



# Exploring the Contributions of the Non-profit Sector to Youth Employment in Zambia: A Literature Review

2025

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**Bhekinkosi Moyo**  
CAPSI Director

### DISCLAIMER

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

CBOs	Community-Based Organisations
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
ICNPO	International Classification of Non-profit Organizations
ICT	Information Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisations
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NPOs	Non-Profit Organisations



# 01 INTRODUCTION

Achieving sustainable development by 2030 through decent work and economic growth has become the United Nations' catchphrase guided by the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8. Youth employment, a global issue drawing significant attention from researchers and policymakers alike (Sumberg et al. 2021), is key to achieving the United Nations' development objectives. This is echoed by the Mastercard Foundation (2019) in the Young Africa Works strategy; youth employment is a key measure of social-economic progress that can be used to uplift millions of people out of poverty. However, global youth unemployment is a sticky challenge and particularly pronounced in Africa, where by 2050, it is projected that one in every three people looking for a job will be in Africa. (Yeboah & Jayne, 2020). Africa has the youngest population in the world, with more than 400 million young people between 15 and 35 years of age. Yet, one-third are jobless and discouraged, another third work in vulnerable jobs, and just one in six are employed for wages (AfDB, 2016). Accordingly, the need to engage the youth in decent work calls for policies and mechanisms to advance the youth's agenda (Avura & Ulzen-Appiah, 2016).

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Since independence in 1964, Zambia's population has grown significantly, reaching approximately 19 million as of 2021 (Zambian Statistics Agency, 2021). This demographic shift has resulted in Zambia having one of the youngest median ages globally at 16.6 years, compared to the global average of 29.2 years (YouthMap Zambia, 2014; World Bank, 2023). The rapid growth of the youth population presents substantial challenges to employment, with over 43 per cent of youth classified as Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET); often experiencing discouragement and limited access to education, job opportunities, skills development, and training (Betran, 2022).

Youth unemployment in Zambia has been a persistent issue, as evidenced in the various central statistics surveys carried out over the years. For example, in 2008, the Labour Force Survey reported a 28 per cent youth unemployment rate. The 2012 report highlights significant changes by geographical location, where unemployment figures for the youth in the rural regions were five percent more than those in urban areas. Additionally, urban youth unemployment was much higher among women (47 per cent) than among men (42 per cent) (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2008; 2012). The 2012 African Economic Outlook confirmed that urban youth faced higher unemployment rates than their rural counterparts and that young women were more affected than young men (African Economic Outlook, 2012). As of 2021, data from the Zambia Statistics Agency underscores the persistence of these findings (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2021). Of Zambia's population of 19 million, 40 per cent were aged between 15 and 35 years of age, with over half under the age of 18 years. Among the two million youth labour force, approximately 353,000 were unemployed.

Globally, there has been a growing interest in the non-profit sector due to its perceived efficiency and effectiveness compared to government services (Hansmann, 1980). This is supported by the development of a meaningful satellite account for non-profit institutions to account for their significant contribution to the economy outside the Government units, Households, and Corporations (UN, 2003). The sector's widespread presence is linked to its historical development and alignment with maximising social welfare (Easley & O'Hara, 1983). In developed economies, non-profits significantly contribute to national economies by enhancing public service provision (Bartosova & Podhorska, 2021) and empowering communities by creating stable job opportunities (Berg, 2013). Even a multi-country comparative study by the Johns Hopkins University Centre for Civil Society found that non-profits employ 10 per cent more of the workforce, making them the largest employer in any industry (Salamonet et al., 2013). These findings underscore the economic importance of the non-profit sector, driven primarily by altruistic motives.



While African governments have taken several measures to encourage job creation and reduce youth unemployment, the involvement of non-profit organisations (NPOs) remains critical in this situation. There is a growing expectation that the sector could contribute to the emergence of economically and politically stable societies in several ways (Onwujuba, 2002). For example, Patel (2012) argued that the South African government relies significantly on NGOs to deliver social services such as early childhood development, education, health care, and childcare. In the same vein, amid the heightened rural poverty and the lack of employment opportunities for marginalised communities experienced by the young Zambian population (Imboela, 2005), the need for the operations of the non-profit sector can never be overemphasised. Accordingly, to meet these social economic demands, Daraojimba & Okunade (2024) recommended that non-profits require the design of approaches that are context specific and tailored to the specific needs, challenges, and cultural dynamics of the communities they serve.

The literature on NPOs has extensively explored various aspects, including their role in youth employment, particularly in Zambia. While some studies have focused on enhancing an understanding of NPOs (Weerawardena et al., 2010), others have examined their challenges and opportunities (Johnson et al., 2021). Additionally, research has delved into managing stakeholder relationships within NPOs (Mato-Santiso et al., 2021), and its governance structures (Blevins, Ragozzino, & Eckardt, 2022). However, despite the significant research interests, there is limited literature that discusses explicitly the economic role of NPOs in promoting dignified and fulfilling work for youth in Zambia. This knowledge gap in research is addressed by the current study, which aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by investigating the impact of NPOs on youth employment in Zambia. To address this broad research question, this review aims to explore the following thematic areas:

- The economic contribution of the non-profit sector to youth employment in Zambia.
- The economic contribution of the non-profit sector to dignified and fulfilling work for young people in Zambia.
- Within the non-profit sector in Zambia, what are the sub-sectoral contributions to dignified and fulfilling work for various categories of young people?
- What are the emerging knowledge gaps within the sector and sub-sectors?
- What is the state and nature of youth employment and or youth engagement as work in these sub-sectors?
- What are the possibilities and opportunities for increased employment in the sector?



# 02

## METHODOLOGY



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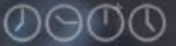
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To explore the scale, quality, and impact of the non-profit sector in providing dignified and fulfilling employment for African youth, including those at the margins, the researchers used online databases including Google Scholar, Web of Science, and Scopus. Keywords such as non-profit sector, civil society organisations (CSOs), nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), and community-based organisations (CBOs) were used to search the literature from peer reviewed journals to retrieve relevant information on the topic. Moreover, supplementary sources such as grey literature were consulted to ensure a comprehensive review of the topic. The data collection methods involved online searches, access to library resources, and consultation with subject matter experts to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives and insights. The analysis process included synthesising the gathered literature, identifying key themes, trends, and knowledge gaps, and drawing out implications for understanding the sector's economic contribution to dignified and fulfilling work for the youth in Zambia.

Supplementary sources such as grey literature were consulted to ensure a comprehensive review of the topic.



# 03 ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION OF THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR TO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN ZAMBIA



As outlined by Watson et al. (2007), the term ‘economic contribution’ refers to the broad measure of the gross change in economic activity resulting from various factors such as industries, events, or policies within a specific regional economy. This broad concept encompasses a multitude of mechanisms and activities that enhance the economic value of a region, including, but not limited to, job creation, production of goods and services, innovation, research, and investment. In Zambia, significant economic contributors span diverse sectors, including activities in mining, agriculture, manufacturing, services, infrastructure development, government policies, fiscal management, and foreign direct investment (Spahia et al., 2023). Among these sectors, heightened mining, agriculture, industrial, and service production stand out as pivotal for sustained economic growth, with the mining sector playing a particularly prominent role (Chigunta & Mwanza, 2016).

Zambia leverages its significant economic contribution from agriculture, industry and service sectors (Statista, 2024) with its abundant water resource playing a pivotal role in contributing 80 per cent of the country’s electricity generation and supporting its agricultural capabilities. Despite its abundant natural resources, political stability, and impressive annual economic growth rate of 7.4 per cent between 2004 and 2014, it is surprising to note the persistence of economic exclusion, especially among the youth (DWF & CYLA, 202; Njovu, 2022; World Bank, 2023), with most citizens, especially those in rural areas worryingly poor (Ministry of National Development Planning, 2017). Accordingly, it is in the interest of this review to explore the interventions the non-profit sector has in place to minimise or eradicate these challenges.

### 3.1 Identifying Conceptualisation of the Non-profit Sector within the Zambian Context

A google scholar search for the term ‘non-profit sector in Zambia’ yields minimal results due to a lexicon discrepancy. The activities characterising this sector commonly sit under the umbrella of civil society, which closely aligns with the broader literature (Malena & Heinrich 2007; Mwinga, 2002; World Bank, 2010). Despite its widespread usage, defining the practical boundaries of civil society has proved challenging, leading to difficulties in establishing an operational conception and standardised measures coupled with a dearth of empirical knowledge (Malena & Heinrich, 2007). Acknowledging these challenges, Malena and Heinrich (2007) recognised the imperative to measure and assess civil society, prompting the establishment of an operational and universally applicable definition. They summarise the term civil society to reflect “the arena, outside the family, the government, and the market, where people associate their interests” (Malena & Heinrich, 2007:340). This definition aims to provide clarity and applicability on a global scale, offering a foundation for understanding and evaluating the role of civil society across diverse contexts, including Zambia. Accordingly, this report will use the terms civil society and non-profit sector interchangeably to mean the non-profit sector in Zambia and still adopt the characterisation as described by the Johns Hopkins study (Salamon & Anheier, 1996).



### 3.2 Registration Status of the Non-profit Sector in Zambia

Organisations in this sector can either be formally or informally organised. While formal enterprises operate in protected markets where they pay tax and adhere to stringent compliance standards such as tariffs, quotas, and trade licenses (ILO, 1972), the term ‘informal sector’ describes economic activities outside the framework of corporate public and private sector institutions (Hart, 1973). These include those that require little capital, low-level technology, and no access to markets, as well as those operating within the boundaries of law to avoid government regulations (Hart, 1973). In Zambia, the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services drafted a National Policy on Non-Governmental Organizations in 1997 to reflect the institutional framework of the Zambian non-profit sector. However, the approval process of this policy framework encountered several challenges due to pressure from civil society and the donor community (Haapanen & Waller, 2007; Wilson, 2007). Consequently, Zambia’s legislative framework for NPOs is still evolving, with numerous laws, policies, and non-state actors involved in governing the registration and operations of the sector.

According to the SDG Philanthropy Platform (2017), the non-profit sector in Zambia promotes, among other things, civic education, advocacy, human rights and social welfare, and development. These organisations operate across the country, with local and international organisations under various registration bodies. These organisations are primarily active in carrying out development and human rights activities, with a significant presence in urban and rural areas. Most of these are concentrated along the railway route from Copperbelt to Livingstone due to easy access to needy areas (Haapanen & Waller, 2007). Larger CSOs located in large cities like Lusaka create linkages with individuals in smaller towns to help carry out their activities.

As of 2007, the structure of Zambia’s civil society included trade unions, local community-based organisations, informal civil groups, religious organisations, local NGOs, and international NGOs (INGOs) (Haapanen & Waller, 2007). Among these, 41 were registered trade unions, about 11,000 were NGOs, and almost 14,000 were religious organisations. These organisations register under different bodies: the Patents and Companies Registration Agency, the Registrar of Societies, or the Registrar of Non-Governmental Organisations in the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services. The silo-based operational framework lacks cohesion, leading to potential service redundancies that, if merged, could enhance efficiency. Additionally, numerous informal organisations operate within communities across Zambia. Grassroots entities, while not formally registered, play significant roles in addressing local needs and concerns, complementing the efforts of their registered counterparts.

The silo-based operational framework lacks cohesion, leading to potential service redundancies that, if merged, could enhance efficiency.

The dichotomy between formal and informal NPOs in Zambia, along with the fragmented registration and regulatory framework, complicates efforts to understand the actual size and impact of the sector. The contested policy framework and the existence of numerous informal entities further obscure the landscape. For a comprehensive understanding and effective non-profit sector governance, there is a pressing need for cohesive policies, reliable data collection, and inclusive research that captures both formal and informal contributions. Addressing these challenges could lead to more efficient service delivery, better resource allocation, and enhanced support for community-driven initiatives across Zambia. Accordingly, this study intends to address this knowledge gap through a mixed methods research design. This review explores the sector’s economic contribution among marginalised youth in Zambia.



### 3.3 Youth Employment Status in Zambia

The youth in Zambia face several challenges when it comes to employment. A recent newspaper article by Chalwe (2024) identified seven key factors contributing to high youth unemployment. These factors include low economic growth, a thriving informal economy, a lack of entrepreneurship skills, limited budgets for research and development, and deficiencies in the education system that lead to a mismatch between educational outcomes and the requirements of the labor market. Addressing these issues is essential for promoting economic inclusion and requires solutions that are proportionate to the scale of the problem.

The Zambia Statistics Agency (2021) provides some interesting statistics of the employment structure in Zambia. It is noted that the majority of employment is in the informal sector (43.4 per cent), followed by the formal sector (29.6 per cent) and household sector (27 per cent). More specific data reveal that 2 033 232 people comprise the youth labour force, among which 1 680 358 are employed, 509 168 are in formal employment, 725 211 are informally employed, and 445 979 are employed in the household. In addition, Bhorat et al.(2015) noted that youth aged 15 to 24 years are most prone to unemployment or discouraged worker status with low labor participation compared to those aged between 25 and 34. Although the lower labor participation rate of the 15 to 24-year-old age group is somewhat expected because they are expected to still be in school, youth unemployment is still a contested topic within the Zambian labor market and, if unresolved, could linger as a youth problem. Table 1 provides statistics on the status of the Zambian labour market by age as of 2015.

**TABLE 1: Labour market by age in Zambia, 2015**

	15-24 (000s)	(%)	25-34 (000s)	(%)	Non-youth <65 (000s)	(%)	Non-youth >65 (000s)	(%)	Total (000s)	(%)
Working age population	3 071 (28)	39.1	1 970 (24)	25.1	2 427 (26)	30.9	383 (11)	4.9	7 852	100
Employment	1 094 (19)	22.7	1 477 (22)	30.7	2 014 (24)	41.9	224 (9)	4.7	4 809	100
Unemployment (strict)	237 (9)	55.4	122 (7)	28.4	68 (5)	15.8	2 (0.6)	0.4	428	100
Labour force (strict)	1 331 (20)	25.4	1 599 (22)	30.5	2 082 (24)	39.8	226 (9)	4.3	5 238	100
Discouraged workers	110 (6)	57.2	51 (4)	26.3	30 (3)	15.7	2 (0.7)	0.9	192	100
Not economically active	1 630 (22)	67.3	321 (11)	13.3	315 (10)	13.0	156 (7)	6.4	2 422	100
Labour force participation rate (%)	43.3		81.1		85.8		58.9		66.7	
Unemployment rate (%)	17.8		7.6		3.3		0.7		8.2	

The data are weighted. Standard errors are in parentheses

Source: Bhorat et al. (2015)

Most Zambians are marginalised and confront a unique set of systemic challenges that exacerbate their ability to access meaningful employment opportunities (Restless Development, 2017). According to the 2014 YouthMap Assessment report, these challenges encompass, amongst others, poor quality of education and educational opportunities, limited civic engagement opportunities, high HIV prevalence rates, lack of experience, nepotism, and corruption, teenage pregnancy, lack of skills and entrepreneurship training, and early marriage (YouthMap Zambia, 2014), leading to high vulnerability and poverty levels. Nonetheless, the major obstacles Zambian youth face in their pursuit of gainful employment paint a grim picture of reality and call for a deeper insight, especially in assessing the economic contribution of the country's non-profit sector to the youth in the margins. The underlying issues Chalwe (2024) identified could be explored to address youth unemployment effectively. The following sections discuss some of the key interventions implemented by the non-profit sector to address youth unemployment.

### 3.4 Non-profit Sector and Work Interventions to the Youth in Zambia

The non-profit landscape in Zambia is broad. It is characterized by a diverse array of active registered and non-registered organisations established to combat the socio-economic issues that confront the nation (Haapanen & Waller, 2007). The sector saw significant growth, particularly after the 1991 period of economic and political liberalization, which coincided with a decline in the state's ability to provide public services to citizens (Mumba & Mumba, 2010). To date, the sector contributes 0.6 per cent of overall employment. Of these, 0.5 are youth (Zambian Statistics Agency, 2021). Specifically, NGOs employ 4,482 youth, faith-based organisations employ 9,901, and embassies and international organisations employ 962, totalling 15,345 youth employed by registered non-profits. This data is further disaggregated by gender and geographical location in Table 2.

**TABLE 2: Distribution of youth employment in Zambia 2021**

Institutional Sector	Total			Rural		Urban	
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
	Number	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total	1,680,358	62.4	37.6	63.0	37.0	62.1	37.9
Central Government	106,504	59.4	40.6	64.6	35.4	57.3	42.7
Local Government	46,909	52.6	47.4	36.6	63.4	56.5	43.5
Parastatal/State-owned firm	23,590	81.5	18.5	81.2	18.8	81.6	18.4
Embassy/International organisation.	1,325	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0
NGO	8,517	76.5	23.5	100.0	0.0	65.1	34.9
Faith-Based organisation	14,268	76.8	23.2	53.0	47.0	96.0	4.0
Private Business / Farms	1,025,227	67.3	32.7	65.7	34.3	68.2	31.8
Producers' cooperative	8,039	65.1	34.9	32.2	67.8	75.5	24.5
Household	445,979	50.9	49.1	59.0	41.0	43.6	56.4

Source: Adapted from Zambian Statistics Agency (2021)

These data provide a significant starting point for understanding the scale and scope of the non-profit sector's economic contribution in Zambia. However, the literature remains notably silent in providing up-to-date and consistent data that includes outcomes of their impact on the informal sector. By analysing information from various literature sources, this review offers a few examples highlighting the extent of its contributions.

#### 3.4.1 Education and Scholarship

Education is vital for any nation's social and economic prosperity and has become a major factor for developing human capabilities, transmitting knowledge and cultural heritage, and improving the quality of life. In a study that explored the supply side determinants of youth unemployment in Zambia and India, Ali and Jabeen (2016) found that the factors determining youth unemployment in the formal sector were the lack of required qualifications and training. The current low education attainment in Zambia, with its uneven distribution between gender, region, and economic sector (Ravillard, 2017), presents a significant opportunity for improvement that could profoundly reduce youth unemployment.

The education system in Zambia has significantly impacted the development of youth employment. The Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MESVTEE) plays a pivotal role in skills development and training by integrating basic entrepreneurship skills into the curriculum and formulating and implementing policies related to general education and skills development (Bhorat et al., 2015). However, the education sector faces several challenges that affect its ability to prepare students for the labour market. These are low education and skills levels, skills mismatch, and limited access to quality education (Betran, 2022). Amid these challenges, the donor community, including the ILO, African Development Bank, and local NGOs, are collaborating with the

Zambian government to provide skills development and capacity-building interventions to facilitate access to dignified and fulfilling jobs. A few of these are discussed below.

The Girls Education and Women's Empowerment Livelihoods (GEWEL) project, funded by the World Bank in 2015, aims to support 1.5 million households in Zambia. It focuses on improving the livelihoods of extremely poor women and girls aged 14 to 18 in rural areas, helping them succeed in their education (Baur-Yazbeck et al., 2019; World Bank, 2024). Beneficiaries are selected through community meetings, which identify potential participants, followed by household enumeration, community validation, and a lottery process. The programme provides training in life skills, business skills, and savings techniques. The programme has impacted girls from 39 districts (out of 116 districts) in Zambia. The project is still ongoing and has a budget of \$242 million.

Youth Skills Enterprise Initiative (YSEI), a joint undertaking by the Cross Society, the YWCA Council of Zambia, and Street Kids International, was established in 1996 in response to the increasing economic needs of street kids in Lusaka (Street Kids International, 2002). The programme targets youth between the ages of 14 and 22 years that are out of school and spending most of their time on the streets with no work experience; in short, they marginalized youth. The programme aims to achieve a youth centric participatory process that views street kids as economic actors by providing them with useful business and life skills. To date, the successes of the YSEI have positively impacted participants, families, and communities in a great way, including but not limited to providing them with business skills, health education, and improved general human well-being. Other smaller but significant initiatives include establishing the Kucetekela Foundation in 2006 with the aim of scholarships to academically promising but disadvantaged Zambian boys and girls (Kucetekela Foundation, 2006). To date, the foundation has provided 118 scholarships and is sponsoring 34 youth.

### 3.4.2 Entrepreneurial Training and Skills Development

Several NGOs offer training opportunities to promote entrepreneurship in Zambia (Haabazoka, 2016). For example, a youth-focused NGO registered in 2003 has carried out activities in 24 districts in six provinces (Restless Development, 2020). Their work revolves around four goals: a voice, a living, reproductive rights, and leadership. It works with young people aged between 10 and 28 years and youth up to the age of 35 years to ensure that their voices are heard in the decision-making that affects their lives, bodies, health, well-being, livelihoods, and communities. Restless Development Zambia achieves its goals either by working directly with communities or through partnerships with community-based organisations or local authorities. They have projects that focus on establishing communities free of Gender-Based Violence, child marriages, teen pregnancies, and other harmful practices, as well as enabling young people to lead change and development. 13,000 young people have benefited from its programs. Among other achievements in 2022 alone, it supported 7,600 young people to in their communities and impacted 10 868 people in communities (Restless Development, 2022).

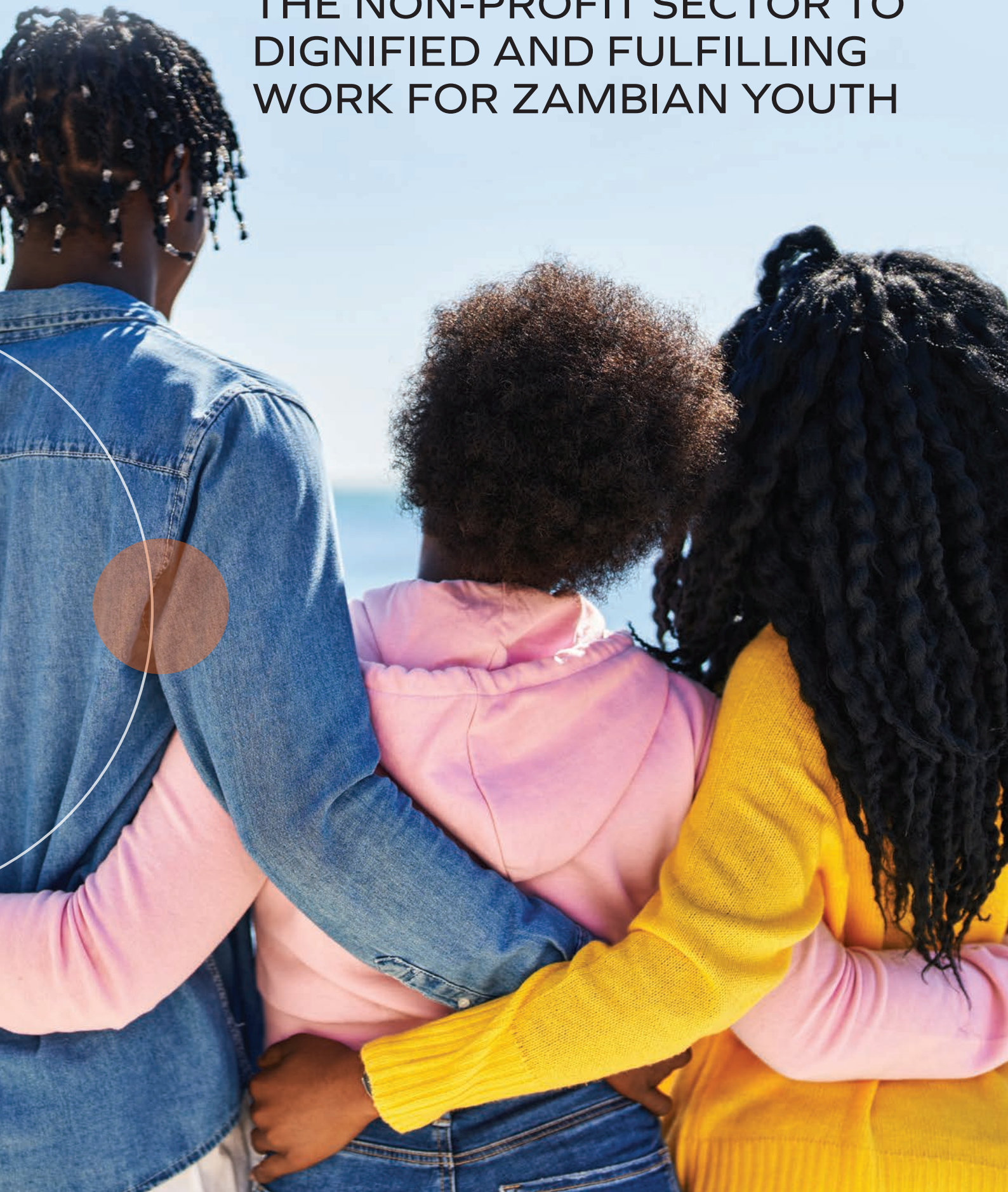
Another significant example is the work done by The Borgen Project, which commenced its mission in 2013 as a pioneering digital outsourcing company committed to providing employment opportunities for the youth in the country (Tanwar, 2018). Since its inception, the Borgen Project has played a pivotal role in transforming the lives of Zambia's young population, opening doors of opportunity, and shaping the future of the country. It has achieved this by championing equality in the digital realm, actively involving youth in entrepreneurial ventures, and instilling the concept of agriculture as a lucrative investment for the country's future leaders.

## 3.5 Conclusion on Economic Contribution of the Non-profit Sector on Youth Employment in Zambia

Sub-sections 3.3 and 3.4 provide some examples of the nature of youth employment and subsequent interventions provided by the non-profit sector in Zambia. However, as noted earlier, the magnitude of youth unemployment is significant beyond what these interventions can address. While existing data provides lessons for future interventions, the lack of extensive literature presents a challenge to ascertain the sector's size in providing direct employment to young women and men in Zambia, especially for those on the margins. The lack of literature also presents a challenge when addressing some pertinent questions, such as ascertaining the role that young people play in creating non-profit sector structures in Africa or how the non-profit sector engages the voices, views, and perspectives of different categories of young women and men on issues of productive and fulfilling livelihoods. Accordingly, more research is needed to address this knowledge gap.

04

# ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION OF THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR TO DIGNIFIED AND FULFILLING WORK FOR ZAMBIAN YOUTH



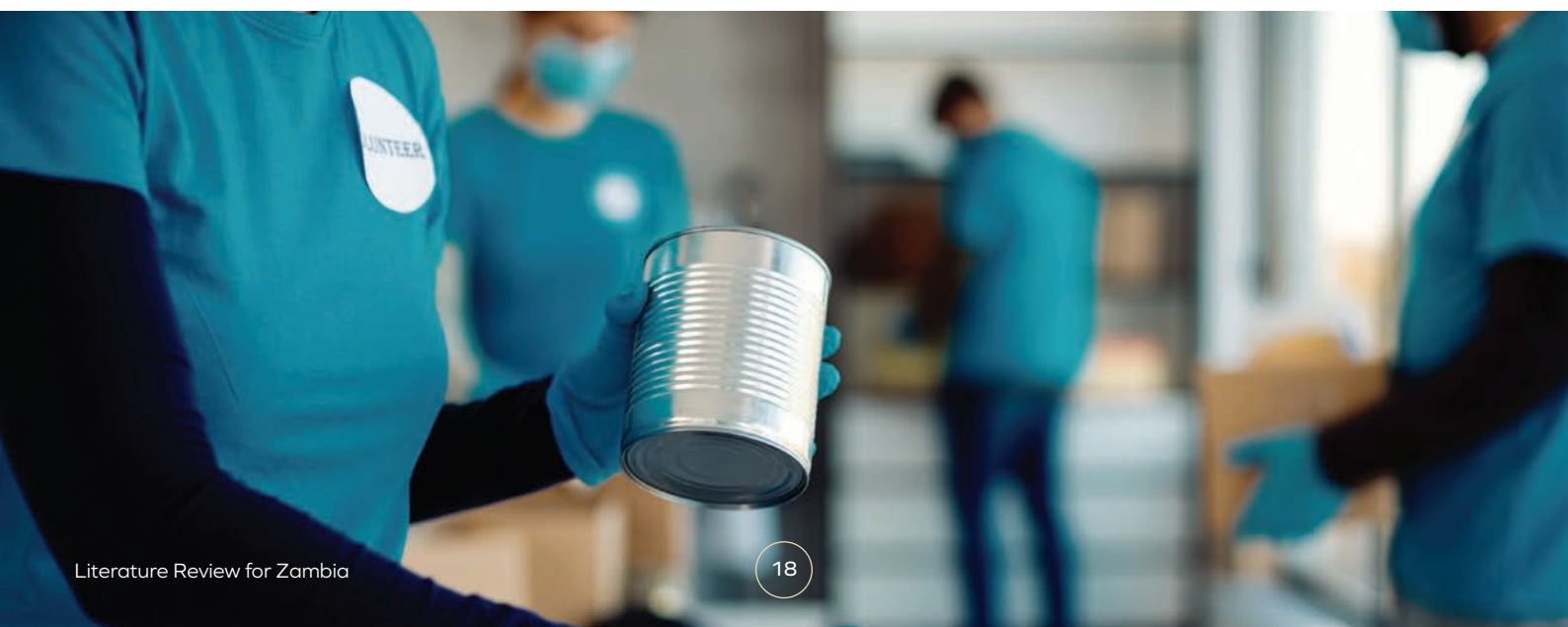
The right to work is a fundamental human right that is universally recognised as an inherent part of human dignity for persons of all ages and essential for realizing other human rights. However, access to decent and productive work, especially for young women and men, remains a daunting challenge among developing economies (ILO, 2023). The Global Youth Employment Trends report shows that young people are three times more likely than adults to be unemployed and are at risk of earning lower wages, working in unsafe environments, and often working below their skill or education level (ILO, 2013). These issues speak to the question: What is the non-profit sector's contribution to dignified and fulfilling work for African youth, specifically in Zambia?

The terms dignified and fulfilling work mean different things to different people and are mostly contextually based. For example, UPAYA Social Ventures (n.d.), an organisation that was founded on the basis of creating dignified jobs for people living in extreme poverty in India, describes dignified jobs as work with tasks that jobholders can perform without fear of injury and where they will receive fair, steady, and predictable pay. Others view it as work that provides individuals with a sense of purpose, self-worth, and personal growth including being valued and respected for one's contributions and expertise (Valcour, 2014), work that is not exploitative, especially among young women and other marginalised groups (Adela, 2022), as well as work that creates a feeling of security while promoting physical and mental well-being in oneself (Tuyisabe, Arinatwe, & Kazimierzuk, 2020).

The Mastercard Foundation's Youth Africa Works initiative aims to empower 30 million African youth to obtain dignified and fulfilling work by 2030 (Adela, 2022).

Similarly, governments and development share close alignment with these objectives. For example, the Mastercard Foundation's Youth Africa Works initiative aims to empower 30 million African youth to obtain dignified and fulfilling work by 2030 (Adela, 2022). The absence of a stable and reliable income makes it very challenging for young people to escape poverty. As a result, development communities are allocating considerable resources to help integrate African youth into labor markets (The Lab & Mastercard Foundation, 2020). This review defines dignified and fulfilling work in four categories: work that ensures a reliable income, reputable employment, work that offers a sense of purpose, and work that fosters respect in the workplace.

The need to achieve dignified and fulfilling work among the youth cannot be overemphasised. The literature highlights significant challenges the youth face in securing dignified and fulfilling work. For instance, in an exploratory study on how young people perceive their employment situations and the practices they adopt in their livelihood pursuits, 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, engage in casual work, or partake in alternative/illicit activities. The youth face insecure wages/profits, fierce competition, no or temporary contracts, expectations of financial or sexual favours, nepotism or corruption, unhealthy or dangerous activities, and limited institutional support (Gough, et al., 2016). In the same vein, Wilson (2007) observed that some of the work provided by the sector relies heavily on unpaid volunteer workers as a cost-saving mechanism. This is exacerbated by the absence of a legislative framework that could clarify Zambian public policy about the role of volunteers in providing social services. It is also noted that the extent to which the activities in the sector translate to the provision of direct employment to the youth and the subsequent scale of economic contribution is not clearly defined.



As noted in section 3, interventions by the non-profit sector in Zambia have the potential to uplift the youth from undesirable work conditions. Among these, skills development stands out as having the most significant potential for success. Recent ILO (2021) data highlights that most employed youth in Zambia have low skill levels and are engaged in the informal sector. Therefore, the non-profit sector could play a role in facilitating these transitions, most of which could benefit from skilling and re-skilling. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the sector's efforts in engaging women in skills development (Edgar, 2023), recognising the importance of gender inclusivity in these programs. However, the literature remains silent on the impact of youth skills development at a national level in response to the magnitude of the problem in Zambia. This absence highlights a knowledge gap in research that needs to be addressed.

Against this backdrop, understanding the meaning of dignified and fulfilling employment is important but complex to measure. One way to explore its measurement scale is through a co-creation process where the voices of the individuals impacted are included in the development of the scale. For instance, the DWF & CYLA (2021, p. viii) stipulated in their proclamation: "Nothing for Us without Us", including the youth's voice in determining employment structures, cannot be overemphasised. Among the many concerns raised, the youth clarified that the main barriers to achieving high inclusivity include a lack of financial resources, low awareness levels, and unemployment. The youth further demand quality public health service provision, quality education, social and welfare protection, and attention to economic diversification, to name a few. Realising the need to give the youth power to express themselves, this study aims to explore the role of the NPOs, including social enterprises, in facilitating the transitions from informal to formal, dignified, and fulfilling jobs among the marginalised youth in Zambia. Furthermore, the study intends to ascertain how much young people benefit or stand to benefit in terms of productive and fulfilling jobs generated from the non-profit sector, which has not been adequately addressed in the current literature.



A photograph of a group of young people, likely of African descent, holding hands in a circle. The image is taken from a high angle, looking down at the hands and faces. The people are smiling and looking towards the center. The background is bright and out of focus. A thin white circle is drawn around the hands, and a semi-transparent orange circle is overlaid on the right side of the image.

05

**SUB-SECTORAL CONTRIBUTIONS  
OF THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR  
TO DIGNIFIED AND FULFILLING  
WORK AMONG MARGINALISED  
YOUTH IN ZAMBIA**

The non-profit sector in Zambia is characterised by its heterogeneity and diversity (Einarsson & Wijkström, 2019; Mumba & Mumba, 2010), encompassing various subsectors such as trade unions, local CBOs, local NGOs, and INGOs. Trade unions, including the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions and the Federation of Free Trade Unions in Zambia, focus on improving working conditions but are not typically seen as advocates for marginalized groups (Haapanen & Waller, 2007). CBOs address community needs beyond their members' interests. Notable examples include community schools and religious organisations like the Catholic Commission for Justice, Development, and Peace (Haapanen & Waller, 2007). Local NGOs play a significant role in diverse areas such as education, agriculture, and human rights, with over 1,300 registered NGOs in Zambia (Mutenje, 2017; Wilson, 2007). INGOs such as World Vision and Save the Children also have a strong presence, working on health, education, and governance issues. The largest subsector, NGOs, actively fosters community change through training, capacity building, and mentorship programs, exemplified by organizations like Copper Rose Zambia (2021).

This review adopts the International Classification of Non-profit Organizations (ICNPO) to further classify the non-profit subsectors in Zambia. The ICNPO is widely used in varying global contexts to categorise non-profit activities comprehensively (Einarsson & Wijkström, 2019; Salamon & Anheier, 1996). The ICNPO then explores the economic activity of these establishments, focusing on detailing the major activities within which they could ground themselves. To this end, 12 major activities are identified. Table 3 provides a summary of the major activities.

**TABLE 3: International classification of NPOs' major groups and subgroups**

Major Group	Subgroup
Group 1: Culture and Recreation and Recreation Activities	1 100 Culture and Arts
	1 200 Sports
	1 300 Other Recreation and Social Clubs
Group 2: Education and Research	2 100 Primary and Secondary Education
	2 200 Higher Education
	2 300 Other Education
	2 400 Research
Group 3: Human Health Services	3 100 Hospitals and Rehabilitation
	3 200 Nursing Homes
	3 300 Mental Health and Crisis Intervention
	3 400 Other Health Services
Group 4: Social Services	4 100 Social Services
	4 200 Emergency and Relief
	4 300 Income Support and Maintenance
Group 5: Environment Protection and Animal Welfare Activities	5 100 Environment
	5 200 Animal Protection
Group 6: Community and Economic Development And Housing Activities	6 100 Economic, Social and Community Development
	6 200 Housing
	6 300 Employment and Training
Group 7: Civic, Advocacy, Political and International Activities	7 100 Civic and Advocacy Organisations
	7 200 Law and Legal Services
	7 300 Political Organisations
Group 8: Philanthropic Intermediaries and Voluntarism Promotion	
Group 9: Religion Congregations and Associations	

**TABLE 3: International classification of NPOs' major groups and subgroups** (continued)

Major Group	Subgroup
Group 10: Business, Professional and Labour Organisations	
Group 11: Professional, Scientific, Accounting and Administrative Services	
Group 12: Not Elsewhere Classified	

Source: Adapted from: Einarsson and Wijkström (2019)

The structure of the non-profit sector in Zambia is classified as heterogeneous and diverse. It is best explained according to four categories: grassroots organisations, formally constituted organizations, umbrella organizations, and platforms and consultation forums (Mumba & Mumba, 2010; Mutesa, 2006). While grassroots organisations such as faith-based organisations, women and youth-based organisations, farmers' unions, and cooperatives are formed to find joint solutions to problems. Formally constituted organisations focus on social responsibility, including supporting grassroots organisations. Yet umbrella organisations collaborate with the desire for information sharing and capacity building for member organisations. Moreover, platforms and consultation forums are established to create a common stance against external problems, public policy, and donor policies. The CSOs prevalent in Zambia are as follows:

- faith-based organisations,
- trade unions,
- women's organisations,
- student or youth organisations,
- developmental CSOs (NGOs working on literacy, health, or social services),
- advocacy CSOs (civic action, social justice, human rights, or consumers' groups),
- CSOs active in research, information dissemination, education and training (think tanks, resource centres, non-Profit schools),
- non-profit media groups,
- associations of socio-economically marginalised groups (poor people, homeless people, landless people, immigrants, refugees),
- social service and health associations (charities raising funds for health research and services, mental health associations, associations of people with physical disabilities),
- other fund-raising bodies and organisations,
- professional and business organisations (chambers of commerce, professional associations),
- community organisations (village associations, neighbourhood committees),
- community-level groups or associations (burial societies, self-help groups, parents' associations, village associations, indigenous peoples' associations, monasteries, and mosque-based associations),
- economic interest organisations (cooperatives, credit unions, mutual saving associations, agriculture),
- ethnic, traditional or indigenous associations or organisations,
- environmental organisations,
- culture, arts and social and recreational organisations, and
- CSO networks, federations, support organisations (Mumba & Mumba, 2010).



Beyond the figures provided in sub-section 3.4, obtaining precise quantitative data that explains how the segmentation of the Zambian non-profit subsectors affects work opportunities for various categories of young people has been challenging. However, using the fine-grained descriptive data provided by Mumba and Mumba (2010), along with industry details from the Non-governmental Gender Organisation Coordinating Council and grey literature (Haapanen & Waller, 2007), could offer a starting point for understanding the activities of the Zambian non-profit subsectors relative to the ICNPO categorisation.


Given the descriptions of various CSO sub-sectoral establishments, it can be argued that the primary establishments within Zambia's non-profit sector in Zambia concentrate on activities listed under social services (group 4), religious congregations and associations (group 9), and other activities (group 12). Other activities spread across seven additional groups, including culture and recreation, education services, environmental protection and animal welfare, civic, advocacy, political and international activities, and professional and labour organisations. A comparative summary is presented in Table 4.

**TABLE 4: Civil society in Zambia relative to the ICNPO classification**

ICNPO Categorisation	Civil Society in Zambia
Group 1: Culture, Communication, and Recreation Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Culture, arts, and social and recreational organisations</li> </ul>
Group 2: Education Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CSOs active in research, information dissemination, education, and training (think tanks, resource centres, non-Profit schools)</li> </ul>
Group 3: Human Health Services	
Group 4: Social Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developmental CSOs (for example, NGOs working on literacy, health, or social services)</li> <li>Associations of socio-economically marginalised groups (poor people, homeless, landless, immigrants, refugees)</li> <li>Social service and health associations (charities raising funds for health research and services, mental health associations, associations of people with physical disabilities)</li> <li>CSO networks, federations, support organisations</li> </ul>
Group 5: Environment Protection and Animal Welfare Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental organisations</li> </ul>
Group 6: Community And Economic Development and Housing Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic interest organisations (cooperatives, credit unions, mutual saving associations, agriculture)</li> </ul>
Group 7: Civic, Advocacy, Political and International Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocacy CSOs (civic action, social justice, human rights or consumers" groups)</li> </ul>
Group 8: Philanthropic Intermediaries and Voluntarism Promotion	
Group 9: Religion Congregations and Associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faith-based organisations</li> <li>Community organisations (village associations, neighbourhood committees)</li> <li>Community-level groups or associations (burial societies, self-help groups, parents associations, village associations, indigenous peoples, associations, monasteries, and mosque-based associations)</li> <li>Ethnic, traditional or indigenous associations or organisations</li> </ul>
Group 10: Business, Professional and Labour Organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trade unions</li> <li>Professional and business organisations (chambers of commerce, professional associations)</li> </ul>
Group 11: Professional, Scientific, Accounting and Administrative Services	
Group 12: Other Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Women's organisations</li> <li>Student or youth organisations</li> <li>non-Profit media groups</li> <li>Other fund-raising bodies and organisations</li> </ul>

Source: Borat et al. (2015)

While Table 4 illustrates some fine-grained qualitative analysis of the non-profit sub-sectoral classification in Zambia, limited research exists that analyses the size of the sub-sectoral contribution to dignified and fulfilling jobs for Zambian youth. Furthermore, there is a need to understand which sub-sector is the greatest employer of youth, including those in the margin. Accordingly, there exists a huge knowledge gap that requires further exploration.

A man with a shaved head, wearing a short-sleeved shirt with a bold orange and black geometric pattern and blue jeans, is walking away from the camera on a wide, dusty dirt road. His shadow is cast long and dark on the ground in front of him. The road is flanked by lush green trees and bushes on the left, and more vegetation and a simple building with a corrugated metal roof are on the right. In the distance, a few other people can be seen walking further down the road. The sky is a clear, bright blue. A thin white curved line and a solid orange circle are overlaid on the left side of the image.

# 06 EMERGING KNOWLEDGE GAPS WITHIN THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR AND SUB-SECTORS

Zambia possesses significant potential to harness its natural resources, youthful population and strategic geographical location for social and economic development. Over the past decade, the period between 2012 and 2022 (Statista, 2024), the country achieved substantial economic growth of , surpassing the regional averages in Southern Africa (Chigunta & Mwanza, 2016). This growth has the potential to mitigate the prevailing socio-economic challenges. Despite these advancements, youth unemployment remains a critical challenge in the country (Chigunta & Mwanza, 2016). Given this context, it is imperative to identify and assess opportunities within which the non-profit sector and its sub-sectors to increase their economic contribution to dignified and fulfilling work for young people in Zambia.

## 6.1 Level of Education

One of the primary drivers of youth unemployment/underemployment, as identified by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), closely tie to factors such as low education and skill levels. Although the Zambian government has formulated a comprehensive education plan, firmly advocating inclusivity and equality, to equip all individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills to actively contribute to and drive the economic advancement of the nation, access to timely and quality education among the Zambian youth remains one of the main challenges, especially in tertiary education (Population Council & UNFPA, 2018).

Zambia's youth have poor education outcomes, with many primary education dropout rates. In 2016 alone, the gross enrolment rate was 105 per cent for grades 1 to 7; with a subsequent net enrolment rate of 90.4 per cent for grades 8 to 12. Similar trends are experienced in tertiary education, where only 1.5 per cent achieve tertiary education. In light of this, it is expected that youth unemployment is a major challenge, which has exacerbated the crises of high levels of poverty and inequality. Addressing these pressing issues requires decisive and concerted interventions to provide a meaningful cushion against the adverse impacts faced by the youth. According to the 2012 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor data, one consoling development shows that Zambia youth are entrepreneurial (Xavier et al., 2013). However, it is also noted that most youth entrepreneurs do not continue beyond three years; most start their businesses with personal savings. They cannot sustain this for the medium to long term (Chigunta & Mwanza 2016).

It is expected that youth unemployment is a major challenge, which has exacerbated the crises of high levels of poverty and inequality.

## 6.2 Access to Digital Literacy

The term digital literacy has been defined in various ways, with different interpretations by scholars such as Bawden (2001), Bawden and Robinson (2002), Kope (2006), and Williams and Minnian (2007). Analysing the multitude of definitions exceeds the scope of this study. However, this study adopts the European Commission's (2023, p. 201) characterisation of digital literacy as "the proficiency in utilizing Information Communication Technology (ICT) and the Internet, emerging as a novel form of literacy in a way that citizens lacking digital literacy are hindered from full participation in society and from acquiring the essential skills and knowledge for thriving in the 21st century". According to Reddy, Sharma, and Chaudhary (2020), advancements in ICT have brought about access to eLearning capabilities due to the introduction of digital tools such as mobile devices, computer-aided manufacturing tools, and other communication tools.

In today's digital age, access to digital literacy is essential for employment and advancement in education, communication, and entrepreneurship. While these developments are undoubtedly intriguing, Fu (2013) argued that they also introduce a distinct set of challenges. One major problem, according to Radovanović et al. (2020), is the lack of solutions for local language digital interfaces, culturally relevant content, and digital literacy training. In light of this, Fu (2013) proposed a nuanced approach to digital literacy that considers individuals' diverse needs and circumstances, particularly in regions where traditional literacy challenges persist.

These challenges highlight opportunities for the non-profit sector to improve the socio-economic status and employability of youth in Zambia. The implications of these challenges are especially severe for marginalised youth, particularly those living in rural areas.

# 07 POSSIBILITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCREASED EMPLOYMENT IN THE ZAMBIAN NON-PROFIT SECTOR



The Zambian government has implemented several policies and laws aimed at promoting youth employment, including the National Youth Policy, Employment Act, Education Act, National Development Act, and Skills Development Act (Republic of Zambia, 2024; Population Council & UNFPA, 2018; Zambia Law Development Commission n.d.). These policies and initiatives were designed to create an environment conducive for youth to participate in the economy and overcome the socio-economic challenges facing them. Additionally, programmes like the Economic Stabilization and Growth Programme (ESGP), known as 'Zambia Plus' (Geda, Weeks, & Moono, 2018), aimed to stabilise the economy and foster growth. In alignment with its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Zambia allocates significant human, financial, and institutional resources, with substantial public investments directed toward social sectors to alleviate extreme poverty and promote human capital development (the Republic of Zambia, 2020).

Zambia is a resource-rich economy with mining, agriculture, trade, and construction sectors contributing significantly to its GDP. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) African Department (2023), the Zambian economy is bolstered with a growing service sector (4.2 per cent of GDP), a capital-intensive mining sector (17.5 per cent of GDP), and an agricultural sector (3.4 per cent of GDP) all contributing to the country's GDP. Despite these achievements, Zambia faces significant challenges in lifting its young and growing population out of poverty, inequality, and unemployment (Geda et al., 2018). The economy's heavy reliance on copper mining and rain-fed agriculture makes it vulnerable to fluctuations in global copper prices and climate-related shocks, such as droughts and floods (IMF African Department, 2023). This dependency, combined with limited economic diversification, has resulted in high public debt, weak fiscal positions, and a youth unemployment rate of approximately 52 per cent (International Labour Organisation, 2021), as well as high levels of poverty - 64.3% in 2022, (59., inequality (.57 in 2024) and working poverty (64.92% - those who earn less than \$2.15 per day in 2023 ) (Statista, 2024; World Bank, 2024)

The economy's heavy reliance on copper mining and rain-fed agriculture makes it vulnerable to fluctuations in global copper prices and climate-related shocks.

The effectiveness of Zambia's policies has been mixed. Key challenges include an implementation gap, characterised by a disconnect between policy formulation and actual execution, leading to a limited impact on youth employment rates (Betran, 2022). The dominance of the informal sector poses another challenge - 87.5% of workers in Zambia are employed in the informal sector (ILO, 2019). Also, 64.92% are considered working poor), and most in the informal sector work in unsafe environments. Furthermore, poor accountability due to the absence of robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for youth programs undermines the effectiveness of these policies in achieving their intended outcomes (Betran, 2022).



## 7.1 Employment Potential and Opportunities in the Non-profit Sector

The non-profit sector in Zambia could make a major contribution to employment, and the creation of dignified and fulfilling jobs for the youth, although this would be limited given the structural nature of the economy. But given this context, how can NPOs contribute to job creation in the country? By establishing partnerships with the government, NPOs can provide vocational training and skills development programmes tailored to the needs of the youth, thereby enhancing their employability. NPOs can also play a crucial role in advocating for policy reforms and raising awareness about youth employment issues, helping to bridge the gaps between youth needs and government initiatives. Additionally, the sector can offer entrepreneurial support through mentorship, access to microfinance, and business development training, increasing its visibility and impact.

According to the Zambia Statistics Agency (2021), industries such as agriculture, forestry and fishing, manufacturing, and wholesale and retail trade show higher percentages of employment in the country, with agriculture, forestry, and fishing being the largest employers. In 2019, the agriculture alone contributed 49.9% of employment – most of it informal (IMF, 2023). Research by Namonje-Kapembwa and Machina (2018) highlighted immense opportunities in primary production, including crops (soya beans, cotton, beans, cassava, maize), horticulture, aquaculture, and livestock (cattle, goats, sheep, pigs, poultry, beekeeping). These opportunities are not limited to the production level; the secondary segment of the agricultural value chain, encompassing activities like agro-processing, trading, and retailing, also presents crucial avenues for youth employment. Notably, agro-processing activities such as milling, soya bean oil production, and the processing of meat and milk products offer valuable opportunities for youth employment.

A study by Mulema et al. (2021) investigated youth participation in agri-enterprises in Zambia and Vietnam showed a notable difference in engagement patterns. While Vietnamese youth exhibited diversified involvement in various value chain activities beyond production, Zambian youth predominantly focused on crop production, particularly high-value and early maturing cash crops. This disparity suggests a knowledge gap in Zambia, limiting awareness of the broad spectrum of opportunities available to youth in the agricultural sector beyond crop production. Addressing this knowledge gap is crucial to unlocking the full potential of youth engagement in agri-enterprises in Zambia.



# 08 CONCLUSION



This review explored the economic contribution of the non-profit sector in Zambia, particularly emphasizing its role in promoting dignified and fulfilling work among the youth. The right to such employment is fundamental to human dignity and a universal human right. However, providing access to decent and productive employment remains a major challenge, especially for young people in developing countries like Zambia. This has to be understood in the context of the economy, which though agriculture contributed 3.39% to GDP in 2022, it accounted for half of employment, most of which was in the informal sector, with the majority of those in the sector considered as working poor. NPOs, therefore, have a role in advocating for policy for the structural transformation of the economy from low to high value-added activities. Sectors that absorb unskilled to highly skilled workers as necessary to create dignified and fulfilled jobs for Zambian youth should include working collaboratively with the government, the private sector, and the donor community to create a conducive investment environment. NPOs should, therefore, play a major role in social dialogue.

The existing literature on the economic contribution of the non-profit sector to youth employment in Zambia is notably limited and fragmented. There is a significant lack of extensive empirical research and standardized measures to accurately capture the sector's impact. While existing studies offer valuable insights into specific interventions such as educational initiatives and entrepreneurial training, they do not comprehensively understand the sector's overall size and its direct employment impact on young people, especially those in the margins. This knowledge gap underscores the need for cohesive policies, reliable data collection, and inclusive research to effectively address youth unemployment and fully comprehend the non-profit sector's economic role in Zambia and African economies.

Moreover, the literature highlights unfavourable work conditions, unpaid volunteer labour, and the absence of legislative frameworks supporting volunteer roles. Further research is essential to explore the long-term impacts of non-profit interventions, the effectiveness of skills development programs, and the integration of youth perspectives in shaping employment structures. Understanding the nuanced definitions of dignified and fulfilling work and developing comprehensive, inclusive measures for these concepts would also enhance the current body of knowledge.

Despite substantial economic growth over the past decade, youth unemployment remains a pressing issue in Zambia. Addressing this challenge necessitates leveraging opportunities within the non-profit sector to contribute to dignified and fulfilling employment for young people. Low education and skill levels are primary drivers of youth unemployment, with high dropout rates in primary education and low tertiary education attainment exacerbating the issue. Furthermore, digital literacy is crucial for employment, education, and entrepreneurship in the digital age. However, challenges such as the digital divide and lack of local language digital interfaces persist. This highlights the need for NPOs to work with the government and private sector to make concerted efforts to bridge these gaps. Research is required in this area to promote evidence-based policy.

Digital literacy is crucial for employment, education, and entrepreneurship in the digital age.

Although Zambia has implemented policies promoting youth employment, such as the National Youth Policy and the Skills Development Act, these face challenges, including implementation gaps, the dominance of the informal sector, and poor accountability. The non-profit sector can play a crucial role by partnering with the government to provide vocational training and skills development programs, advocating for policy reforms, and offering entrepreneurial support through mentorship, access to microfinance, and business development training. Significant employment opportunities exist in agriculture, forestry, fishing, manufacturing, and wholesale and retail trade, with the agricultural value chain presenting immense potential for youth employment. However, there is a knowledge gap in the agricultural sector, limiting the youth's awareness of opportunities beyond crop production.

To fully harness Zambia's potential for economic development and reduce youth unemployment, it is crucial to address the existing knowledge gaps and utilize the capabilities of the non-profit sector. This approach will foster a more inclusive and robust economic environment for Zambian youth, ultimately contributing to sustainable socio-economic development.

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