led to business scalability

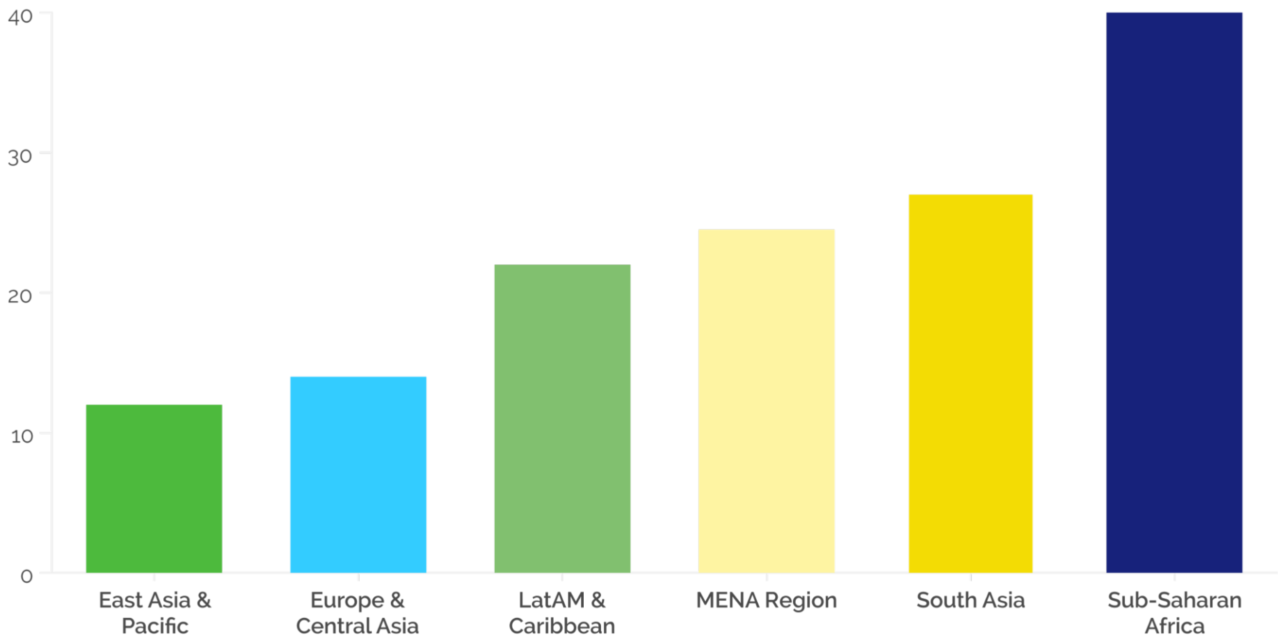
More capital is required, but it is not the objective in itself. The real test is whether it helps businesses scale, generates sustainable returns, and strengthens the ecosystem over time, and on that test, the evidence is mixed. The first signal is that businesses still describe finance as a binding constraint. World Bank Enterprise Survey data shows that

> **40.4% of firms in Sub-Saharan Africa identify access to finance as a major or severe constraint, against a global average of 22.9%.**

In Nigeria and Kenya, more firms cite it as a major obstacle today than a decade ago.

African firms still cite access to finance as a constraint.

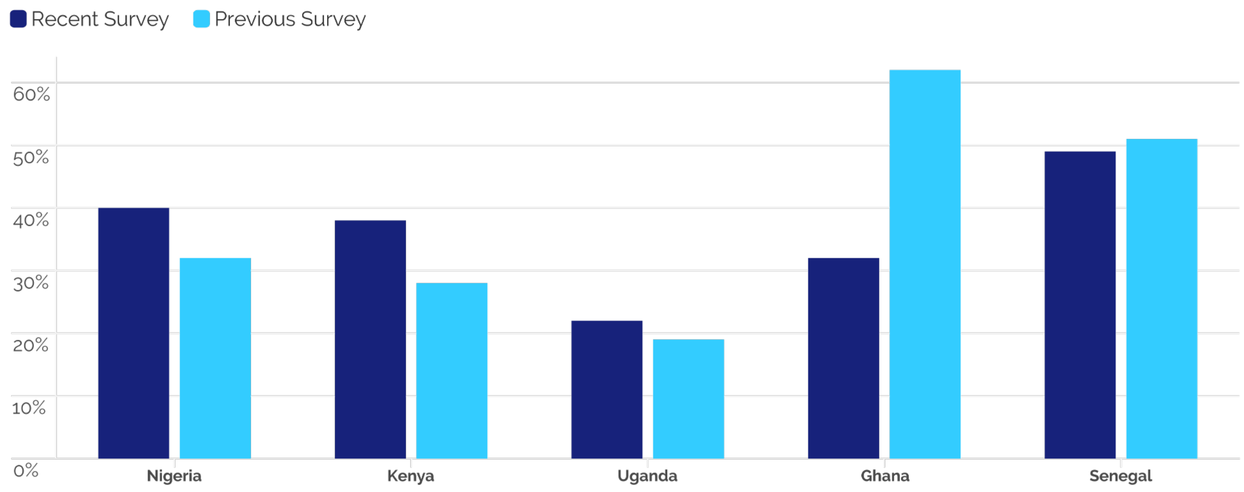
Percentage of firms identifying access to finance as a major or very severe constraint



Source: World Bank Enterprise Survey (2025)

Self-reported capital barriers may be worsening in some countries.

Percentage of firms identifying access to finance as a major or very severe constraint



Source: World Bank Enterprise Survey (2014-2025)

The second crucial signal is conversion. Partech's data on startup progression shows fewer companies advancing from one funding stage to the next, and those that do taking longer to get there.

> **Of the 2019 seed-funded cohort, 12.7% reached Series A within two years; for the 2024 cohort, that figure had fallen to 3.8%.**

The average gap between Series A and Series B has widened from seven quarters in 2020 to twelve in 2025, even as fewer Series A companies make that jump at all.

Some of this reflects the natural cooling of a venture cycle that ran hot earlier in the decade. But cyclical explanations do not account for the scale or the direction of the shift. What remains, once cyclicality is allowed for, is a pattern of capital availability outpacing allocative efficiency.

We do not read this as evidence that more capital is the wrong goal. Africa's funding ecosystem has, over the past decade, become genuinely better at initiating ventures.

What it has not yet become equally good at is identifying which founders can convert that early activity into durable growth, preparing them to do so, and matching them with capital structured for what their businesses actually need.

From what we have observed directly, the allocation problem shows up in two related but distinct ways. The first concerns how capital is structured: businesses frequently receive funding whose instrument, terms, or currency do not fit the underlying need. The second concerns how risk is managed: the mechanisms that protect capital providers do not always leave the business any stronger or more investable than before. Neither is a claim that the market is functioning badly across the board. In large parts of it, capital is well matched to need. But in specific, identifiable segments, the misalignment is significant enough to explain a meaningful share of the gap between capital deployed and value created.

1.3 Providing capital that fits the business

Only 22%

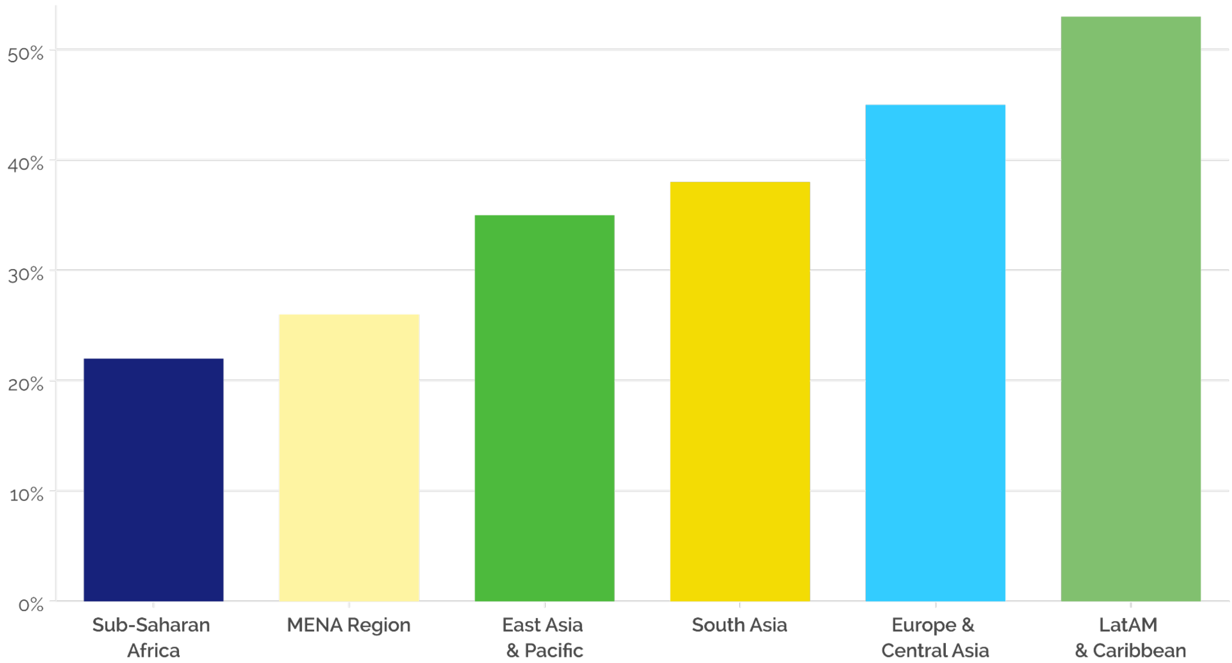
of Sub-Saharan African firms hold a bank loan or line of credit, against a global average of 36.3%.

Much of this instrument mismatch traces back to a single, well-documented gap: debt has been far harder to access in Africa than equity, so businesses that need debt are frequently pushed toward equity instead.

Only 22.5% of Sub-Saharan African firms hold a bank loan or line of credit, against a global average of 36.3%. This gap persists even though the survey sample includes large firms, which are typically less credit-constrained than SMEs. The IFC's estimate of Africa's MSME finance gap, at 19%, is roughly in line with the global average; what is not in line is how constrained African MSMEs are within that gap. Half are partially or fully credit-constrained, the highest rate of any region measured.

Fewer African firms can reliably access bank loans or credit lines

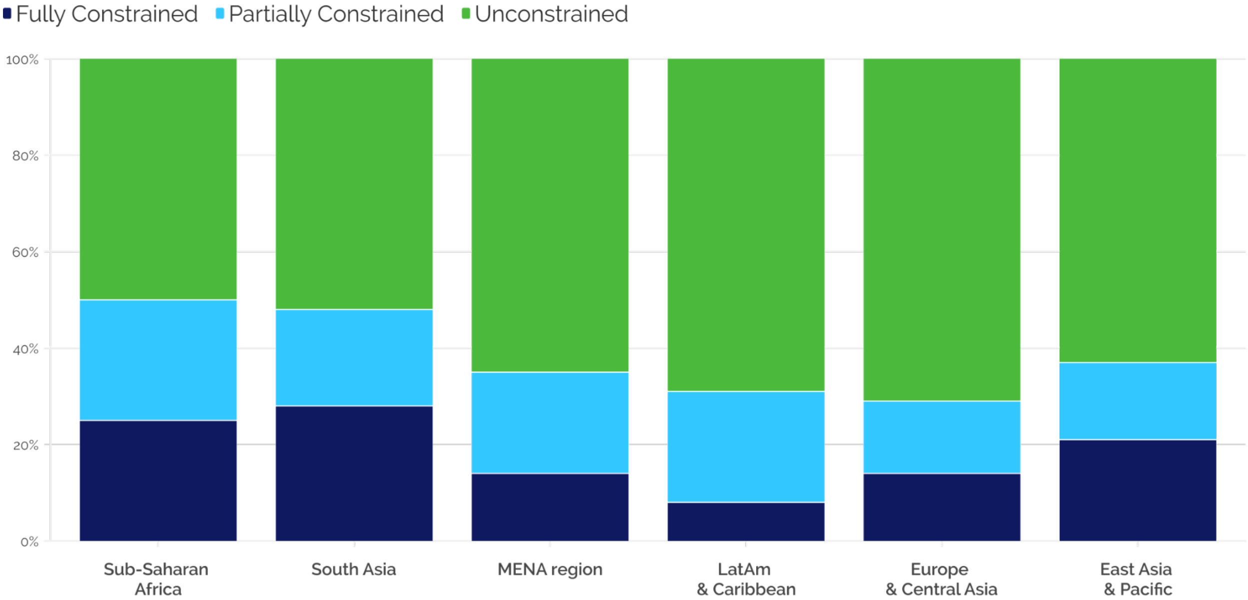
Percentage of firms with a line of credit.



Source: World Bank Enterprise Survey (2025)

Sub-Saharan African firms are more credit-constrained than their peers

Percentage of firms with a line of credit.

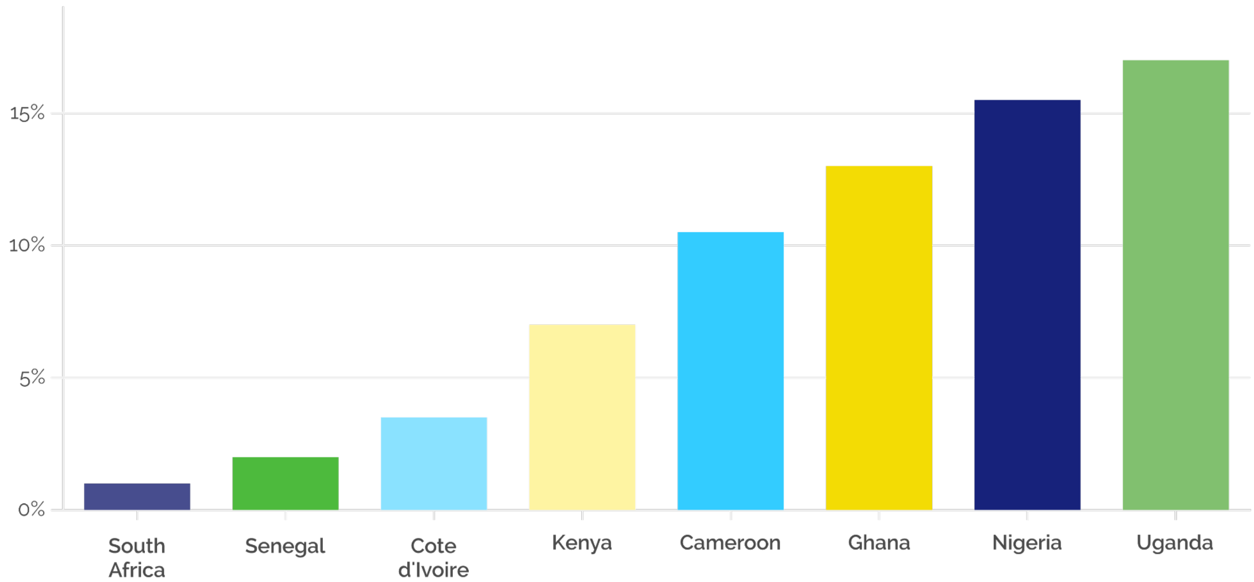


Source: International Finance Corporation MSME Finance Gap Report

> The consequence is predictable:
> **African businesses finance a larger share of investment through equity than the global norm (8.1%, against 5.8% globally) not because equity is the right instrument, but because debt is the unavailable one.**

African firms disproportionately rely on equity for financing

Average proportion of investment financed by equity or stock sales (%)



Source: World Bank Enterprise Survey (2025)

This matters most where the underlying need is working capital, which equity is poorly designed to finance.

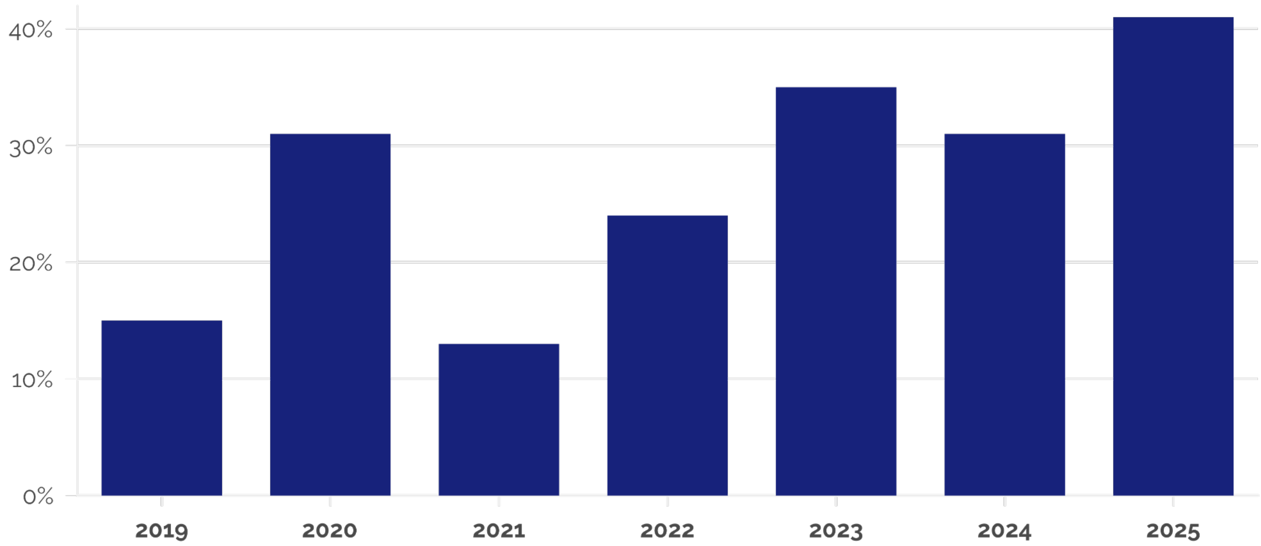
A 2024 PwC survey of Nigerian MSMEs found working capital to be the single most commonly cited external financing need, reported by 40% of firms seeking funding. Yet only 6.7% of working capital in Sub-Saharan Africa is bank-financed, against a global average of 9.5%, and in Nigeria, just 1.9%

Businesses with a self-liquidating, short-cycle need are, in large numbers, financing it with permanent capital instead.

There is a genuine correction underway. Debt's share of African venture funding rose from 14.8% in 2019 to 40.5% in 2025. The market is, belatedly, recognising what scaling businesses actually need.

Debt is becoming an increasingly important part of the venture mix

Percentage of firms with a line of credit.



Source: World Bank Enterprise Survey (2025)

Our reading of why the gap persisted this long is that capital allocation in the region has been more supply-driven than demand-driven: shaped by what investors and financiers are mandated to deploy, rather than by what the business in front of them requires. The growth of African VC has been an unambiguous good for the ecosystem. The distortion is not VC's existence but its gravitational pull, i.e. a financing environment where venture funding dominates tends to encourage every pre-scale business to present itself as a startup, whether or not that is the shape its financing needs actually take.

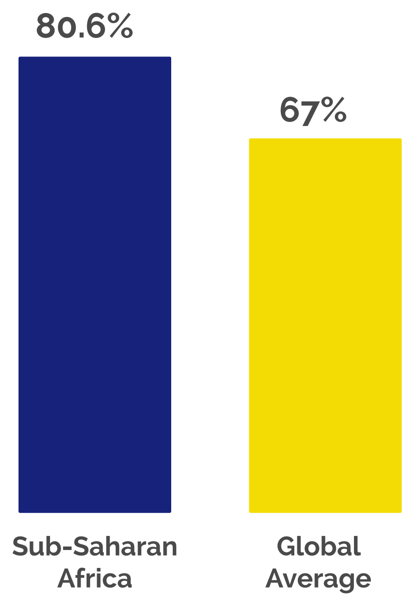
The same dynamic shows up in currency. Much of the funding available to African businesses is dollar-denominated, because that is the currency in which their investors raise and deploy, not because dollar exposure suits the underlying business. Local-currency alternatives exist but remain rare; Growth Investment Partners' work in Ghana and Zambia is a notable exception rather than the norm.

1.4 Managing the risk of capital effectively

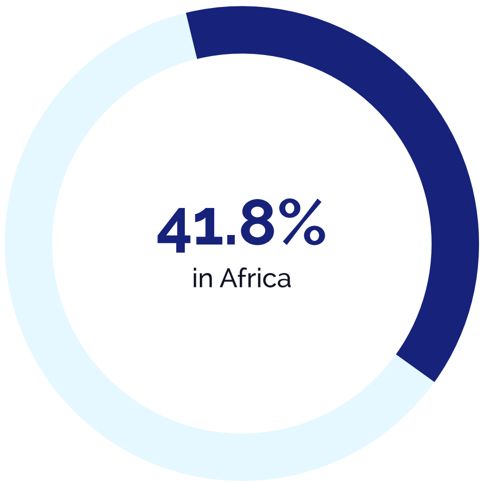
Fit alone is not sufficient. Capital that is well matched to a business still depends on how its risk is managed, and how that risk is managed shapes, more than almost any other factor, whether the business ultimately succeeds.

Debt providers typically manage risk through collateral, higher interest rates, and strict lending procedures. These protect the lender, but in African markets they also exclude a large number of businesses that could use credit productively. 80.6% of business loans in Sub-Saharan Africa require collateral, against a global average of 67%, and 41.8% of firms cite unfavourable rates, collateral requirements, or lending procedures as the reason they did not apply for a loan at all, against 23.9% globally.

80.6% **of business loans**
in Sub-Saharan Africa require collateral, against a global average of 67%.



African credit markets exclude more businesses



of firms cite unfavourable rates, collateral requirements, or lending procedures as the reason they did not apply for a loan.

of firms globally cite the same reasons for not applying.

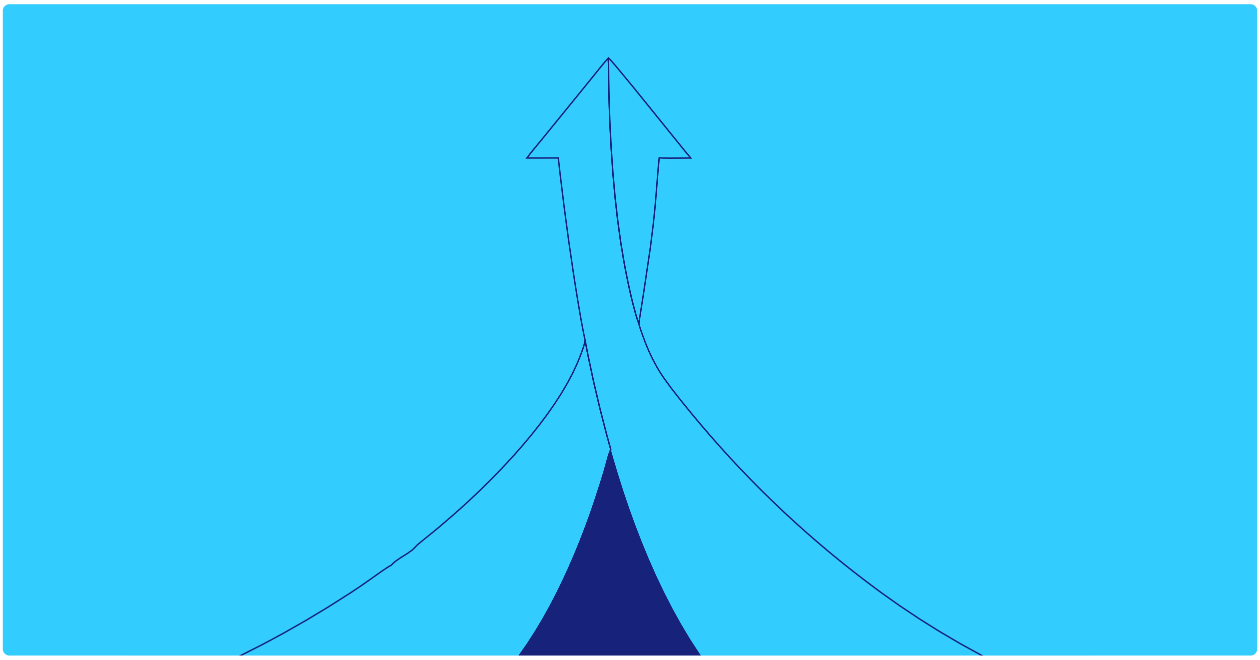
Venture capital manages risk by spreading it across a portfolio, expecting a small number of exceptional outcomes to compensate for the rest. This is well suited to high-growth technology businesses and poorly suited to real-economy businesses with steadier growth, greater asset intensity, and fewer venture-style exit paths. Grant funders absorb risk that commercial investors are unwilling to take on, which is valuable precisely where a business is not yet commercially investable, but it is a mechanism built for that stage, not for what comes after it.

Each of these approaches is a reasonable response to a genuine problem, and each has built the market it was designed for. What none of them does, by itself, is reduce the risk inside the business. They price it, spread it, or absorb it, without necessarily leaving the founder better equipped to deploy capital or the company stronger positioned to take on more of it.

This is the question Cascador starts from.

> **Rather than asking how capital providers can become more comfortable funding risk, we ask how a business can become less risky before capital reaches it.**

1.5 Two gaps, one response



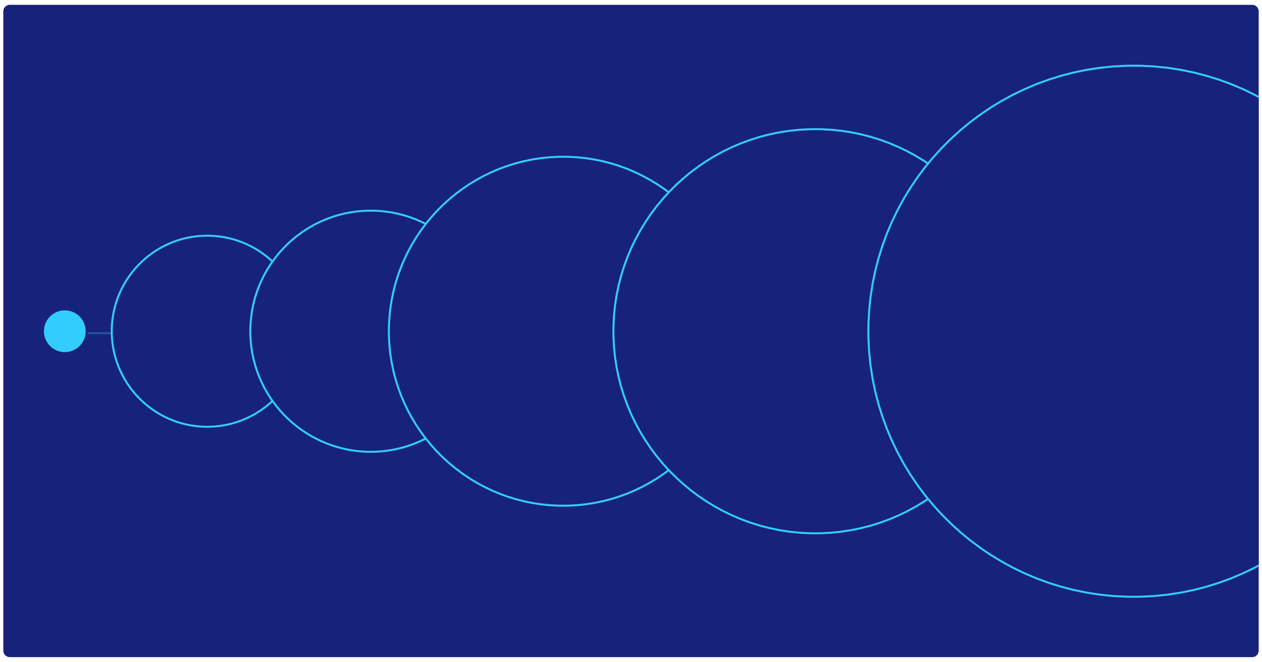
Two threads run through this section, and it is worth drawing them together before turning to how Cascador responds. The first is that a meaningful segment of African businesses receive capital poorly structured for their actual needs. The wrong instrument, the wrong currency, terms shaped by what investors are mandated to deploy rather than by what the business requires. The second, which the data available for this section speaks to less directly but which our own experience across the portfolio confirms, is that many founders are not yet equipped to identify what they need, negotiate for it, or use it well once it arrives, which is a gap in capability and preparation that compounds the structuring problem rather than sitting apart from it.

Neither claim amounts to a verdict on the ecosystem as a whole. Large parts of the market allocate capital sensibly, and most institutions within it are doing exactly what they are built to do. But in the specific segments where these two gaps overlap, where a business is both underprepared and poorly matched to the capital available to it, the result is a meaningful and avoidable loss of value. Addressing both is the premise of the model this paper now turns to describe.

2

Cascador's Theory of Change

2.1 Cascador's founding belief



Cascador was built to respond to both gaps described above: capital that is poorly structured for the businesses it reaches, and founders not yet equipped to identify what they need or use it well once it arrives.

> **Africa's challenge is increasingly one of allocation rather than availability.**

Capital is no longer as scarce as it once was, though it remains, like every resource, limited. So are experienced mentors, management expertise, commercial networks, governance support, and the time of entrepreneurs themselves. The question this raises is not how to mobilise more of these resources, but how to ensure the resources that exist reach the businesses positioned to create the greatest long-term value from them.

Cascador's starting point is that stronger entrepreneurial ecosystems are not built by increasing the supply of capital alone, but by improving how capital and every other critical resource is allocated. Matching the right businesses to the right combination of capital, knowledge, relationships, and support, at the right stage of their development.

At its heart, Cascador is a model for improving allocative efficiency within Africa's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

We believe that long-term economic transformation depends on directing scarce resources towards businesses that will generate the greatest return from them. These resources include founder development, strategic advice, governance, commercial networks, technical expertise, and investor capital. When matched to businesses that can absorb and apply them effectively, their impact compounds over time. When allocated poorly, even substantial investment can produce limited results.

> This shifts the central question from **"How do we support more entrepreneurs?" to "How do we identify the entrepreneurs who will create the greatest value from additional resources, and how do we help them maximise that potential?"**

Cascador's answer is built around three simple ideas.

First, better allocation creates better outcomes. More capital, training, or support will not automatically produce more successful businesses. What matters is ensuring that scarce resources reach the entrepreneurs who can create the greatest long-term value from them.

Second, the sequence matters. Capital deployed too early can become a burden rather than an accelerator, while knowledge shared without practical implementation rarely changes behaviour. Entrepreneurs should first be identified, challenged, strengthened, and prepared before receiving capital. **Founder readiness comes before capital readiness, and capital readiness comes before capital deployment.**

Third, support should fit the business. Every business has different financing needs, growth paths, capabilities, and ambitions. Cascador therefore follows a founder-led rather than fund-led approach, tailoring both capital and non-capital support to the needs of each business. This shapes the advisers founders are matched with, the challenges they work on during mentoring, and the type and timing of capital they eventually receive. The objective is to prepare each company for, among other things, its next financing need, whether that means commercial debt, institutional equity, strategic investment, or the point where it can finance future growth itself.

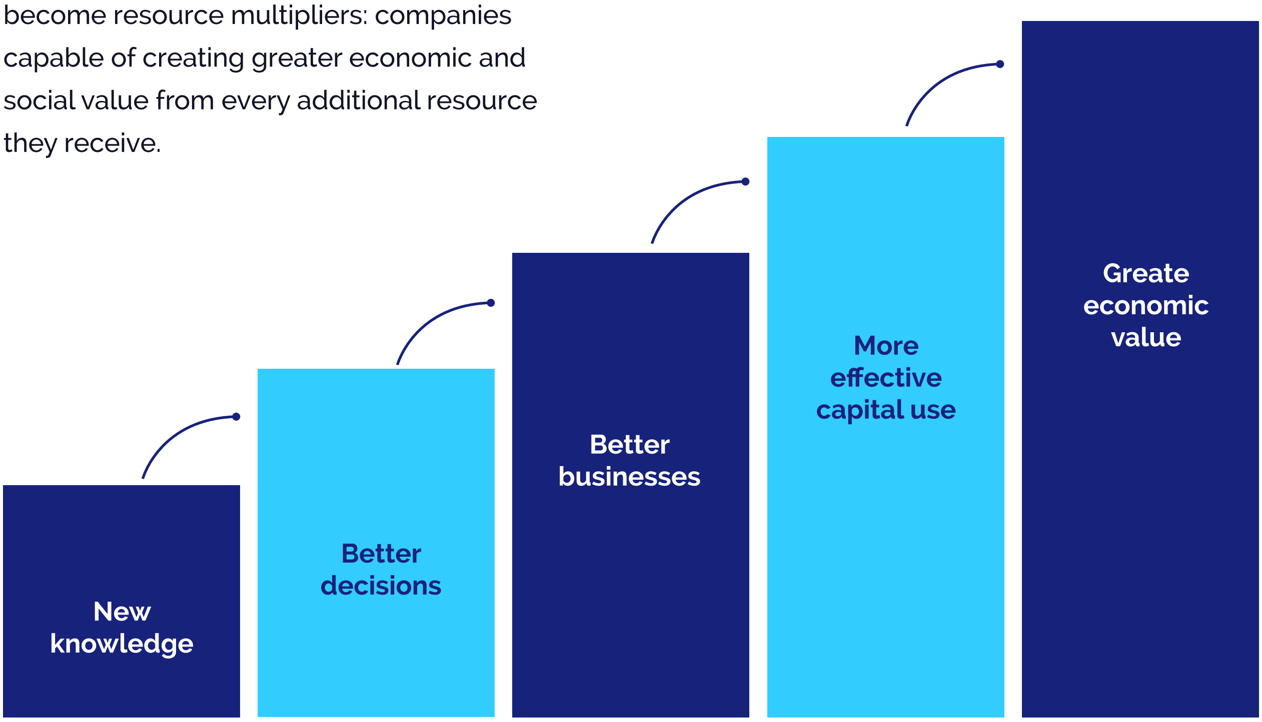
> **At the centre of these ideas is the founder.**

For us, founder development is not an end in itself. It is Cascador's primary mechanism for improving capital allocation. The stronger the founder, the more effectively every subsequent resource, funding, talent, partnerships, advice, can be converted into business growth. Improving the founder increases the productivity of every resource that follows.

We believe that the founders who create the greatest long-term value are not necessarily those who know the most at the beginning. They are the ones who continue learning as their businesses become more complex. Every new stage of growth presents unfamiliar decisions, whether around hiring, governance, financing, operations, or market expansion. Founders who consistently absorb new ideas, adapt their thinking, and apply those lessons in practice are better positioned to allocate resources effectively as their businesses evolve.

We call these entrepreneurs learning multipliers.

Learning multipliers absorb ideas, challenge their assumptions, seek feedback, and consistently translate new knowledge into better decisions. Better decisions improve the business. Better businesses use capital more effectively. Over time, the businesses they lead become resource multipliers: companies capable of creating greater economic and social value from every additional resource they receive.



2.1 How the theory of change works

Cascador's model follows four connected steps, each explained in full in Section 3

1. Select learning multipliers

The first step is identifying founders with exceptional capacity to learn. This goes beyond evaluating today's business performance. Cascador looks for coachability, intellectual curiosity, clarity of thought, resilience, commercial judgement, and a willingness to challenge existing assumptions. These are qualities that are difficult to measure through applications alone, which is why founder selection extends well beyond the initial screening process.

2. Develop learning multipliers

Selection alone does not create stronger businesses. Cascador invests heavily in founder development through mentoring, advisory support, leadership development, peer learning, governance support, and practical problem-solving, diagnosing the constraints facing each business rather than delivering standardised entrepreneurship education.

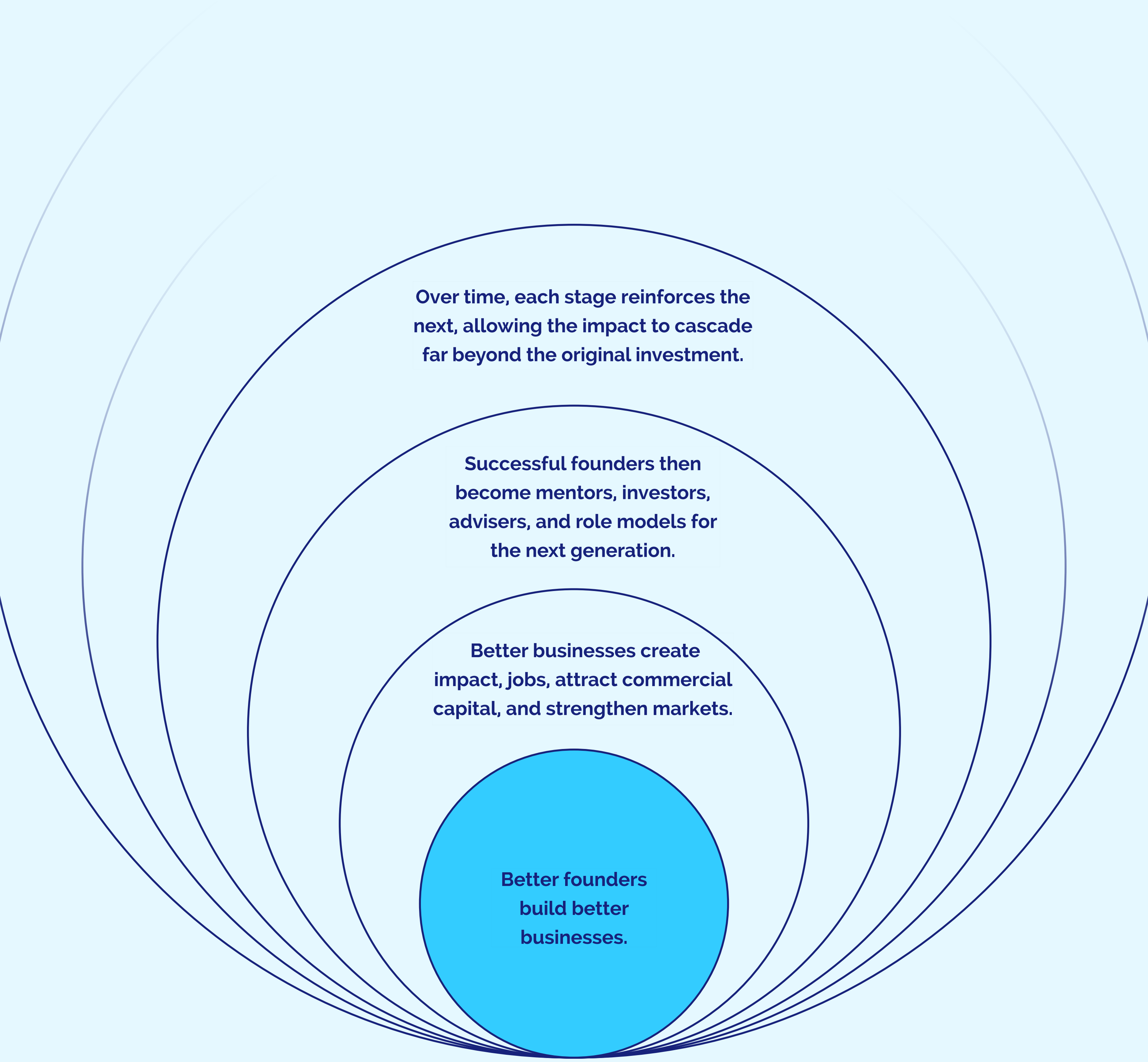
3. Fund resource multipliers

We provide capital only once we believe the founder and the company are ready. That means deciding what type of capital is appropriate, when it should be provided, and how it should be structured. One business may need debt rather than equity; another may need local-currency financing, patient capital, or stronger governance before it is ready for external funding at all.

4. Invest in strategic ecosystem nodes

Even exceptional founders cannot solve every problem alone. Cascador invests beyond individual founders by building long-term adviser relationships, strengthening boards and governance, developing an active alumni community, and selectively supporting ecosystem infrastructure that removes bottlenecks affecting many businesses rather than one.

The name Cascador, taken from the word "Cascade" (relating to events occurring in progressive stages), reflects this philosophy. Change should not stop with one entrepreneur or one investment. Better founders build better businesses. Better businesses create impact, jobs, attract commercial capital, and strengthen markets. Successful founders then become mentors, investors, advisers, and role models for the next generation. Over time, each stage reinforces the next, allowing the impact to cascade far beyond the original investment.



3

Cascador's Multiplier Framework

Cascador's Multiplier Framework

1 Screening

We identify founders with exceptional capacity to learn and grow, using a layered, evidence-based assessment process.

BY THE END OF THIS STAGE, WE EXPECT TO SEE:

- Clear founder potential and programme fit.
- Deep understanding of the business and key gaps.
- High-potential founders ready for the next stage.

2 Founder Development

We build founders' capability through executive education, hands-on support and tailored advisory, focused on their real-world challenges.

BY THE END OF THIS STAGE, WE EXPECT TO SEE:

- Stronger leadership and decision-making.
- Actionable plans to address key business gaps.
- Founders better prepared to use capital effectively.

3 Capital Readiness

We work with founders to strengthen their business fundamentals, systems and investor readiness, so they can use capital effectively.

BY THE END OF THIS STAGE, WE EXPECT TO SEE:

- Stronger, investable businesses.
- Investment-ready materials and financial models.
- Founders ready to engage investors.

4 Capital Deployment

We deploy the right capital, with the right structure, at the right time, aligned to each business's needs and growth plan.

BY THE END OF THIS STAGE, WE EXPECT TO SEE:

- Capital structured around business needs.
- Clear value creation and milestones.
- Support through early deployment.

5 Stewardship

We stay engaged after investment, providing continued support, connections and accountability to help founders scale enduringly.

BY THE END OF THIS STAGE, WE EXPECT TO SEE:

- Continued growth and resilience.
- Strategic networks and follow-on opportunities.
- Lasting impact across the ecosystem.

3.1 Screening: Identifying learning multipliers

Cascador Kick-Off Week 2025

Cascador's approach begins well before founders enter the programme. Screening is not designed simply to identify promising businesses; it is designed to identify founders most likely to convert learning into sustained growth, which reflects our broader conviction that better allocation starts with understanding the founder as closely as the business.

We build that understanding through layered assessment rather than a single application or interview, with each stage reducing uncertainty and sharpening our view of where support is likely to matter most.

Cascador deliberately focuses on growth-stage businesses. Companies that have moved past proving demand and are now facing the harder problem of scaling. This focus lets us tailor curriculum, advisers, and capital to founders working through a broadly similar set of challenges, rather than spreading the programme thin across every stage at once.

The screening process runs through four stages:

1. **Initial application:** founders submit basic information about themselves and their business, to establish eligibility and fit with the profile the programme is built to support.

2. **Detailed application:** shortlisted applicants complete a fuller submission sufficient to build a real picture of the business (Business model, financial performance, market opportunity, leadership team, growth plans).

3. **Structured assessment:** applications are scored against an evidence-based framework covering commercial viability, results, founder capability, team strength, impact, and programme fit. A first-principles grounded approach keeps assessment consistent across applicants while still leaving room for reviewer judgement where it matters.

4. **Financial review and founder interviews:** businesses that clear the paper review undergo deeper financial assessment and sit with the selection panel. These conversations surface what an application form cannot. Unit economics, how a founder reasons through a problem, responds to challenge, and communicates the vision and self-awareness that leading a growing organisation requires.

Cascador Scoring Rubric

Criterion	What it means
Impact	The social or economic value the business creates, including jobs and value delivered to customers or communities.
Business viability	Whether the value proposition is credible, defensible, and supported by a sufficiently attractive market.
Founder (CEO)	The founder's experience, clarity of thought, leadership capability, and openness to learning.
Team	Whether the business has a capable, multidisciplinary team that can execute and support growth.
Traction	Evidence that the business is progressing commercially, including revenue and profit growth, margins, customers, and units sold.
Programme fit	Whether the founder's needs align with what Cascador can provide and whether the business fits the wider cohort.
Financial strength	The quality and resilience of the company's financial position, based on the information submitted and subsequent review.

Selection and diligence happen simultaneously by design. The screening stage is not only deciding which founders join; it is building an understanding of what each business will need if they do.

This reflects a pattern we have observed directly across cohorts: judgement, behaviour under pressure, and the capacity to learn are far more visible over sustained contact than in a single application or pitch. A founder's response to a difficult question in one interview tells us less than how they have actually changed their thinking over several conversations. Cascador therefore treats founder selection as an ongoing process that runs through the full screening sequence, not a single decision made at any one point in it.

Over the course of the programme, every founder completes a 360-degree holistic business assessment spanning strategy, leadership, finance, operations, branding, messaging, revenue generation, compliance, governance, and organisational capability. This gives us a clear view of where each business is strong, where it is exposed, and what is most likely to hold back its growth. Actionable recommendations address not only the steps required to prepare for scale, but also the prioritization, time, and cost associated with each initiative. Determinations of the diagnostic team then shape the mentoring, advisory support, and executive education that follow.

By the end of the comprehensive analysis, we have two things: an understanding of each company's genuine potential and capacity to develop, and a clear, actionable list of each company's priorities, so that support is tailored rather than standardised across the cohort.

3.2 Founder Development

Cascador Kick-Off Week 2025

We select founders because we believe they have the potential to build companies of lasting value. But selection is only the beginning. Once we understand where each founder and business is strong, where they are exposed, and what could hold them back, we get to work. We challenge their thinking, sharpen their judgement, and help them build the discipline required to lead a stronger business. That is how learning potential becomes better execution, and how founders become better prepared to use capital when it comes.

Our approach is built on a simple observation. Most entrepreneurs do not struggle because they lack access to business information. They struggle because applying that knowledge consistently inside a growing business is difficult. As companies scale, founders face increasingly complex decisions around leadership, strategy, governance, finance, talent, and execution.

Rather than delivering a standard curriculum, we combine executive education, hands-on training, diagnostics, mentoring, specialist expertise, and practical implementation support. The emphasis is on helping founders solve the problems inside their own businesses rather than simply teaching business principles.

- **Executive education and implementation:** the programme combines structured learning with intensive residential sessions where founders step away from the day-to-day demands of running their businesses. Time to reflect on strategy, challenge existing assumptions, and work on the business rather than constantly working in it. Cascador initially placed greater emphasis on classroom learning, but found that lasting change required repetition, accountability, and guided implementation.

- **Leadership development and self-awareness:** Cascador develops the founder as an individual, not only as a business operator. Behavioural assessments help founders understand their leadership style, communication preferences, and team dynamics. These are capabilities that shape how founders lead teams, build organisations, and make decisions.

- **Mentoring and specialist advisers:** every founder is paired with experienced mentors who challenge assumptions, ask difficult questions, and hold founders accountable through important strategic decisions. Founders also gain access to specialists in finance, legal matters, governance, operations, and strategy, brought in against specific business challenges.

- **Peer learning:** founders progress through the programme as a small cohort facing similar scaling challenges, testing ideas in a trusted environment and building relationships that often continue well beyond the programme. Several alumni identified these peer relationships as one of the programme's most valuable features.
- **Continued support:** founder development does not end when the residential programme concludes. Participants continue receiving mentoring and support as they implement changes inside their businesses, recognising that meaningful organisational change happens over time.

This mirrors something we have learned directly through running the programme: generic training changes what a founder knows far more readily than it changes what a founder does. Tailored intervention, aimed at the specific problem inside a specific business, is what shifts behaviour. Cascador's programme has evolved in exactly this direction, with each cohort leading to refinements in curriculum, diagnostics, adviser support, and follow-on mentoring.

By the end of the founder development stage, we expect to see three things:

1. Founders with greater strategic clarity, stronger leadership capability, and more commercial discipline.
2. Businesses that have begun addressing the operational, governance, and organisational constraints identified during diagnosis.
3. Companies that are better prepared to absorb external resources and convert them effectively when the time is right.

3.3 Capital Readiness

Founder development prepares entrepreneurs to build stronger businesses. Capital readiness prepares those businesses to use external funding effectively. The objective is not simply to help founders raise capital, but to ensure they raise the right capital, at the right time, on terms that support rather than constrain long-term growth.

Cascador Founders Interview 2025

We begin with the needs of the business. What constraint is holding it back? What type of capital would address that constraint? And is the business ready to take that capital on? This reflects our conviction that capital should fit the business, rather than the business being forced to fit the capital. Capital readiness therefore goes well beyond preparing a pitch deck or making investor introductions. We focus on four areas.

- **Building financial discipline:** we help founders understand their financial performance, unit economics, cash flow, and capital requirements. This makes them more credible stewards and helps them make better strategic decisions inside the business. Several interviewees described this increased commercial discipline as one of the programme's most valuable outcomes, irrespective of whether they ultimately received funding.

- **Matching the capital to the business:** rather than assuming equity is always the answer, Cascador works with founders to determine what type of financing best addresses the company's immediate constraint. The guiding principle is simple. A need that will resolve itself through the business's own cash flow (Inventory that will sell, receivables that will be collected, or any other self-liquidating workflows) belongs in debt, priced against that cash flow. A need whose outcome is genuinely uncertain (a new market, an unproven product, a model not yet tested at scale) belongs in equity, priced against that uncertainty. Getting this backwards is expensive in ways that rarely show up on the term sheet:

> **debt against an uncertain bet imposes fixed obligations on unpredictable cash flow, while equity against a self-liquidating need dilutes a founder permanently to solve a problem that would have paid for itself.**

Depending on the business, the result may be working-capital debt, patient equity, blended structures or, in some cases, delaying fundraising altogether until the business is better prepared. This philosophy evolved directly from founder feedback: early programme participants consistently argued that debt for working capital was often more valuable than equity, and as founders' financing requirements expanded, we expanded the model to include equity where it made sense.

- **Preparing businesses for external investors:** we help founders understand how different capital providers assess businesses and what they expect around governance, financial reporting, and strategic planning, preparing companies for a wider range of commercial financing, not only Cascador funding.

- **Thinking beyond the immediate investment:** a funding decision should help the business reach its next stage of growth without weakening any other crucial capacities, fundraising prospects, or financial flexibility. **Our goal is for Cascador's capital to serve as a bridge to the business's next commercial raise, rather than a bridge to nowhere.**

By the end of the capital readiness stage, we expect to see three things:

1. Investment-ready businesses, with stronger financial discipline, governance, and commercial credibility.

2. Better capital-company fit, where the instrument and terms reflect what the business actually needs rather than what the capital provider prefers to offer.

3. A clearer funding pathway, with catalytic capital used as a bridge to future commercial finance rather than treated as the final destination.

3.4 Capital Deployment

Cascador Pitch Day 2025

Completing the programme does not guarantee Cascador funding. Only alumni can apply, either immediately after the programme or in a later year once the company and its funding needs are ready. Every application is assessed separately before we decide whether to invest.

The process begins with a funding application. The founder sets out how much capital the business needs, what it will be used for, and what it is expected to achieve. We then review the company's financial information and conduct the additional diligence required to understand the business and the proposed investment. The process ends with the founder presenting and defending the investment case.

By this point, we have already spent considerable time with the founder and developed a close understanding of the business. We know how the founder responds to difficult questions, whether they act on feedback, and how the company has changed since entering the programme. We bring that knowledge, and trust, into the investment process alongside the financial and commercial evidence.

During the review, we look at the strength of the business, the founder and management team, their proximity to the issues at hand, financial performance, evidence of demand, impact potential, and the proposed use of funds, including whether the business is in a feasible position to absorb the proposed instrument. Cascador's Investment Committee, made up of senior investment professionals, makes the final decision.

Where we decide to invest, the structure follows the needs identified during the capital readiness stage. So far, Cascador has provided debt, equity, and combinations of both, sometimes designed around a specific requirement such as asset financing. Depending on the business, this can include a lower cost of capital or other terms that give the company room to grow and make it easier to attract other investors or lenders.

Our involvement continues after the capital is deployed. We agree upon clear targets with the company, expect consistent financial reporting, and remain in regular contact with the founder. The Portfolio Review Committee reviews progress across funded companies and identifies where further support or intervention may be required. Where there are unexpected deviations, we work with the entrepreneurs to recalibrate their approach.

We also keep the company's next financing stage in view. Cascador is intentional about using its capital, its knowledge of the business, and its relationships to help crowd in future commercial funding. Our goal is for Cascador's capital to serve as a catalytic bridge to the business's next milestones.

As this stage progresses, we expect to see three things:

1. Capital deployed against a clear business need, with the instrument and terms reflecting what the company is trying to achieve.
2. Strong post-investment discipline, supported by clear targets, regular engagement, and consistent financial reporting.
3. A stronger path to commercial funding, with Cascador's investment helping the business open doors to more resources.

3.5 Stewardship: Sustaining progress beyond the programme

Cascador Mixer, Lagos

The Cascador programme does not end when founders leave the residential sessions. In many ways, that is when the harder work begins. Founders have to apply what they have learned, make difficult changes inside the business, and respond to new challenges as they grow. We stay involved because founder development only matters if it continues to shape the business afterwards.

We sustain that relationship in four ways.

- Ongoing mentor relationships: many founders continue working with their mentors after the formal programme ends. Because those mentors already understand the founder and the business, they can provide continuity as new strategic, organisational, or leadership challenges emerge.
- Continued access to expertise: the problems a business faces change as it grows. Where appropriate, we continue connecting alumni to people who can help with new legal, financial, operational, or governance challenges.
- An active alumni network: each cohort becomes part of a wider community of Cascador founders, drawing on it for practical advice, commercial partnerships, introductions, and support from people facing similar challenges.
- Durable governance: alumni are encouraged and supported in building formal advisory or governing boards to provide strategic guidance, accountability, compliance oversight, and access to contacts and capital.

- Long-term engagement: we continue tracking how alumni businesses evolve and where further support may be useful. Those lessons feed back into our curriculum, mentoring, funding approach, and wider support for founders.

Stewardship reinforces one of our central beliefs: founder development compounds. The value of the programme depends on how consistently founders continue applying better judgement, stronger leadership practices, and greater commercial discipline over time. By staying connected after graduation, we help those practices take root in the business rather than fade once the formal programme ends.

As this stage progresses, we expect to see three things:

1. Long-term founder support, through trusted relationships and continued access to relevant expertise.
2. A connected alumni community, creating practical opportunities for learning, collaboration, and introductions.
3. A stronger Cascador model, shaped by ongoing learning from what alumni experience after the programme.


20
CASCADOR PITCH DAY
INDIGENIUS
TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY
THOUSAND DOLLARS ONLY
June 3rd, 2026
$ 250,000
Sterling
CATALYTIC FUND FINALIST
POWERSTOVE
ONE BILLION EIGHT HUNDRED
MILLION NAIRA ONLY
₦ 1,800,000,000
CATALYTIC FUND FINALIST
₦ 2,500,000,000
$ 10,000
TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS
ONLY
NSIA PRIZE FOR INNOVATION
₦ 500,000,000

4

Evidence and Portfolio Insights

A model is only as good as what it produces. This section sets out what Cascador's approach has generated so far, what the data supports, and what it does not yet establish.

One clarification first. Cascador's philosophy does not assume that every company should arrive at the same destination. Success is assessed against the company's starting position, the constraint holding it back, and the kind of business the founder is trying to build.

For one device-financing company, the most important outcome was a change in its commercial model. The company had previously sold high-volume products to individual consumers, with weak retention. After the programme, it moved to a contract-led, fully managed business-to-business device-as-a-service model. This produced no headline of the kind usually associated with an accelerator, no large equity round, no valuation milestone. What it produced was a clearer customer profile, a more predictable commercial relationship, and a model better aligned with the service the company could actually deliver. On the terms that mattered to that business, it was the most valuable thing the programme could have done.

Individual examples of this kind establish that the model works in particular cases. They do not establish that it works broadly. For that, the portfolio data is the better test, and what it shows is that individual changes of this kind sit within a wider pattern of business growth, capital mobilisation, governance improvement, and economic impact.

Portfolio Snapshot

67

BUSINESSES SUPPORTED

High-potential, growth-stage companies across Africa.

7

COHORTS

A track record of backing exceptional founders, year after year.

96%

AVERAGE REVENUE GROWTH

Across our portfolio companies.

54%

MEDIAN GROWTH

A strong and consistent performance across sectors.

94%

FINANCIALLY RESILIENT

Portfolio companies with 12+ months of runway or positive cash flow.

1.7M

CUSTOMERS SERVED

People and businesses reached through our portfolio companies.

3.9K

FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES

Direct employment across the portfolio.

$124.2M

TOTAL CAPITAL RAISED

$85.6M
raised post-Cascador.

4.1 Evidence from the portfolio

By the end of 2025, Cascador had supported 67 alumni businesses over seven years with only 3 business closures. The insights below draw on data from 61 of them, giving a reasonably broad view of how companies perform after the programme.

Cascador Portfolio Snapshot for 2025

Indicator	Category	2025 Result
Average Revenue Growth in 2025	Sustainable Growth	96%
Companies in Profit / with 6+ Months Runway	Sustainable Growth	94%
Customers Served in 2025	Impact	1,734,221
Full-Time Employees as at Dec-25	Impact	3,900
Women in Leadership (Board/Exec Team) (% of portfolio)	Governance	97%
Newly Established Board Post-Cascador (Director/ Advisory)	Governance	31%
Companies with a Board	Governance	86%
Total Capital Raised Post-Cascador	Capital	$85,607,789
Total Capital Raised	Capital	$124,205,805

Source: Cascador Annual Impact Survey Report (2025)

Business Growth

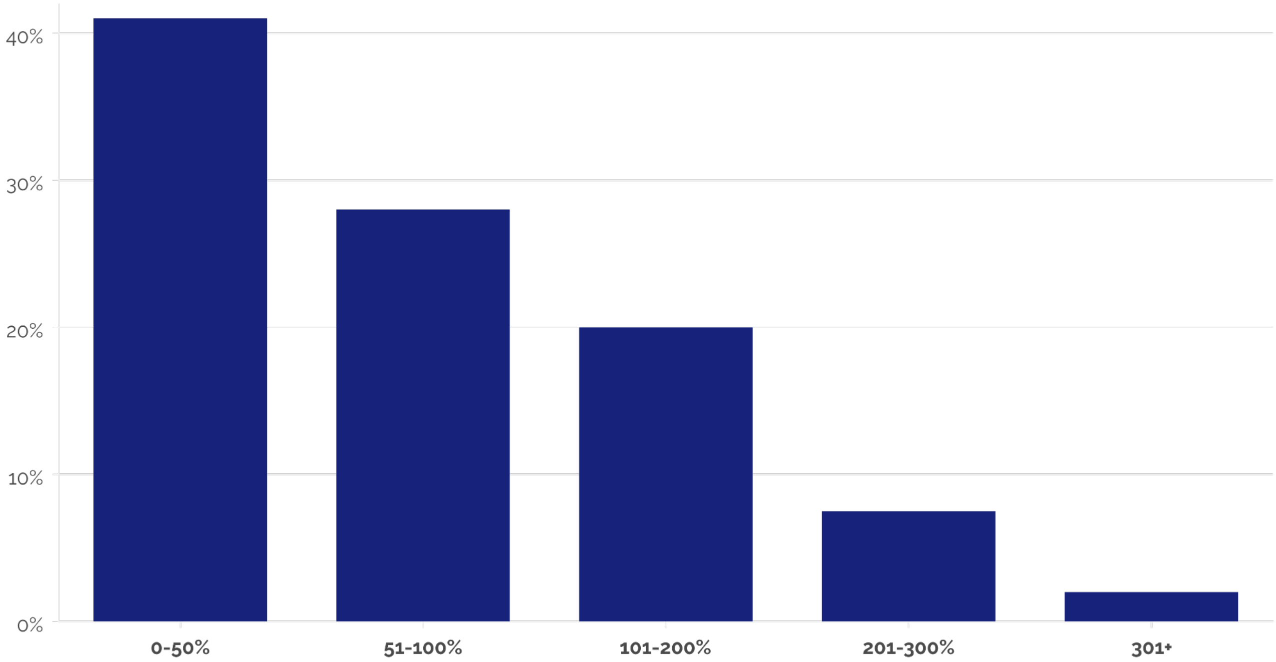
The 41 businesses with revenue data recorded **average growth of 96% YOY in 2025. That average is lifted by a small number of exceptional performers, including one company that grew more than 700%. The median company grew by approximately 54%,** which is the better indication of what a typical company in the portfolio experienced. Close to three in ten companies with available data more than doubled revenue during the year.

96% YOY

average growth in 2025.

Portfolio revenue growth is an important positive success metric

Distribution of Percent Revenue Growth in 2025



Source: Cascador Annual Impact Survey Report (2025)

The portfolio also appears financially resilient. Thirty-three of the 35 businesses that answered the relevant question were either profitable or had at least six months of runway. The indicator combines two different forms of financial health, so it should not be interpreted as showing that 94% of companies were profitable. It does suggest that most respondents were operating without an immediate liquidity crisis at the end of 2025.

Scale and economic impact

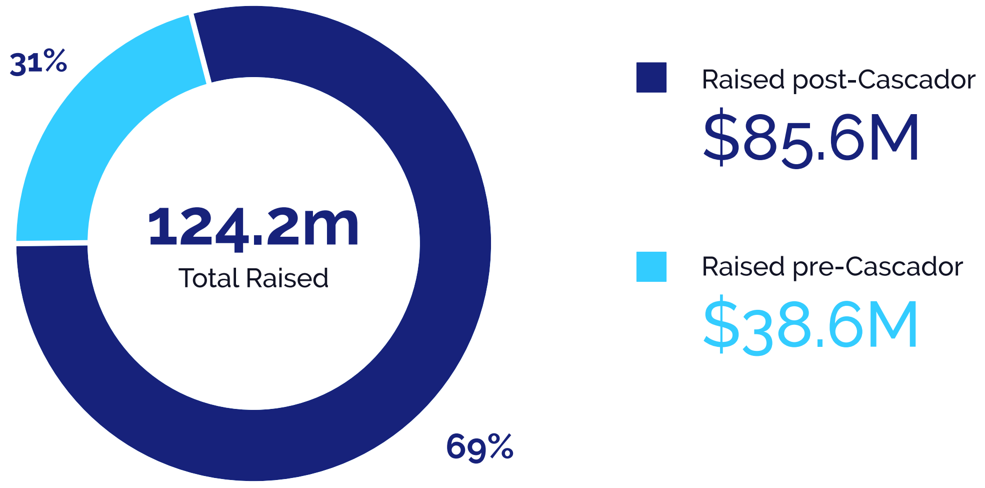
Cascador businesses employed 3,900 full-time staff at the end of 2025 and served more than 1.7 million customers during the year. Reported job creation, direct and indirect combined was 67,019. The great majority of these jobs were indirect: agents, distributors, smallholder suppliers, borrowers, and others whose livelihoods depend on a portfolio companies' operations without appearing on their payroll. They are also concentrated, as three companies account for roughly 55% of the total. Both facts matter for how the number should be read. Indirect employment is a real economic effect and worth reporting, but it is not equivalent to direct employment, and a portfolio total driven substantially by three businesses says less about the portfolio than the headline suggests.

We report it because it is what the companies report to us, and because the underlying effect is genuine.

> **We disaggregate it because a number that cannot survive scrutiny is worth less than a smaller number that can.**

Cascador Alumni raised over $85 million post-Cascador

Total Capital Raised



Source: Cascador Annual Impact Survey Report (2025)

The composition matters as much as the total. Alumni have raised through equity, grants, bank facilities, private notes, and concessional debt, a spread consistent with the principle set out in Section 3.3, that the instrument should follow the business rather than the reverse. One digital lender took ₦1.5 billion in Cascador debt and subsequently completed a ₦1 billion private note issuance, 113% oversubscribed, and ₦3 billion commercial paper, 230% oversubscribed. A mobility-finance company received ₦2 billion in concessional debt structured to finance the full cost of its asset purchases.

Governance

Board adoption across the portfolio rose from 54% before Cascador to 86% by the end of 2025, with eleven surveyed businesses (31% of respondents) establishing a new board or advisory board after the programme.

This is the clearest single indicator of organisational development in the data. Formal boards strengthen accountability, bring external expertise into decisions, and reduce a company's dependence on its founder, which is the specific transition that separates a business from a founder's job. Women were represented on the board or in executive leadership at 97% of reporting companies.

Taken together, the portfolio is growing, attracting capital, formalising its governance, and producing measurable economic effect. The figures vary considerably by business, and the sample is not large enough to make strong claims about causation. What the direction of travel is consistent with is Cascador's stated objective: stronger founders building more durable companies.

4.2 Lessons from our portfolio

Dave DeLucia, Cascador Lagos Open House 2026

Commercial clarity often unlocks the next stage of growth

Many Cascador interventions begin by helping founders become more precise about their customer, value proposition, and business economics. One healthcare founder entered the programme believing almost everyone was a potential customer. She left with a narrower customer base, a more tailored offering, and a clearer understanding of unit economics and the indicators that mattered most.

A mobility-finance founder faced a similar challenge. Defining the company's primary customer helped the business focus on its most credible commercial opportunity. It later reached breakeven after four years of losses. These experiences show that growth often begins with greater clarity about whom the business serves and how it creates value.

Founder development changes how a business is run

The programme also changes how founders lead. Behavioural assessments, such as DISC and Clifton Strengths—widely used frameworks for understanding talents, communication and working styles—support self-awareness and healthy team collaboration. One energy entrepreneur said the DISC assessment helped him see that underperformance in his team could reflect personality, working style, or gaps in support rather than simple incompetence. An agriculture founder said the programme showed him how to build a company that could operate without depending entirely on him.

These shifts show up in the aggregate data, most visibly in the rise in board adoption. Stronger businesses require founders willing to build teams, delegate authority, and create structures that both augment and outlast their own involvement.

The right capital matters more than the standard funding route

Capital readiness, in practice, usually means finding the instrument that fits. One microcredit company had never held a bank loan before Cascador. After improving its systems, documentation, and financial presentation, it secured ₦50 million from a commercial bank and later increased its available facility to ₦100 million — an outcome that required no external equity at all.

For another company, the binding constraint was the cost and structure of asset financing rather than access to it. Cascador provided ₦2 billion in debt at 22%, against market rates of around 35%, and financed the assets in full. The capital was useful because it was shaped around the constraint.

Networks create value when they produce practical outcomes

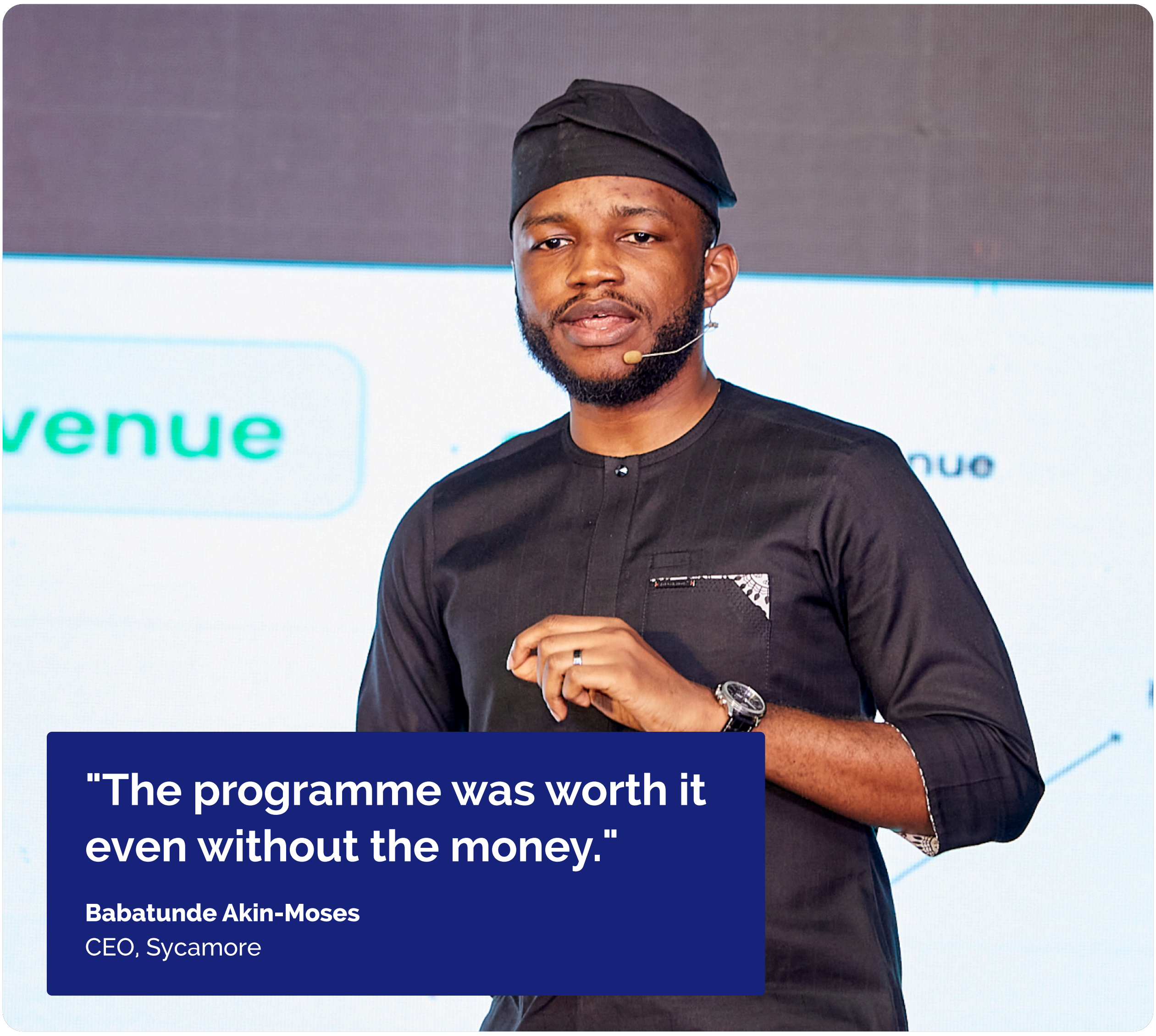
Founders consistently described Cascador's network as most valuable when it produced something concrete, like a customer, a partner, an adviser, a route into a new market. One founder reported that members of his cohort had become customers and that the company was exploring distribution partnerships with other participants. Another described the cohort as a working group of service providers he could draw on for immediate problems. Access to a network is not the same as value from a network, and the distinction is worth holding onto.

Success can mean stopping or changing direction

Better judgement does not always produce expansion. One founder said the programme helped her team confront a difficult truth about a logistics-financing business they had continued to pursue despite limited progress. Cascador gave them the confidence to test alternatives and, eventually, to step away from the original idea.

We count that as a success, and the reasoning matters for how the whole model should be read. If the claim is that better judgement produces better allocation of scarce resources, then a founder who stops committing time and capital to something that will not work has allocated better, not worse. Improved judgement can lead to growth. It can equally lead to narrowing a market, redesigning a business, declining unsuitable capital, or abandoning an approach that was never going to succeed. A programme that only counted the first of those would be measuring the wrong thing. This is also why a closed venture does not end the relationship. Because Cascador selects for the founder rather than just the business, the capability it invests in persists when a particular company does not. Alumni remain part of the community and eligible for support, and many go on to create value through an entirely different vehicle. The venture was the occasion for the investment. The entrepreneur was the actual object of it.

4.3 Founder case study: Sycamore



> **"The programme was worth it even without the money."**
>
> **Babatunde Akin-Moses**
> CEO, Sycamore

Babatunde Akin Moses, Cascador Pitch Day 2025

Babatunde Akin-Moses, the founder of Sycamore, a digital lending company, joined Cascador's 2021 cohort, drawn by the quality of the faculty, the small cohort size, and the fact that the programme was built around the founder and the business rather than around a predetermined investment thesis.

At the time, the company could plausibly have raised conventional venture capital. Akin-Moses had grown wary of funding that would require the business to optimise for investor returns and an eventual exit rather than for customers and long-term operating quality.

> **"If we had taken VC funding, we would have been building and optimising the business for investors, not for customers."**

The residential week gave him time away from daily operations to examine the business properly. Preparing a four-minute closing presentation forced him to strip away most of the company's existing deck and state the central business logic plainly. He connected that discipline to a wider shift inside Sycamore: more attention to substance, less to presentation for its own sake.

The one-to-one sessions reinforced it. He described Cascador's approach as cutting through unnecessary detail to reach the real issue, and began applying the same method to his own decision-making. The DISC assessment changed how he thought about his team; governance support helped him work more effectively with an already-established board.

The most consequential financing outcome was a conclusion rather than a transaction: Sycamore did not need venture equity to grow. What it needed was debt that could expand the balance sheet and fund the loan book without dilution or pressure toward a premature exit.

When the company later applied for Cascador funding, the assessment examined sales, finance, governance, and business performance rather than the transaction alone. The founder found the process valuable despite already having experience raising bank finance.

Cascador provided ₦1.5 billion in catalytic debt. Sycamore subsequently completed a ₦1 billion private note issuance, 113% oversubscribed, ₦3 billion commercial paper, 230% oversubscribed, turned over more than ₦100 billion in transactions, and publicly launched a Securities and Exchange Commission-licensed entity, strengthening its standing with investors, lenders, partners and regulators, and widening its access to future debt.

> **"Cascador is really about building the person and the business."**

The sequence is the point of the case. Cascador first helped the founder interrogate the business more rigorously, articulate it more clearly, strengthen his own leadership, and identify a financing path aligned with how the company actually created value. The capital came afterwards, into a business that had become clearer about its customer, its model, and the kind of funding it needed. Capital deployed in that order multiplies. Deployed in the reverse order, it frequently does not.

5

Call to Action

Cascador's model depends on more than the work we do with founders. It depends equally on the quality of the capital, expertise, market access, and policy environment around them. Each group below has a specific part to play, and a specific way to begin.

1. Potential founders

Cascador is for founders who have already built an operating business and are now confronting the harder work of scaling it. We look for people who know their business well, are willing to be challenged on it, and are prepared to change how they lead and decide.

The programme asks for honesty, discipline, and a serious commitment of time. In return, founders gain experienced mentors, specialist advisers, a strong peer cohort, and support directed at the actual constraints inside their businesses. Alumni are eligible to apply for Cascador capital, though completing the programme does not guarantee funding. As Section 4 shows, a number of founders have found the programme worthwhile without it.

Next step: review the eligibility criteria and apply through the programme application link when the next cohort opens.

2. Co-investors and funders

We welcome partners who can help strong alumni businesses move from catalytic support to sustainable commercial finance.

That can mean co-investment, follow-on funding, or facilities built around a specific need, working capital, asset finance, expansion. What Cascador brings to a transaction is a close, tested understanding of the founder and the business, accumulated through selection, development, diligence, and continued engagement after deployment. We are well placed to help partners identify credible opportunities, structure capital appropriately, and stay usefully involved once it has landed.

Next step: send your investment mandate to capital@cascador.org to open a funding or co-investment discussion.

3. Ecosystem partners

Useful partnerships solve specific problems for specific businesses. That may mean opening access to customers, supporting entry into a new market, providing specialist expertise, strengthening governance, or making one well-judged commercial introduction.

We are interested in partners who bring a clear capability and apply it to a defined need. The test of the partnership should be visible in an outcome, a contract signed, a market entered, systems strengthened, reporting improved, rather than in an alignment of intent.

Next step: submit a short partnership proposal, CV or company profile to info@cascador.org.

4. Policymakers and public institutions

Growth-stage businesses routinely face barriers they cannot resolve alone: slow licensing, limited access to public procurement, thin local-currency financing, and few structured channels for engaging regulators. These are precisely the constraints that no amount of founder capability can overcome unaided.

Cascador can contribute a screened group of businesses and evidence on the constraints they encounter in practice. Public institutions can contribute clearer pathways, improved access to finance, and the removal of barriers that prevent otherwise productive companies from scaling.

Next step: contact info@cascador.org to discuss engagement on a specific constraint or policy area.

Founders must be willing to learn and to adapt. Investors must match capital to the business in front of them. Partners must convert expertise and networks into practical outcomes. Policymakers must remove the barriers that strong businesses cannot clear alone.

We began this paper with a reflection that what separates a venture that endures from one that stalls is rarely the size of the cheque, but the quality of the judgement applied to it. Everything since has been an account of what follows if that is true: how founders are selected, how judgement is developed, how capital is fitted to a business rather than imposed on it, and what has happened in the companies where we have done this work. The capital matters. What determines whether it compounds or dissipates is the judgement it meets when it arrives. Improving that judgement, and then deploying into it deliberately, is the whole of Cascador's method. It is how more African companies move from promise to scale.

Capital is abundant,
Multipliers are not.
Our edge is building the
few who become many.

CASCADOR

info@cascador.org | www.cascador.org