



# Contributions of the Non-profit Sector to the Creation of Dignified and Fulfilling Work for Young People in Africa

## A Synthesis Literature Review Report 2025

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At the time of publication, the project was still in its early phase, and as such this report is based on literature reviews only. Subsequent reports will be published later once primary research is conducted. In the last two years, CAPSI has worked with seventeen authors, the majority of whom were emerging and young scholars to conduct a systematic review of available literature on nonprofits and their contribution to creating dignified and fulfilling work for young Africans in seventeen countries, namely Burkina Faso, Cote d' Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Morocco, Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The seventeen country reports were utilised by CAPSI's three Lead Researchers, namely Dr. Dennis Boahene Osei, Dr. Eleanor Meda Chipeta and Dr. Wycliffe Nduga Ouma to produce the synthesis report. Given the scarcity of data in most of these countries, Lead Researchers had to dig deeper to find additional data and information to strengthen the report. I want to thank country report writers, including the following: *Burkina Faso & Cote d' Ivoire* – Arsène Brice Bado; *the Democratic Republic of Congo* – Bernad Lututala; *Egypt* – Ali Awni, Kareman Shoaib & Alaa El Daly; *Ethiopia* – Tesfaye Zeleke, Alemu Azimeraw & Befikadu Ejeta; *Ghana* – Sylvester Senyo Horvey; *Kenya* – Roselyn Cheruiyot-Koech; *Nigeria* – Ekeminiabasi Eyita-Okon; *Morocco* – Mohsine El Ahmadi; *Mozambique* – Carlos Fernandes & Helio Maungue; *Senegal* – Mohamadou Sy, Jeru Achyl Hounogbe, Ndongo Mane Kebe & Serge Hadeou; *South Africa* – Hlengiwe Ndlovu & Roselyn Cheruiyot-Koech; *Tanzania* – Ng'wanza Kamata; *Rwanda* – Ndikubwimana Innocent & Christelle Umutesi; *Uganda* – Roland Banyana; *Zambia* – Eleanor Meda Chipeta and *Zimbabwe* – Tendai Murisa for producing the draft reports upon which the synthesis is based. Second, I want to thank CAPSI lead researchers, together with Prof. Alan Fowler, Prof. Jacob Mwathi Mati and several reviewers for producing this synthesis. In addition, I want to thank Dr. Omano Edigheji and Dr. Simamkele Dlakavu who joined the publication of the report to edit and coordinate its final production. Xolani Dlamini made sure that the report undergoes all the necessary publishing protocols. Finally, I want to thank the Mastercard Foundation for providing us with the support over a period of five years to conduct this study across several African countries. In the next three years, we will be publishing additional reports based on primary research currently underway at the time of publishing this synthesis.

**Bhekinkosi Moyo**  
**CAPSI Director**

### DISCLAIMER

This work was produced by CAPSI at Wits Business School, University of the Witwatersrand in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation. The five-year partnership from 2022 to 2027 aims to explore the contributions of the non-profit sector to African economies, with a particular focus on creating dignified and fulfilling work for the youth at the margins in 17 African countries. The views expressed do not represent those of the Foundation, its staff, or its Board of Directors.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAMFED	Campaign for Female Education
CAPSI	Centre on African Philanthropy and Social Investment
CBO	Community Based Organisations
CRZ	Copper Rose Zambia
CES	Core Employability Skills
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
ICNP/TSO	International Classification of Non-profit and Third Sector Organisations
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organisation
K-YES	Kenya Youth Employment and Skills
MSMEs	Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NPOs	Non-Profit Organisations
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SOT	Social Origins Theory
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training

**Africa is distinguished by a youthful demography, with over 70% of the population being under 30 years of age. Projections indicate that the African youth population will grow rapidly and reach 850 million by 2050.** With the right investment, the youth bulge offers an important opportunity for the continent's transformation. However, Africa also faces significant challenges, notably the high youth unemployment rate, which demands proactive and sustained policy interventions. This review examines the non-profit sector's contribution to creating dignified and fulfilling work for African young people. The findings are based on country-level literature reviews conducted in 17 selected African countries. They were based on the analysis of peer-reviewed articles, reports of non-profit organisations (NPOs), government and international development organisations, research institutions' outputs, and relevant grey literature.

It was revealed that NPOs, including social enterprises, play a pivotal role in this landscape through various youth-oriented programs.

The review shows that the literature on the non-profit sector's contribution to creating jobs for young people in Africa is in its embryonic stage. The analysis highlights the conceptual and data challenges that hinder the precise quantification of the overall and sectoral impacts of the non-profit sector on the creation of dignified and fulfilling work for the youth. Nevertheless, evidence abounds that depicts the nature of the contributions of the non-profit sector to youth employment in the countries under study in Africa. It was revealed that NPOs, including social enterprises, play a pivotal role in this landscape through various youth-oriented programme. Notable contributions of the sector include the provision of direct employment, skills development, education and training, entrepreneurial support, and policy advocacy. The most prominent sub-sectors for youth employment include education, agriculture, tourism and hospitality, ICT, human rights and advocacy, arts and culture, the environment, and health.

Based on the review, this synthesis report recommended how the non-profit sector could contribute meaningfully to create dignified and fulfilling work for African youth. One of the major contributions it could make in this regard is policy advocacy for the structural transformation of African economies. This way, the formal sector will be the main source of employment. Another recommendation is that NPOs should and diversify their funding sources for sustainability and impact. Additionally, it recommends that NPOs should forge strategic partnership with governments, the private sector and high-net-worth individuals to expand opportunities for youth employment initiatives. To this end, NPOs should play a critical role in promoting social dialogue among stakeholders for inclusive economic development and job creation. Priority should be given to policies and programmes that expand employment opportunities for marginalised youth, especially women, people living with disabilities, ex-convicts, and youth in rural areas. There is also the need for the non-profit sector to pay critical attention to technology interventions since technology has changed the nature of work requiring programmes that help the youth to adapt to changing demands in the labour market. To this end, NPOs should be a strong advocate for Africa to embrace AI to become a main driver of dignified and fulfilling jobs for African youth.

The study's findings have implications for future research. They emphasise the need for empirical studies to deepen the understanding of NPOs' contribution to dignified and fulfilling work in particular and to employment in general. Such studies will also enable scholars to disaggregate the contributions of NPOs to employment creation in general and dignified and fulfilling jobs in particular of each sector.

# 01

## INTRODUCTION

The Southern Africa region also has a growing young population, with the youth constituting approximately

**35%**

of the total population (SADC, 2019).

Africa has the youngest population of all regions in the world. Currently, over 70% of its 1.5 billion population is under 30. It is projected that by 2050, the population of the continent will increase to 2.5 billion, with the youth population constituting 850 million people (Sinha & Getachew 2024). For example, in East Africa (excluding South Sudan), this demography predominantly comprises individuals younger than 35 years, which accounts for 80% of the region's population of 146 million people, with a median age of 16 to 19 years. Similarly, in West Africa, youth comprise two-thirds of the population (Olson et al, 2022). In North Africa, nearly half of the population is under the age of 24, making it the youngest region in the world (Ghafar, 2022). The Southern Africa region also has a growing young population, with the youth constituting approximately 35% of the total population (SADC, 2019).

Africa's youthful population is both a blessing and a challenge. While it presents a dynamic potential for transformative economic and social development, Ogbonna, Adediran, Oloko, and Isah (2023) highlight critical challenges requiring proactive and sustained policy interventions and investments in education and job creation, particularly in the formal sector, to ensure sustainable development and economic stability across the continent.

Africa faces a high youth unemployment rate. For the latest year for which data is available, 2023, it is estimated that the unemployment rate among youth between the ages of 15 and 24 in sub-Saharan Africa is 10.2%, below the world average of 13.8%. This might be surprising, but the percentage of those whom the ILO termed working poor in Africa is 29%, above the world's 6.9% of the working poverty rate. This is due to the structural nature of the African economy, where 83% of those currently employed (in 2024) are in the informal sector compared to the world average of 58%. Informal sector employment is characterised by low wages, job insecurity, and exploitative working conditions (ILO dataset, 2024).

With the youth population rising exponentially, Africa's unemployment scourge is particularly ubiquitous among the youth entering the job market. For example, a significant demographic factor in Uganda indicates that about 78% of the population is aged below 30 years, with an annual growth rate of 3.7% (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022). This translates to over a million young individuals in Uganda entering the labour market annually. Similarly, Ethiopia recorded a youth unemployment rate of 25.3% in 2018, surpassing its general unemployment rate (Central Statistical

Agency, 2018). A primary obstacle is the limited capacity of these economies to absorb new labour market participants, attributed to rapid demographic growth, scarce economic opportunities, and a substantial mismatch between available jobs and requisite skills (First Consult, 2023). This phenomenon is not unique to the East Africa but it is the trend on the continent.

In general, Africa's inability to absorb new entrance into the labour market is due to several factors. First are the structural constraints of the African economy, which are dependent on natural resources for exports and are not integrated into the rest of the economy. As natural resource-based, Africa is an enclave economy<sup>1</sup> because the natural resource sector is not integrated into the rest of the economy. Hence, its low contribution to employment – the natural resources sector – has little positive multiplier effects on the rest of Africa's economy.

Second, when combined, the two major sectors that contribute to the GDP of Africa are services (47%) (low value added services) and agriculture (17%) in 2022 (Galal, 2023) – they accounted for 64% of African GDP<sup>2</sup>. These sectors are mainly informal. Thus, the situation is that two economies co-exist. On the one hand, the natural resource sector with highly skilled workers, high wages, uses high technology, attracts high investment, and is a major source of foreign exchange but has low labour absorption capacity. On the other hand, the informal sector has low wages, low skills, high levels of under-employment, relatively unregulated, easy entry and exit, low and obsolete technology, low levels of capital investments, and high levels of subsistence forms of economic activities. With a low industrial base and low value-added service sector, the formal sector contribution to employment is about 17% (ILO 2024b). This is the context to understand the inability of the African economy to create jobs, especially for the youth, who are those absorbed in the labour market and who make a living in the informal sector, which the literature review shows 29% are working poverty – the working poor (ILO data, 2024a).

Solving youth unemployment in Africa requires concerted efforts to bring together key stakeholders such as the government, learning institutions, the private sector, and non-profit entities. The non-profit sector in Africa, civil society or non-profit institutions (NPIs), has been seen as an important force in transforming the African socio-political landscape and its economies. As aptly observed by the United Nations Economic and Social Affairs Division provides a broader list of organisations that are classified NPOs, as follows:

Types of organisations commonly included are sports and recreation clubs, arts and cultural associations, schools and universities, research institutes, hospitals, social service organisations, religious congregations and faith-based service organisations, humanitarian assistance and relief organisations, charities, advocacy groups, and foundations and charitable trusts. Increasingly, however, that category has been extended to include entities referred to as social economy institutions, including certain cooperatives, mutual societies (or mutuals), social enterprises, non-stock and benefit corporations, as well as volunteer work performed outside formal organisations (United Nations Economic and Social Affairs Division, 2018: 1).

NPOs have become important change agents in a world where youth unemployment is on the rise and dignified and fulfilling work and opportunities are desperately needed. However, the literature provides limited data that point to tangible contributions of the non-profit sector to African economies, specifically in reducing youth unemployment. This situation is not particular to Africa. Despite the general recognition in both scholarly and policy circles of the role of NPOs in development, including in creating dignified and fulfilling work, there is little empirical work in this area.



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<sup>1</sup> See Mhone (2001) for a discussion of an enclaved economy.

<sup>2</sup> In 2022, industries contributed 28% of Africa's GDP.





This report aims to fill this gap by synthesising the literature on the non-profit sector's contribution to African youth employment. It does so by looking at the role of NPOs in providing dignified and fulfilling work for young people in Africa. To untangle the overarching objective of the literature review specifically, the report attempts to answer the following leading research questions:

- (1) What is the economic contribution of the non-profit sector to youth employment in Africa?
- (2) What is the economic contribution of the non-profit sector to dignified and fulfilling work for African youth?
- (3) What are the sub-sectoral contributions to dignified and fulfilling work for African youth within the non-profit sector?
- (4) What are the possibilities and opportunities for further employment in the non-profit sector for African youth?
- (5) What are the emerging knowledge gaps within the non-profit sector and its sub-sectors?

After considering theories relevant to the research, the report's structure corresponds to the research questions. It seeks to provide a preliminary understanding of the literature on the non-profit sector's scale, quality, and impact in delivering dignified and fulfilling employment for African youth, including those on the margins. Furthermore, this report provides an analytical view of the sectors and sub-sectoral activities concerning the inclusive employment of young people and the differentiated outcomes arising from various interventions. Furthermore, the review aims to bridge research gaps by investigating trajectories to dignified and fulfilling work within various sub-sectors in 17 African countries. These countries are Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The findings in this report highlight the state of the literature and provide the basis for an empirical study on the contributions of the non-profit sector to creating jobs for young people in Africa. This study is commissioned by the Centre on African Philanthropy and Social Investment (CAPSI) at the Wits Business School, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa and supported by the Mastercard Foundation. CAPSI is implementing the study in collaboration with several autonomous African-led networks of researchers and institutions in the selected countries.

The rest of the report is structured as follows: The next two sections discuss the conceptualisation and theoretical angle of the non-profit sector's existence in Africa. Section 4 provides the methodology for the literature reviews, while Section 5 discusses the findings and emerging gaps from the literature reviews. Section 6 concludes the report by highlighting the implications of the current research.





## 02

### THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR IN AFRICA: CONCEPTUALISING THE SECTOR



This study starts by adopting Salamon and Anheier's (1992) structural/operational view of the non-profit as a form of organisation that shares five basic characteristics including formal, private, non-profit-distributing, self-governing, and voluntary.

The conceptualisation of the non-profit sector has evolved significantly over the years, with several studies contributing to our understanding of their roles, structure, and usage in comparative studies globally (Salamon & Anheier, 1992). Several terms have since emerged and are used interchangeably to describe the non-profit sector, including the independent sector, third sector, charitable sector, tax-exempt sector, civil society, social enterprise, voluntary sector, or non-governmental organisations (Turin et al., 2022: 31), as well as non-profit institutions or third or social economy (TSE) (United Nations, 2018). Others describe it in terms of its heterogeneous nature spanning large, multi-billion dollar, mainstream, professionalised institutions that function similar to for-profit with close relations to governments and corporations to small, hardscrabble, all-volunteer organisations providing shoe-string services or pushing for systemic change from the fringe (Casey, 2016). Yet, some recognise it as a unique organisational field with its challenges and dynamics (McInerney, 2008).

This study starts by adopting Salamon and Anheier's (1992) structural/operational view of the non-profit as a form of organisation that shares five basic characteristics including formal, private, non-profit-distributing, self-governing, and voluntary. But it critiqued this narrow conceptualisation of NPOs because it excludes some important non-profits that are rooted in traditional African social structures or associational life. Typically, these non-profits have little formal structure, and they are rarely registered (not legally constituted or taxed). Hence, these types of organisations could be described as informal NPOs. Notable examples include self-help groups, mutual aid associations, village associations, stokvels, burial societies, local craft unions, market women's associations, and migrant groups. Thus, these are important components of the African non-profit sector that must be included in its conceptualisation.

NPOs not only have different legal and organisational frameworks (United Nations, 2018), but is also characterised by its extensive scope and diversity (Einarsson & Wijkström, 2019). To organise this diversity, subsectors have been identified, with classification systems like the United Nations International Classification of Non-profit and Third Sector Organisations (ICNP/TSO) (UN, 2018). The ICNP/TSO explores the economic activity of these establishments with an emphasis on detailing the major activities within them. Table 1 provides a summary of the main classes in the sector. This classification system addresses the diversity of NPOs across different countries and economic contexts. It distinguishes NPOs based on key features such

as being organised, private, self-governing, non-profit distributing, and voluntary. The framework categorises NPOs based on their primary economic activities into significant categories like culture and recreation, education and research, health, social services, environment, etc. This classification provides a structured approach to understanding and categorising the various types of NPOs operating worldwide. This approach is important because it provides a basis for comparative research and analysis within the non-profit sector.

**TABLE 1: International classification of non-profit and third sector organisations**

**GROUP 1: CULTURE, COMMUNICATION, AND RECREATION ACTIVITIES**

Culture and arts  
Sports and recreation  
Information and communication services  
Culture, communication and recreation services (not elsewhere classified)

**GROUP 2: EDUCATION SERVICES**

Pre-primary, primary, and secondary education  
Higher education  
Other education  
Education services (not elsewhere classified)

**GROUP 3: HUMAN HEALTH SERVICES**

Ambulatory health services  
Hospitals  
Nursing and residential care services

**GROUP 4: SOCIAL SERVICES**

Individual and family services  
Child day-care services  
Emergency and relief services  
Vocational rehabilitation services for people with barriers to employment  
Social services (not elsewhere classified)

**GROUP 5: ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AND ANIMAL WELFARE ACTIVITIES**

Natural resource management and protection  
Animal health and welfare activities  
Environmental protection and animal welfare activities (not elsewhere classified)

**GROUP 6: COMMUNITY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND HOUSING ACTIVITIES**

Construction of housing and infrastructure  
Community and economic development activities  
Housing management and maintenance  
Utilities and waste management  
Indigenous self-governance  
Community, economic development, and housing (not elsewhere classified)

**GROUP 7: CIVIC, ADVOCACY, POLITICAL AND INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES**

Civic, advocacy, and social participation activities  
Political activities  
International activities  
Civic, advocacy, political and international activities (not elsewhere classified)

**GROUP 8: PHILANTHROPIC INTERMEDIARIES AND VOLUNTARISM PROMOTION**

Grant-making foundations

Other philanthropic intermediaries and voluntarism promotion (not elsewhere classified)

**GROUP 9: RELIGION CONGREGATIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS**

Religious congregations

Other religious associations

**GROUP 10: BUSINESS, PROFESSIONAL AND LABOUR ORGANISATIONS**

Business and employers' associations

Professional associations

Labour unions

Business, professional and labour organisations (not elsewhere classified)

**GROUP 11: PROFESSIONAL, SCIENTIFIC, ACCOUNTING AND ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES**

Scientific research and testing services

Professional services

Management and administrative services

Professional, scientific and administrative services (not elsewhere classified)

**GROUP 12: OTHER ACTIVITIES**

Agriculture, forestry, and fishing

Manufacturing

Accommodation, catering, and food services

Trade activities

Transportation and storage activities

Financial and insurance services

Real estate activities

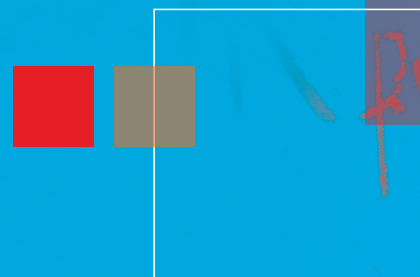
Unpaid activities of households

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Source: UN (2018)



# 03 THE EVOLUTION OF THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE



The complexities and heterogeneity of the non-profit sector have made it difficult for scholars to model its origins, history, and particularly the behaviour of critical players in the sector. Different theoretical origins and disciplinary traditions have contributed to the complexity of the non-profit or third sector concept, resulting in theoretical disagreements (Mati, 2013). However, to investigate the non-profit sector's contribution to African economies, this study will explore the nexus between the social origins theory and political theory to trace the sector's emergence in Africa.

## 3.1 Social Origins Theory

The underpinnings of SOT also conjecture that many economic theories have consistently faltered in objectively evaluating the contributions of the non-profit sector to society.

The Social Origins Theory (SOT) proposed by Salamon and Anheier (1998) and further developed by Anheier and Salamon (2006) argues that the failures of many economic paradigms and government policies create lacunae in society, which prompts the emergence of the third sector. The underpinnings of SOT also surmise that many economic theories have consistently failed in objectively evaluating the contributions of the non-profit sector to society. These scholars opined that the nature of the interrelationships between the private sector, public (government) sector, and the philanthropic/non-profit sector is crucial for explaining the non-profit sector's presence, shape, and role in different societies globally.

According to them, understanding these dynamics helps focus the lens on the variations across countries regarding the size and dimensions of the non-profit sector (Salamon & Anheier, 1998). Thus, the theory classifies the space and role of the third sector depending on the governing regime, corporate sector orientation, and political power relations. In liberal societies, like the United States of America and the United Kingdom, for instance, the space occupied by the non-profit sector is crucial since the government does not fully participate in social welfare provision. On the other hand, in corporatist societies, like the Nordic countries, Germany, and France, the government and the third sector work collaboratively to address problems of social inequalities. Synergistic state-society relations is an important explanatory variable for successful economic development. The same argument is true: the Nordic countries ranked top globally in almost all social development indicators such as the Human Development Indicators of the United Nations Development Agencies.



The Covid-19 pandemic, for example, birthed new forms of these organisations, collaborations, and innovations that do not follow or adhere to the political regimes, corporatists, statist systems, and so forth.

According to their classifications, Africa falls under a statist regime where the heavy hands of the government are felt in the operations of the third sector organisations. In this regime, governments are seemingly suspicious of the activities carried out by these organisations, hence consolidating power and remaining autonomous on all decisions that directly or indirectly affect the sector, thereby stifling their organic development and flourishing. This, however, is a generalisation because in reality African governments are more comfortable with NPOs that provide services than those that advocate fundamental change to governance and the dominant economic system.

Although SOT provides the foundation for grounding the emergence, shape, and dimensions of the non-profit sector in various countries, it does not account for the emerging nuances increasingly shaping the non-profit sector is experiencing across the globe. The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, birthed new forms of NPOs, collaborations, and innovations that do not follow or adhere to the political regimes, corporatists, and statist systems. Proponents of SOTs did not envisage, among others, these organisational forms, mobilisation, New types of non-profit sector mobilisations, such as environmental advocacy purely driven by the youth (e.g., Greta Thunberg), race movements (such as Black Lives Matter (USA)), and hashtag movements such as *#BringBackOurGirls* (Nigeria), *#EndFinanceBill* led by Gen-Z (Kenya), and *GivingTuesday* (Globally). These movements and new forms of organisations show the limit of SOT.

Another conceptual weakness of the SOT is that it seems more concerned with formalised systems. As a consequence, it did not fully capture the dynamics and nuances of the sector in the African context. As noted earlier, even the UN acknowledged that NPOs have different organisational and legal frameworks. Therefore, a conceptual framework that recognises only NPOs that are registered misses the varying associational life in Africa, where some NPOs are not formally registered but derive their legitimacy and credibility from their members and the services they provide to their target groups and communities. Therefore, the point is that SOT tends to neglect the non-informal NPOs and their intricate relationships with statist regimes. As Etim and Daramola (2020) correctly argue, some non-informal NPOs are integral to the economies of Africa, including the two largest African economies with significant informal sector. According to the authors, the informality of the sector plays a significant role in economic growth, including creating jobs. These activities often operate outside formal governmental frameworks, reflecting the community-driven efforts prevalent in the African context.

As such, while the SOT provides a robust framework for understanding the structured relationship between governments and the third sector across various regimes, it falls short of incorporating the flexible, dynamic, and often informal activities that characterise much of the African non-profit landscape. These activities frequently emerge in response to immediate social needs. They are driven by local communities without formal governmental support or recognition and reflect a more complex interplay of socioeconomic factors and cultural practices than the theory typically accounts for. This gap highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of the non-profit sector that can adapt to the evolving global challenges and the unique socio-political contexts of different regions in this study.

### 3.2 The case for SOT and political theory

While new dynamics have emerged to question the practicality of SOT in explaining the presence of the third sector in Africa, there are still pockets of reasons that justify the theory (Salamon & Anheier, 1998). For instance, SOT emphasises historical and social forces, such as religious traditions, social stratification, and community-based organisations, all of which continue to shape the non-profit sector in the continent. This perspective is particularly relevant in countries like Kenya and Nigeria, where missionary activities and traditional community structures have played, and





In Kenya, for example, the transition to multiparty democracy in the early 1990s led to a significant increase in NGOs.

continue to play foundational roles of the sector. As correctly noted by Kanyinga and Mitullah (2007), Ayandele (1966), and Olukoju (2003), during the colonial period, missionary efforts in education and healthcare established a robust base for modern NGOs, a phenomenon extensively documented by scholars. The influence of Christian missions in establishing schools and hospitals continues to impact the non-profit landscapes in these countries, providing critical social services and fostering a culture of volunteerism and community support.

However, it is true that SOT did not fully account for the rapid expansion and diversification of the non-profit sector, especially in the 1990s. The nexus of politics and the economy played a significant role in the rapid growth of the non-profit sector in Africa and, therefore, provides a solid basis for an understanding of NPOs on the continent (Mati, 2013). This can be termed a political economy approach to understanding the emergence of NPOs on the continent in the 1990s. It situates the non-profit sector in the broader political economy. In doing so, it brings to the fore how the political contexts and economic policies driven by market fundamentalism played a role in the rise of NPOs in Africa (Lechterman & Reigh, 2020). Market fundamentalism resulted in rolling back the state's role in development, including providing social services to citizens. Some NPOs emerged to resist these policies, while others were formed to fill the vacuum created by the non-provision of basic services by the State. During this period, political liberalisation and democratisation processes created an enabling environment for NGOs to flourish. In Kenya, for example, the transition to multiparty democracy in the early 1990s led to a significant increase in NGOs, particularly those involved in governance, human rights, and development issues (Bratton, 1989; Kanyinga & Mitullah, 2007). Similarly, in Nigeria, the shift from military rule to democratic governance facilitated the growth of the organisations in the sector (Aina, 1997; Ikelegbe, 2001).

In South Africa, the social and political origins of the non-profit sector are essential to understanding its evolution (Habib & Taylor, 1999). As posited by the SOT, the historical influence of religious organisations and the anti-apartheid movements laid a robust foundation for understanding the emergence, growth, and significance of civil society in the country. Religious groups like the South African Council of Churches and advocacy organisations such as the Black Sash were instrumental in providing social services and mobilizing against apartheid (Beinart, 2001; Hearn, 2007). However, the theoretical framework of the political economy approach is equally crucial, as the democratisation process in the immediate post-apartheid period created a conducive environment for NGOs to thrive. The emergence of organisations such as the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) during this period reflected the critical role of political changes in shaping the sector's trajectory (Habib & Taylor, 1999; Swilling & Russell, 2002). Similarly, the sector demonstrated



the complex interaction between social origins and political dynamics in Egypt. Historically, the system of waqf (Islamic endowments) and traditional community organisations provided essential social services, forming the social foundation of the non-profit sector (Cuno, 1992). These traditional associational lives and structures continue to influence contemporary NGOs, particularly those providing social services such as health, education, and social welfare programmes.

Therefore, the SOT and the political economy conceptual approach provide a comprehensive framework for understanding Africa's non-profit sector. This approach acknowledges the foundational influence of historical context and the social structures and traditions, as highlighted by SOT, while also recognising the critical role of political dynamics and state policies, as encapsulated by the political economy approach. As an example, the growth and activities of the Green Belt Movement in Kenya can be understood through both theories. SOT can be relied on to explain its foundation in traditional community, structure, and environmental awareness, which underpin the historical and social structures of the country (Maathai, 2003). At the same time, the political economy framework constitutes the basis for framing the movement's expansion and advocacy efforts, which were facilitated by the political opportunities and challenges during the democratization process (Bratton, 1989). Similarly, in South Africa, the evolution of the Legal Resources Centre reflects the interplay of historical, social structures rooted in anti-apartheid activism and the political liberalisation that provided an enabling environment for legal advocacy and human rights work to operate (Beinart, 2001; Habib & Taylor, 1999).

The interplay of social and political factors in Nigeria is evident in developing organisations such as the Nigerian Red Cross Society and other health-related NGOs. The social origins theory explains their historical roots in missionary activities and community-based health initiatives, while the political economy theory highlights the impact of political transitions and state policies on their growth and operations (Ayandele, 1966; Ikelegbe, 2001; Olukaju, 2003), as well as the formation of NPOs' struggle against the World Bank-IMF inspired Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). While in Egypt, the historical influence of waqf and traditional community organisations formed the social foundation of the non-profit sector. In addition, contemporary political changes and state policies significantly influenced its development (Abdelrahman, 2004; Cuno, 1992).

In light of the above, the two conceptual frameworks, SOT and the political economy approach constitute the theoretical foundation of this study.





## 04 METHODOLOGY



This report draws from country-level literature reviews (including academic and grey literature) conducted in the selected African countries. The aim is to understand the state of knowledge on the economic contributions of the non-profit sector to dignified and fulfilling work. The literature on the overall and sectoral contribution of NPOs to youth employment, especially dignified and fulfilling work, and opportunities and possibilities for NPOs to increase employment of young people were sourced from peer-reviewed papers, working papers, international and local organisational reports, and government reports.

To identify relevant studies, the research utilised keyword searches such as NPOs, NGOs, civil society organisations (CSOs), social movements, dignified and fulfilling work, youth employment, and marginalised youth. The research questions and study context are guided by the selection of appropriate studies included in the literature review. Subsequently, relevant studies were analysed to understand current themes and identify gaps in the literature. Based on these findings, recommendations for future research were made.



# 05

## FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEWS



### 5.1 The economic contribution of the non-profit sector to youth employment in Africa

The term 'economic contribution' encompasses a broad measure of the gross change in economic activity resulting from various factors within an economy (Watson et al. 2007). This encompasses a range of mechanisms and activities, including job creation, goods and services production, innovation, research, and investment.

The role of NPOs in providing welfare services to targeted groups and communities has been generally recognised. They complement governments' efforts and fill the vacuum created by governments' inability to provide social welfare services to communities where the state has failed (Salamon & Toepler, 2015). On the African continent, NGOs play an important role in ungoverned spaces, that is, where the government is absent, especially in rural and poor peri-urban areas. Their widespread presence is often attributed to historical evolution and a tendency to prioritise social welfare (Easley & O'Hara, 1983). Moreover, NPOs are pivotal in empowering communities by creating direct and indirect employment opportunities (Berg, 2013). The significant role they play as employers has been widely acknowledged by scholars by Akesbi (2011), Swilling and Russel (2002), Kanyinga and Mitullah, 2007, and Salamon, et al (2013).

It is important to note that the literature on the economic contribution of the non-profit sector to African youth is in its embryonic stage. Reviews conducted in the past revealed some of the contributions of the non-profit sector to development outcomes (Akesbi, 2011; Amponsah, Darkwa, & Gyampoh, 2007; CCOAIB, 2011; Kanyinga & Mitullah, 2007; Salamon et al., 2013). Despite the sector's contribution, there is little empirical research on the role of NPOs due to the factors highlighted earlier. Consequently, there is a scarcity of information, research, and published work regarding the sector's economic contribution. While some studies delve into the macro-economic aspects of employment in rural and urban settings, others focus on issues such as youth job seeking opportunities, barriers to employment, job market structures, and prospects of youth employment (Friesenhahn, 2016; Kang et al., 2015). Additionally, some studies examine the sector's capacity to offer alternatives to dominant socio-economic development models (Bebbington et

On the African continent, NGOs play an important role in ungoverned spaces, that is, where the government is absent, especially in rural and poor peri-urban areas.



In Nigeria, NPOs like Lagos Food Bank, Food Bank Nigeria, and No Hunger Food Bank engage youth in food bank projects aimed at addressing food insecurity through community-based approaches.

al., 2008). Furthermore, the existing literature is deficient, and is characterised by either outdated or lack of substantive information to address the research questions adequately (Mutenje, 2017). This dearth of research underscores the need to further explore and understand the economic dynamics between the non-profit sector and African youth employment.

Though there is a lack of empirical evidence, anecdotal evidence reveals some common and unique findings on the economic contribution attributed to NPOs to employment creation for African youth. Some of the common findings are, first, the lack of relevant disaggregated data to make adequate inferences on the scale and scope of the economic contribution of the non-profit sector in Africa. Second, the prevalence of youth engagement in the informal economy is often attributed to barriers to formal employment or entrepreneurship. These barriers include a dearth of job opportunities, limited networks, restricted access to finance, and insufficient education or skills. In addition to the above findings, as we noted earlier, there is empirical evidence that points to the enclave nature of African economies and the small size of the formal sector in terms of contribution to employment. These have created the context for the lack of dignified and fulfilling jobs for youths on the continent. This is in addition to the fact that the size of NPOs on the continent is relatively small; hence, its contribution to direct employment, and dignified and fulfilling jobs is relatively limited.

Besides the common themes in the literature, a few practical examples underscore the non-profit sector's pivotal role in providing direct employment opportunities for African youth. For instance, in Kenya and Nigeria, evidence suggests that non-profit initiatives have significantly contributed to the economy by directly creating jobs for young people. In Kenya, NGOs have emerged as major employers of youth, contributing significantly to their economic empowerment (Madu & Muhingi, 2017) despite earning lower wages than the private sector. In Nigeria, NPOs like Lagos Food Bank, Food Bank Nigeria, and No Hunger Food Bank engage youth in food bank projects to address food insecurity through community-based approaches. These initiatives involve sourcing surplus food from farms, markets, and households to distribute to vulnerable populations. These initiatives provide young people with employment opportunities through stipends for their participation, albeit not always sustained (Koigi, 2023; Oladipupo, 2023). These initiatives underscore the tangible impact of NPOs' efforts in creating employment opportunities and addressing African youth's socio-economic challenges.

Besides providing direct employment, non-profit sector initiatives are crucial in enhancing youth employability through various educational and skills development programmes. These initiatives encompass job training, second-chance education, internships, vocational training, mentorship, entrepreneurial training, and the development of learning materials (Rotich & Karanja, 2020). For example, in Kenya, projects such as the Kenyan Youth Employment and Skills (K-YES), Young Africa Works, and the Youth Economic Empowerment Initiative have actively engaged youth and facilitated access to economic opportunities for more than 60,000 young people (Wafula, 2019).

There are similar initiatives across the African continent. For example, World Vision Ghana, School for Life, and Girls Education Units have contributed significantly to meeting educational needs in rural and urban areas where government resources are insufficient. Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) and Action Aid Ghana also played crucial roles in providing educational support to young people. These enabled them to acquire skills needed in the labour market (Tagoe & Oheneba-Sakyi, 2015; Okine, 2022).

In Zambia, NGOs promote civic education, advocacy, human rights, and social welfare while offering entrepreneurship training opportunities. In Ethiopia, the Ethio-German Sustainable Training and Education Programme (STEP) is a project funded by the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ and the EU. GIZ implements it in cooperation with the Ethiopian Ministry of Labour and



Volunteerism emerges as a significant mechanism for NPOs to provide job opportunities to youth (Mati, 2017; 2024).

Skills. STEP aims to enhance “the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system and universities of applied sciences (UAS) in Ethiopia. STEP aims to improve the employability of TVET and UAS graduates, especially women, in various economic sectors” (Reframe Data, n.d: 1). It aimed to increase the employability of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system and universities of applied sciences (UAS) in Ethiopia. It expanded employment-oriented qualification and skills development offerings in six economic sectors (automotive, building construction, electronic technology, hotel and tourism, health, and agro-processing). Its programmes are aligned with industry needs to enhance the employability of its beneficiaries. These examples underscore the significant impact of non-profit sector initiatives in providing training opportunities that pave the way for youth empowerment and economic advancement in these countries.

Also, the literature review shows that some NPOs on the continent conduct research, advocacy, and policy analysis to address the crises of unemployment and other labour market issues. This has promoted policies that enabled young people to access work opportunities. For instance, Youth Hub Africa, a non-profit organisation in Nigeria, has advocated for policies and programmes to address the problems in the labour market that are facing the youth, such as unemployable skills and unemployment. It analysed existing policies to identify gaps and propose evidence-based solutions (Youth Hub Africa, 2022). Some of their recommendations have influenced public policy on youth employment.

In addition to offering training and direct employment, the literature underscores the pivotal role of NPOs in facilitating volunteering as an alternative avenue for youth employment and economic empowerment. Volunteerism emerges as a significant mechanism for NPOs to provide job opportunities to youth (Mati, 2017; 2024). It fosters and enhances social integration within communities – a critical aspect of youth development (Patel, 2009). Globally, many NPOs recognise youth volunteerism as a valuable resource that benefits both the community, and the individuals involved. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), young people often lack Core Employability Skills (CES), typically acquired non-formally through on-the-job training and work experience (ILO, 2019). Thus, NPOs fill this gap by offering CES through volunteerism programmes, especially for first-time job seekers.



However, the literature on youth volunteerism in Africa is still scant – scholars have not paid adequate attention to this phenomenon. There are, however, a few cases of youth volunteering to work with NPOs that are collaborating with the World Health Organisation. As an example, youth volunteered with community-based organisations (CBOs) to provide healthcare to communities (Brown & Green, 2015). Another NPO, Raising Futures Kenya, provides job opportunities and supports the well-being of Kenya's youth. This is done through a network of volunteers who collaborate with individuals, NGOs, and local governments to train young Kenyans in diverse fields (Fair Planet, 2019). Compton et al. (2021) indicate that volunteering among Ghanaian youth fills an important vacuum. Accordingly, youth volunteers help address staff shortages in NPOs, and even in both the public and private sectors (WACSI, 2015). Financial constraints in the various sectors are a major challenge that made them resort to youth volunteers to address the gaps of staff shortages (Okorley, Owusu, & Akuamoah-Boateng, 2017). For example, the Social Education Development Volunteer programme, a non-profit organisation in Ghana, engages youth in volunteering to support rural communities. Their activities include youth empowerment, education and skills training, orphanage work, community development, fundraising, healthcare, and health education, among others (Compton et al., 2021). These examples underscore the significant impact of NPOs in harnessing the potential of youth volunteering for community development and youth empowerment initiatives.

The findings indicate that NPOs play a significant role in job creation and improving job quality through education and skill development programmes. The non-profit sector offers skills development initiatives for youth that enhance their capabilities and employability. This approach is consistent with human capital development theory, which highlights the importance of utilising and developing human resources (Becker, 2009). The theory asserts that education and skill training are the most important investments in human capital development, as they boost individual productivity and lead to better job opportunities (Becker, 2009). Moreover, ongoing investment in education and training is essential to youth employment challenges in Africa.

## 5.2 The contribution of the non-profit sector to dignified and fulfilling work for young people

The literature clearly shows that NPOs create employment for youth in Africa. At this juncture, it is important to provide a broad overview of the literature on the sector's contribution to creating dignified and fulfilling work for young people on the continent.

The concept of dignified and fulfilling work is multifaceted and subjective. According to PASGR (2023), work in Africa is dignified and fulfilling when it gives a sense of purpose, satisfaction, accomplishment, reliable and sufficient income, workplace safety and freedom, and respect in the workplace and society. However, a closer look at existing studies show that little attention has been given to conceptualising dignified and fulfilling work, especially in Africa. Therefore, it is crucial to address the knowledge deficiency that exists in understanding the nature and scope of dignified and fulfilling work on the continent through further research.

A few studies (see for example, Cohen & Moodley, 2012; Okbandrias & Nordjo, 2024) have been framed within the ILO's decent work conceptual framework. Most studies on the continent have conceptualised it within the ILO decent work framework. Decent work is framed within four pillars: job creation, social protection, rights at work, and social dialogue. This conceptualisation has four other characteristics: equality, freedom, security, and human dignity (ILO, 2008). Although this is a useful contribution to conceive work, placing dignity at its core, is useful. This is because, among others, it anchors work at the centre of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and, more importantly, inclusive development (Winchenbach, Hanna, & Miller, 2019). This conceptualisation thus builds on the path-breaking work of Nobel Laureate of Economics, Amartya Sen (1990), who conceived "development as freedom," and that of Peter Evans (2010), who argued that investment in human capabilities is both the driver and the ultimate goal of development.

A closer look at existing studies show that little attention has been given to conceptualising dignified and fulfilling work, especially in Africa.





Evidence underscores the need for NPOs to provide supportive structures to their employees to build good workplace relationships.

As indicated earlier, NPOs are playing important roles in creating employment for African youth. The questions are, first, 'Are the jobs provided by the NPOs dignified and fulfilling, and second, to what extent do they provide such jobs?' Although answers to these questions are hard to find in the literature, some studies provide a general picture of the employment situations and practices offered by the non-profit sector to young men and women in Africa. For instance, Gough, Chiguta, and Langevang (2016) found that young men and women in Zambia face significant levels of employment insecurity regardless of whether they are formally employed, own an informal enterprise, are engaged in casual work, or partake in alternative/illicit activities. According to them, these insecurities exist in various forms, including insecure wages/profits, fierce competition, no or temporary contracts, expectations of financial/sexual favours, nepotism/corruption, unhealthy/dangerous activities, and limited institutional support.

Evidence from Ghana shows that the youth are mostly engaged in low-productive and uncertain work trajectories because of the insufficient number of jobs available in the country (Hassan, 2021). This further underscores the need for NPOs to provide supportive structures to their employees to build good workplace relationships. Cropazano and Mitchell (2005) emphasise this as a social exchange relationship where 'employers take care of employees' to engender beneficial outcomes. Therefore, this relationship aims to generate advantageous and fair transactions leading to effective work behaviour and positive employee attitude. Importantly, this buttresses the point we made earlier for structural transformation of the economy where the manufacturing and high value-added service sectors will be the largest employers of labour. To achieve this goal, NPOs need to advocate for industrial policy, the diversification of Ghana's economy, and the transition from subsistence to modern farming.

A major finding from the literature is that there is a lack of data to determine the overall contributions of NPOs in creating dignified and fulfilling work. Also, there is a lack of evidence showing how the sector contributes towards the different trajectories and transitions between informal and formal settings for young people in general and those on the margins as they look for dignified and fulfilling jobs. Research on the perception of young people on the contributions of the non-profit sector is hard to find in the literature. The lack of empirical evidence, in part, can be attributed to the scarcity of studies on the conceptualisation and measuring of dignified and fulfilling work. Therefore, there is an urgent need for African scholars to undertake research that will examine the quality and quantity of jobs offered by NPOs.



### 5.3 The sub-sectoral contribution of the non-profit sector to dignified and fulfilling work for marginalised youth in Africa

While the ICNP/TSO provides a framework for categorising the diverse range of activities within the non-profit sector, understanding the contribution of these subsectors to dignified and fulfilling work among the African youth remains a daunting challenge. Lack of data hinders the precise quantification of jobs created by the non-profit subsectors, especially for those youth on the margins. What is known is either limited to regions or only focused on specific facets of the classes. For example, Kwao and Amoak (2022) note that the primary focus areas for development projects initiated by NPOs in Ghana are enhancements in agricultural techniques, vocational training, non-formal (but planned and structured) and formal education, and microfinance programmes. These ultimately contribute to economic growth and job creation for the youth, especially in rural areas.

In Senegal, the segmentation of non-profits affects market dynamics and job opportunities for marginalised youth, with job supply from NPOs remaining low compared to the high demand from young people. Limited bargaining power among newly recruited youth, compounded by a lack of professional experience and supportive organisations like trade unions, exacerbates the situation. In Nigeria, socio-cultural and religious dynamics influence the attractiveness of NPO employment interventions, with young men predominantly drawn to sectors like youth empowerment, entrepreneurship, and agriculture. In contrast, young women are more interested in health and wellness programmes due to caregiving roles and biological considerations. Similarly, in Cote d'Ivoire, the sectors in which NPOs operate primarily determine the types of jobs offered, with sectors like health, community development, and gender promotion being particularly in demand (Kasse, 2019).

In East Africa, the NPO sector encompasses diverse institutions operating across various sectors, such as health, education, and social services (Salamon & Newhouse, 2020). The 2021 studies by the African Economic Research Consortium highlight the agricultural sector, micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and business ventures, informal employment, self-employment, formal employment, trade, tourism and hospitality, construction, and ICT sectors as common sectors and subsectors where NPOs focus on youth employment and empowerment strategies (Ndung'u, 2023). For example, the rural informal sector in Kenya, especially in agriculture and pastoralism, accounts for a significant portion of youth employment (Njora & Yilmaz, 2022). The services sector in urban areas also offers substantial job opportunities for youth. In Rwanda, NPOs in the healthcare and community development sectors provide meaningful employment opportunities for young people. This enhances the well-being of individuals and communities and fosters a sense of pride and accomplishment (Gootman & Eccles, 2002; Rosenthal *et al.*, 2010).

According to Mutesa (2006), the NGO sector in Southern Africa stands out as the largest subsector, operating across various sectors such as health, education, environment, agriculture, governance, human rights, and HIV/AIDS treatment. NPOs implement several initiatives aimed at fostering positive change in communities are evident, including skills training, capacity building, and mentorship programmes. For instance, Copper Rose Zambia (CRZ), a youth-led organisation, is dedicated to effecting systematic change on adolescent issues, women empowerment, and gender equality (CRZ, 2021). Similarly, in Zimbabwe, the presence of over one thousand NGOs as of 2022 underscores their dedication primarily to humanitarian aid, service organisations, and political governance. Through their various programmes, the NPOs in the region, directly and indirectly, contribute to creating dignified and fulfilling jobs for youth. However, because of a lack of empirical research, it is difficult to quantify the number of dignified and fulfilling jobs created by the sector for the youth in the region, especially for the youth on the margins.

In Zimbabwe, the presence of over 1 000 NGOs as of 2022, underscores their dedication primarily to humanitarian aid, service organisations, and political governance.



One implication of the findings is the need to examine the structural context in which NPOs operate in Africa. The context is what we refer to as the macro-conditioning for NPOs to contribute to creating dignified and fulfilling jobs. Therefore, political economy theory is an important conceptual lens to examine the sector's role in employment creation, especially those classified as dignified and fulfilling jobs. This conclusion aligns with the institutional theory proposed by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), arguing that institutional structures, norms, and rules influence organisational behaviour and employment practices.

## 5.4 The possibilities and opportunities for increased employment in the sector

Though it has not been quantified due to a lack of empirical research, the literature review in this study shows that the non-profit sector contributes to the African economy and job creation for the youth. Its contribution to employment is both direct and indirect. The former is by NPOs directly offering jobs and internships to young people, while the latter is through skills training, capacity building, and policy advocacy, among others. However, the nature and impact of these contributions, as well as the opportunities and challenges, vary across the different regions on the continent.

In East Africa, for instance, the success of NPOs in addressing youth unemployment is intricately tied to solid partnerships with donors, the government, and the private sector. These collaborative efforts create an environment conducive to programmes such as the K-YES initiative. It can, therefore, be argued that the success of the non-profit sector in contributing to job creation, especially to dignified and fulfilling jobs, is largely dependent on what Evans (1995) refers to as embeddedness and Edigheji (2007) labelled synergy, which is a strong relationship between the state and society. For this study, society refers to both the private sector and NPOs. Resonance (2023) also underscores the same point to account for the success of NPOs in East Africa.

Additionally, investing in skills development programs is a key opportunity for NPOs to enhance youth employability. NPOs are equipping the youth with valuable skills to enhance their employability and secure dignified and fulfilling jobs by offering technical training in areas such as plumbing, welding, or ICT. A case in point is World Vision Kenya's technical skills training for women, which has increased job opportunities and self-reliance among graduates (World Vision Kenya, 2022). This emphasis on skills development is a common theme across regions, with each region adapting the approach to its specific needs and contexts.

In West Africa, NPOs are creating dignified and fulfilling work opportunities for young people. However, there is scope for the non-profit sector to increase its role in employment creation. The non-profit sector can secure more funding to implement youth employment initiatives through diversification of funding sources, including public-private partnerships, corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, and endowment funds. In addition, the sector can collaborate with businesses to fund youth employment programmes while aligning with the company's objectives and values. For instance, a non-profit focused on vocational training could collaborate with a manufacturing company to provide skills development programs tailored to meet the needs of the latter. Furthermore, NPOs could scale up their activities by advocating for the diversification of the region's economy from primary sector dependent to manufacturing, high valued added service, and mechanised agriculture to enable youth to secure employment in the formal sector, which naturally are dignified and fulfilling. Also, NPOs should advocate for the revision of labour laws to promote the creation of dignified and fulfilling jobs in West Africa and throughout the continent.

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Effective NPO activities depend on robust partnerships that leverage local and international support for broader impact.

Southern Africa's non-profit sector is characterised by its heterogeneity and diversity, encompassing various subsectors like education, healthcare, environment, community development, and governance. This diversity allows for tailored approaches to youth employment across different economic activities. The effectiveness of NPO activities depends on robust partnerships that leverage local and international support for broader impact. Like in East and West Africa, skill development is a major area of focus for the work of NPOs. However, there is potential for more diverse sectoral engagement in Southern Africa, given the wide range of activities carried out by organisations in the sector. Promoting youth entrepreneurship through social enterprises is also pivotal, focusing on creating supportive environments and access to necessary resources and training. This approach is aligned with strategies observed in East Africa, where encouraging youth entrepreneurship addresses social and environmental challenges while creating sustainable job opportunities (Davis, 2002; Terziev, Nichev, & Georgiev, 2019).

Across the African continent, NPOs leverage technology and innovation to open and create employment opportunities for youth. In East Africa, ICT and digital transformation for MSMEs in NPO-led youth empowerment and entrepreneurship training have significantly expanded opportunities for young individuals. Many youths can achieve self-reliance or collaborate to establish business enterprises equipped with digital solutions. The support from international NPOs like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, particularly in youth employment coaching through the Sidai Africa social enterprise, which provides training for farmers and pastoralists, has had a substantial impact (Africa HR Solutions, 2018). Founded in 2011, Sidai Africa aimed to establish 150 franchise and branded Livestock Centres in Kenya by 2015. Through its programmes, the organisation has upskilled farmers and pastoralists and increased the number of entrepreneurs who have created dignified and fulfilling jobs for youths in the country.

Like other regions in the continent, NPOs in West Africa use technology to not only scale up their activities but also to ensure their effectiveness and promote efficiency. This is increasing youth employment, as technology has drastically changed the nature of employment. NPOs are implementing programmes that promote training in digital skills such as coding, data analysis, digital marketing, and cybersecurity. These skills are in high demand in the tech sector and other sectors - both private and public (Robinson et al., 2018). Consequently, NPOs are directly and indirectly contributing to employment requiring digital skills. However, the supply is not meeting demands, and as AI becomes more integral to African economies, companies and governments will need more digital skills. Therefore, NPOs in Southern Africa can integrate technological advancements across different sectors to increase employment opportunities and effectiveness.

Environmental conservation and green jobs present opportunities for NPOs to focus on. In East Africa, promoting job opportunities in environmental areas, particularly in the waste management sector, is crucial given the severe impacts of climate change (CFYE, 2021). In West Africa, prioritising green jobs and assisting young entrepreneurs in setting up eco-friendly businesses are essential. This includes providing guidance on funding possibilities and organising green-skills training programmes (Bozkurt & Stowell, 2016). The focus on green jobs is equally critical in agriculture, environmental management, and energy. By integrating green initiatives into their programmes, NPOs on the continent can address environmental and employment challenges and create sustainable and inclusive development.

Despite the shared goals and strategies, each region has unique aspects shaping the NPO sector's approach to youth employment. In East Africa, the emphasis is on digital skills training and rural transformation through smart farming and agribusiness. Programmes led by Young Professionals for Agricultural Development and African Centre for Technology Studies have successfully integrated technology into agriculture, fostering rural employment (Rono et al., 2012). In contrast, West Africa offers proactive advocacy efforts to influence government policies

and improve rural infrastructure, highlighting a strategic approach to addressing systemic barriers to youth employment (Blattman & Ralston, 2015). In Southern Africa, sectoral diversity allows for a wide range of tailored interventions, effectively addressing youth employment across different economic activities. However, NPOs in all regions focus considerably on governance issues.

## 5.5 Emerging knowledge gaps in the literature

In spite of the evidence from the literature review, it is important to acknowledge that the existing literature on the contribution of NPOs to dignified and fulfilling work is yet to be conclusive since some issues remain unexplored. There is a specific need to capture and quantify the contribution of NPOs to youth employment. Therefore, this calls for further studies to explore the extent to which NPOs contribute to creating dignified and fulfilling jobs for African youth. There is also a lack of disaggregate data (sub-sectors and geographical locations) relevant to making adequate inferences on the scale and scope of the economic contributions of the non-profit sector in Africa.

The reviews also identified a conceptual gap regarding the definition and operationalisation of dignified and fulfilling work. There is a need for a study to conceptualise dignified and fulfilling work at the country level in Africa. In so doing, it is important to mainstream African associational life into the conceptualisation of NPOs and how local funds are used to finance the activities of NPOs. Similarly, gender should be mainstreamed into such conceptual definitions of NPOs and disaggregate jobs created by gender. As noted earlier, to fully grasp the contributions of the non-profit sector to the African economy and the creation of dignified and fulfilling jobs for the youth, it is important to take the structure conditions – political and economic structures into consideration. Additional studies can be conducted to augment the scarce literature by examining the following research questions:

1. What are the lessons on the ability and potential of the non-profit sector to reach and provide opportunities to young people on the margins in a particular context (e.g., deep rural, those with a disability; female, young mothers etc.)?
2. What roles do non-profits and social enterprises play in facilitating transitions from informal to formal dignified and fulfilling jobs for African youth?
3. How do young people benefit or stand to benefit in terms of dignified and fulfilling jobs generated from the non-profit sector?
4. What are the perceptions of young people including those on the margins about the non-profit sector as a source of or a contributor to dignified and fulfilling jobs?
5. What is the current / potential role of technology and its usage by the non-profit sector in creating dignified and fulfilling jobs for young people in Africa?
6. What sections of the non-profit sector are more attractive to young men and women when it comes to work, and what factors influence this attraction?
7. What role do young people play in creating non-profit sector structures in Africa?
8. What factors limit NPOs from creating dignified and fulfilling jobs for marginalised youth, and how can the situation be improved?
9. What are the impacts of the African political economy on the ability of the non-profit sector to contribute to economic development and to creating dignified and fulfilling jobs?

Addressing these knowledge gaps will help strengthen understanding of the non-profit sector's contributions to African economic development and the creation of dignified and fulfilling jobs for the African youth.



# 06

## CONCLUSION



NPOs on the continent encounter several internal challenges, such as poor governance, mismanagement, inadequate funding, and a heavy reliance on international donors.

The findings of this literature review shed light on the economic contributions of the non-profit sector to youth employment in Africa, particularly in providing dignified and fulfilling jobs for individuals aged 15-35. NPOs, including social enterprises, play important roles in this landscape through various youth-oriented programmes. Notable contributions and opportunities in this synthesis report include direct employment, skills development, education and training, entrepreneurial support, policy advocacy, technology and digital advancement for youths, and research and impact assessments.

NPOs play a significant role in youth employment across various key sectors, including agriculture, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), trade, tourism and hospitality, information and communication technology (ICT), human rights and advocacy, arts and culture, environmental initiatives, and health. However, the literature review has identified several gaps and challenges within these sectors that hinder NPOs from providing dignified and fulfilling jobs for young people in Africa.

The review indicates that due to the structural nature of the African economy, NPOs primarily contribute to job creation in the informal sector. In addition to this external factor, NPOs on the continent encounter several internal challenges, such as poor governance, mismanagement, inadequate funding, and a heavy reliance on international donors. Many NPOs lack effective strategies to diversify their funding sources and face distrust from governments, leading to a lack of governmental support. Other issues include a hostile political environment, mistrust from citizens, a high turnover rate among staff. Also, most NPOs are based in urban areas and are unable to adequately respond to the employment needs of young females in rural areas.

To address these gaps, the literature review suggests that more investments are needed to create long-term, dignified, and fulfilling work for youth. African governments should focus on investments that will generate employment, especially dignified and fulfilled jobs for youth employment. This calls for a structural transformation of the African economy from natural resource dependence to manufacturing, high-value-added services, and mechanised agriculture.

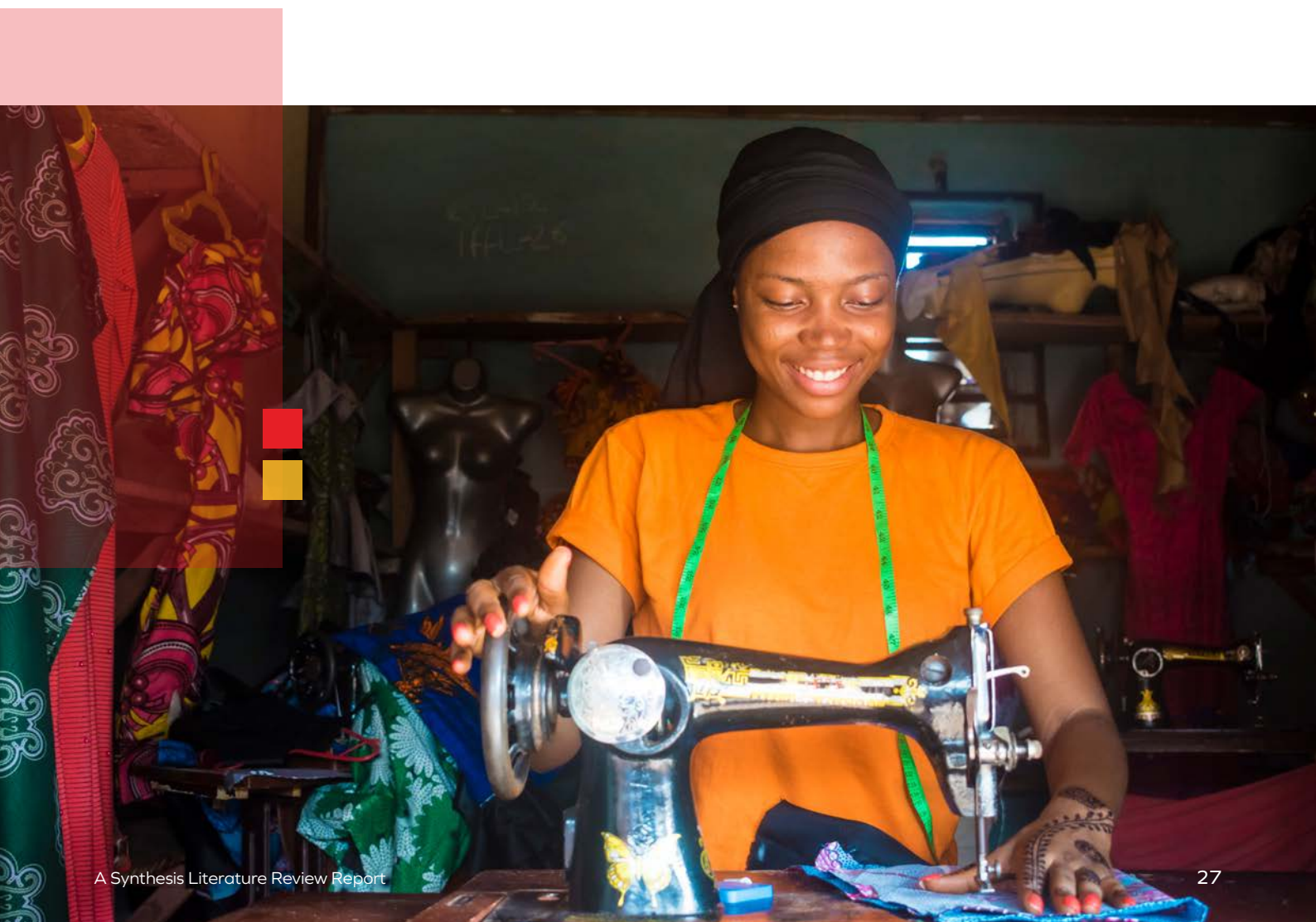


The review also points to the need for strong collaboration between government, private, and non-profit sectors. Embedded relationships between key actors will enable them to jointly track the needs of youth employment and the challenges of the labour market, reveal gaps in current youth employment programmes, and devise initiatives for dignified and fulfilling work for youths.

This synthesis report highlights that NPOs contribute to youth employment through job creation, investment in education and training (vocational and technical), advocacy, and entrepreneurship support.

However, quantifying the overall impact of NPOs' contributions to youth employment, especially to dignified and fulfilling jobs, remains challenging due to a limited contextual understanding and lack of empirical research. The evidence shows that some youths serve as volunteers, and others establish NPOs. Through the latter, they contribute to youth employment. Whether such jobs are dignified and fulfilling is debatable because of the lack of empirical evidence.

The review highlights opportunities for the non-profit sector to create more dignified and fulfilling jobs for African youth. It emphasises the need for NPOs to diversify funding sources through partnerships with private businesses and high-net-worth individuals to expand financial resources for youth employment initiatives. NPOs should continually advocate for policies that create conditions to create dignified and fulfilling work. Leveraging their influence and formal dialogue frameworks, NPOs can promote inclusive economic development and youth employment policies. Opportunities exist for NPOs to empower youth through entrepreneurship, prioritise female entrepreneurship programmes and expand business incubation infrastructure. Further findings suggest that NPOs should increase investment in enhancing youth employability through skills training programmes, especially for youths 'not in education, employment, or training' (NEET) and females in precarious situations.



The manufacturing sector, high value-added services and mechanised agriculture, the digital economy, craft, and tourism sectors have significant potential to contribute to dignified and fulfilling work for African youth. Other findings suggest prioritising technology interventions and green jobs, as technology has changed the nature of work. This calls for interventions, including acquiring digital skills, to help youth adapt to changing job market demands. Additionally, tailored programmes and policies are needed to expand employment opportunities for marginalised youth, such as young people who are disabled and ex-convicts.

The findings from the literature reviews have implications for further research. There is a crucial need to collect relevant quantitative and qualitative data using appropriate methodologies to address identified knowledge gaps and deepen understanding of NPOs' economic contributions to dignified and fulfilling work at the country level. Youth and NPO surveys will be appropriate for gathering quantitative data to measure NPOs' economic contributions to creating dignified and fulfilling work. Interviews with key informants, including marginalised youth, NPOs prioritising youth employment interventions, government officials, experts, and technical and financial partners, will also be useful. Case studies and focus group discussions with marginalised youth to share their employment experiences, including issues related to dignified and fulfilling work and opportunities are needed. This review did not focus on the creative sector creating dignified and fulfilling jobs. This should be given attention in future research.



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