

The Non-Profit Sector's Contribution to Kenya's Economy, and the Creation of Dignified and Fulfilling Work for the Youth 2025

Roselyne Cheruiyot

Centre on African Philanthropy and Social Investment, Wits Business School,
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of the Centre on African Philanthropy and Social Investment (CAPSI) at the Wits Business School, I want to extend our gratitude to everyone who made the production of this paper possible. This paper is one of seventeen others that CAPSI is publishing under one of its projects, namely, 'the creation of dignified and fulfilling jobs for young Africans by the non-profit sector.'

I extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Mastercard Foundation for the generous grant, which made this critical research and the publication of this paper possible. Even though this paper is based on the research intervention of the project, the project overall has different components that include convenings, dialogues, education and training, communications and capacity building, among others. The production of this paper was made possible by the contributions of CAPSI staff and our partner in the country under study. I thus want to specifically thank the author of this paper for the tireless effort put into research and writing. I also want to thank the research lead for the region of East Africa, Wycliffe Nduga Ouma, whose unwavering dedication and insightful contributions have greatly enriched this work. I also owe a profound debt of thanks to the anonymous reviewers and copy editor; their exceptional expertise and commitment were crucial in elevating the content and quality of this publication. We sincerely appreciate Prof. Omano Edigheji, whose unique insights and constructive feedback have played a pivotal role in shaping this paper. Lastly, I acknowledge our Digital Publisher, Xolani Dlamini, for ensuring this paper is formatted and presented to the highest standard. This project would not be successful without the inputs of our support staff namely Joseph Sobuthongo, other research leads, Professor Alan Fowler, Prof Jacob Mati and Dr Simamkele Dlakavu. Thank you to everyone.

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 nonprofit 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.



ABSTRACT



This literature review examines the non-profit sector's role in Kenya's economy, focusing on its contribution to creating dignified and fulfilling employment for youth aged 15 to 35 years. Despite Kenya's youthful population, high unemployment and underemployment persist, with 77 per cent of employed youth in vulnerable, informal jobs. The non-profit sector, including NGOs and social enterprises, addresses these challenges through direct employment, volunteerism, skills training, entrepreneurship support, and digital advancement. It contributes significantly to GDP, with NGOs alone employing over 76 000 individuals and injecting billions into the economy. However, gaps remain in skills alignment, technology access, gender disparities, and policy advocacy. The review identifies sector-specific opportunities in agriculture, ICT, and MSMEs, while highlighting the need for demand-driven training and inclusive strategies. By synthesising existing literature, this review underscores the sector's potential to transform youth employment but calls for stronger collaboration, sustainable funding, and culturally sensitive frameworks to enhance impact. The findings aim to inform policymakers, practitioners, and researchers about leveraging the non-profit sector for equitable economic growth.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACTS	Africa Centre for Technology Studies
AECF	Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund
ANDE	Aspect Network of Development Entrepreneurs
AU	African Union
CBOS	Community Based Organisations
CFYE	Challenge Fund for Youth Employment
COTU	Central Organisation of Trade Unions
CREAW	Centre for Rights Education and Awareness
EET	Entrepreneurship Education Training
GAC	Global Affairs Canada
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IEL	Institute for Education Leadership
IIW-BEK	Investing in Women in the Blue Economy of Kenya
ILC	International Labour Conference
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IPA	Innovations for Poverty Action
JOYWO	Joyful Women Organisation
KIPPRA	Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis
KYDP	Kenya Youth Development Policy
KYEOP	Kenya Youth and Opportunities Project
KYEP	Kenya Youth Employment Programme





K-YES	Kenya Youth Employment and Skills
MAPSKID	Master Plan Study for Kenyan Industrial Development
MGA	Mr. Green Africa
MSME	Micro, Small, Medium-sized Enterprises
NEET	Not in Employment, Education, or Training
NESC	National Economic and Social Council
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NPOs	Non-Profit Organisations
NSDP	National Skills Development Policy
PBO	Public Benefit Organisations
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SE	Social Enterprise
SEEWO	Social Economic Woman Empowerment Organisation
SHOFCO	Shining Hope for Communities
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
SUN	SHOFCO Urban Network
UN	United Nations
UNC-CRPD	United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
YEDF	Youth Employment Development Fund
YPARD	Young Professionals in Agriculture Research and Development

01 INTRODUCTION



The non-profit sector in Kenya and across Africa has been a significant economic force, with a potential to contribute to the creation of dignified and fulfilling work for young people. In Kenya, the sector has witnessed unprecedented growth in the last three decades, with a significant increase in the number and activities of organisations carrying out non-profit work. The volume of resources controlled by the sector has also grown, indicating its economic significance (Kanyinga & Mitullah, 2007).

The non-profit sector in Kenya is diverse and includes organisations such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), soon-to-be public benefit organisations (PBOs), companies limited by guarantee (CLGs), societies, trusts, churches, political parties, and trade unions (COF, 2022). Key players in this sector encompass youth groups, NGOs, cooperatives, foundations/trusts, unions, women groups, and self-help groups (Kanyinga & Mitullah, 2007). According to the Annual NGO Sector Report 2018/2019, NPOs employ over 76 000 individuals, including full-time employees and volunteers (NGO Coordination Board, 2019). The NGO Coordination Board, regulating the non-profit sector, had 12 162 NGOs that had been registered by June 30, 2022 (Angira, 2023).. These entities significantly contribute to Kenya's economy by implementing projects stimulate economic activity and provide substantial employment opportunities.

Non-profit organisations (NPOs) in Africa, with a specific focus on Kenya, contribute significantly to various aspects, notably employment, poverty alleviation, reduction of inequality, provision of public services, support for social systems, delivery of improved goods and services, social responsibility, societal transformation, and acting as research and information sources for critical national policies (Choto, Iwu, & Tengeh, 2020). Social enterprises (SEs) in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), including Kenya, also play a substantial role in employment across diverse sectors. However, challenges exist in estimating their numbers due to the lack of a consistent definition and officially recorded data (Barran, Laucke, Nima, Prasad, & Schwan, 2020).

The review focused on the non-profit sector's role in addressing unemployment challenges in Africa, specifically in Kenya, with a focus on youth. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) reported significant unemployment in Africa, particularly among the youth, with 34 million people unemployed in 2019, including 12.2 million youths aged 15 to 24 years (Shawa, Sossa, O'Higgins, & Folawewo, 2020). In addition, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated youth unemployment in Africa. The review adopts the African Union (AU) definition of youth (15 to 35 years old), aligning with the Kenyan Constitution (2010) (National Council for Law Reporting, 2022). The aim is to explore how the non-profit sector contributes to creating meaningful employment opportunities for young people in Kenya (Shawa et al., 2020).

Key players in this sector encompass youth groups, NGOs, cooperatives, foundations/trusts, unions, women groups, and self-help groups (Kanyinga & Mitullah, 2007)



Kenyan youths are unemployed, with approximately 77 per cent of employed youth engaged in vulnerable employment characterised by informal arrangements, lack of social protection, and often low productivity and earnings (ROK, 2019; Statista, 2023). Barran et al. (2020) highlighted the youth bulge as a demographic phenomenon that can contribute to economic growth if effectively harnessed. While youth unemployment is a significant challenge, the Government of Kenya recognises the crucial role of the youth in national development, emphasising their centrality in achieving key agendas such as the Big Four Agenda, Vision 2030, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (ROK, 2019).

This literature review provides an in-depth analysis of the contributions of NPOs to African economies while focusing on creating dignified and fulfilling work for young people in Kenya. The review is based on existing literature and seeks to answer five critical research questions that guide the themes of this study, which are discussed in the subsequent sections. These questions are:

- (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 Africa youth within the non-profit sector?
- (4) What are the emerging knowledge gaps within the non-profit sector and its sub-sectors; and what is the state and nature of youth employment and engagement in these sub-sectors? and,
- (5) What are the possibilities and opportunities for further employment in the non-profit sector for African youth?



Guided by the research questions, the current review sought to understand the specific scale, quality, and impact of the non-profit sector in providing dignified and fulfilling employment for Kenyan youth, including those at the margins. This gap extended to limited insights into the sector's and sub-sectors activities concerning the inclusive employment of young people and the differentiated outcomes arising from various interventions.

While prevailing studies on Africa's unemployment have predominantly focused on the public and for-profit sectors, research is scarce on the non-profit and social enterprise sectors, particularly concerning informal entities. This dearth of literature also extended to understanding how the non-profit sector contributes to national economies through both direct and indirect employment and its role in generating jobs for young people. This review aims to fill these gaps by investigating trajectories to dignified work within various sub-sectors, thus identifying key entry points into meaningful employment for young people based on diverse cultural and economic contexts.

There are six sections in this review. Following this introductory section, section two conceptualises key concepts used in the review, namely, NPOs, dignified and fulfilling jobs, and formal and informal sectors, while section three focuses on the youth employment situation in Kenya. Section four covers the contributions of NPOs to economic development, and to the creation of dignified and fulfilling jobs. Section five deals with the role of NPOs in facilitating the transition of youths from the informal to the formal sector and section six highlights existing knowledge gaps and areas for future research. The concluding section summarises the key issues that emerged from the review.





02 CONCEPTUALISATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

To ground the literature review on existing studies, this section conceptualises key concepts used in the review, namely, the non-profit sector, dignified and fulfilling jobs, and informal and formal sectors.

2.1 Non-profit sector

The concept of NPOs has evolved significantly over the years, with several research projects and studies contributing to our understanding of their roles, structure, and influence, globally. The literature describes the non-profit sector as immensely heterogeneous, spanning from large, multibillion dollar, mainstream, professionalised institutions that function similarly to for-profit firms and have 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).

Several terms have been used interchangeably in the extant literature to describe the non-profit sector, including “the independent sector, third sector, charitable sector, tax-exempt sector, civil society, social enterprise, voluntary sector, or NGOs” (Salamon & Anheier, 1992, p. 128). Its interdisciplinary nature reflects the complexity of NPOs, their operations, and their relationships with the environment (Horvat & Bobek, 2020). The global expansion of the non-profit sector is evident, with research emphasising its growth and impact on the economy (Ivanova, 2019).

The distinction between the non-profit sector and NPOs is essential. While the terms are often used interchangeably, it is crucial to differentiate them. NPOs are groups or entities engaged in the social sector that do not prioritise profit seeking but rather focus on fulfilling their mission and serving the community (Kirowati, Anggraeny, & Suhasto, 2020). The non-profit sector encompasses a broader spectrum of organisations beyond not-for-profit entities, including social enterprises, charitable organisations, and NGOs (Turin et al., 2022). Understanding the boundaries of non-profit activity and defining what constitutes a NPO can be challenging due to the diverse range of entities within the sector (Horvat & Bobek, 2020). In a globalised world, NPOs play a significant role in various regions, with important differences observed in terms of operation and importance (Bartosova & Podhorska, 2021).

The non-profit sector encompasses a broader spectrum of organisations beyond not-for-profit entities, including social enterprises, charitable organisations, and NGOs (Turin et al., 2022).

For instance, the Johns Hopkins Comparative Non-profit Sector Project and similar studies offer comprehensive insights into the nature and operations of NPOs across different national contexts. The paper “The International Classification of Non-profit Organisations: ICNPO-Revision 1, 1996” presents a comprehensive framework developed through the Johns Hopkins Comparative Non-profit Sector Project for classifying NPOs globally (Salamon & Anheier, 1996). This classification system aims to address 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 major categories like culture and recreation, education and research, health, social services, environment, and others. This classification provides a structured approach to understanding and categorising the various types of NPOs operating worldwide, facilitating comparative research and analysis within the sector.



Other studies point out that NPOs are characterised by their focus on social welfare, community development, and public service rather than financial gain. They are self-governing entities that do not distribute profits to shareholders or directors but instead pursue public purposes outside the formal apparatus of the state (Ivanova, 2019). They play a crucial role in addressing societal needs and providing services that may not be adequately covered by the government or for-profit entities (Kirowati et al., 2020).

The non-profit sector in Kenya is diverse, comprising various types of organisations, including NGOs, CLGs, societies, and trusts (Kanyinga & Mitullah, 2007; Wanga, 2023). These organisations are established for purposes such as promoting charity, research, and public benefit activities in areas like health, relief, agriculture, education, and social amenities provision (Wanga, 2023). They must be registered to operate in Kenya and can access benefits such as income tax exemptions, preferential VAT treatment, and customs duty exemptions on imported goods or services related to their activities (Wanga, 2023). The registration process for NPOs in Kenya involves registering with the Non-Governmental Organisations Coordination Board for NGOs and following specific requirements for both NGOs and CLGs (Kioi, 2024). Both types of organisations have similarities, such as charitable objectives, no profit-sharing formula, and tax exemptions, but CLGs are allowed to venture into business (Kioi, 2024).

These organisations are established for purposes such as promoting charity, research, and public benefit activities in areas like health, relief, agriculture, education, and social amenities provision (Wanga, 2023)

Efforts to measure and classify the non-profit sector have been ongoing to systematically differentiate organisations and facilitate comparative research (Salamon & Anheier, 1994). Developing national typologies of NPOs is crucial for international comparisons and research (Hodgkinson, 1990). Moreover, broadening the conceptualisation of the sector to include cooperatives and SEs alongside traditional non-profits enriches our understanding of the sector (Meinhard, Handy, & Greenspan, 2021). The variability in NPO structures across different nations, as Casey (2016) discussed, presents a challenge in creating a universally applicable definition. This variability is influenced by local cultural, economic, and political factors, underscoring the complexity of categorising NPOs globally. Therefore, this review focuses on the NPOs in Kenya.

2.2 Dignified and Fulfilling Jobs

The concept of the dignity of work is widely acknowledged both in academic research and development circles. It is often understood via the complementary concept of 'decent work' as articulated by the ILO in defining work quality (ILO, 2023a). It defines decent work as encompassing opportunities for productive work with fair income, workplace security, social protection for families, improved personal development and social integration, freedom to express concerns, organise, and participate in decisions, and equality of opportunity and treatment for all individuals (ILO, 2023a).

The agenda for decent work aligns with the Vision 2030 SDG, specifically SDG 8, which aims to promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth with full and productive employment for everyone (UNDP, 2022). Dignified work is closely associated with concepts such as respect, worth, esteem, equality, autonomy, and freedom (Bolton, 2007). The MasterCard Foundation defines dignified work using four markers: reliable income, reputable work, respect in the workplace, and a sense of purpose, emphasising aspects like income stability, workplace reputation, respectful treatment, and a fulfilling sense of purpose (MasterCard Foundation, 2019).

When it comes to fulfilling work, the conceptualisation by Allan, Autin and Duffy (2016) underscores the fundamental elements of the operationalised models of fulfilling work. These elements, such as job satisfaction, meaningful work, work engagement, and workplace positive emotions, are universally applicable. Similarly, Marvell and Cox (2017) defined fulfilling work in the context of older individuals, but their description is equally relevant to all age groups. The essence of their definition is employment that is meaningful to the employee, offers flexibility, is intellectually stimulating, and fosters socialisation and inclusion for all. The role of socialisation and inclusion is crucial, as it creates a supportive environment and a sense of belonging among the employees.

Ensuring dignity and fulfilment in work is crucial for economic prosperity and reducing youth unemployment as a motivating force in employment or other income-generating activities, especially in the informal sector. The Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE, (2022) elaborates on the multidimensional nature of decent work,

expanding beyond traditional economic measures to include various aspects like pay, working conditions, terms of employment, working environment, work intensity, representation, and voice. However, challenges in obtaining reliable data for these dimensions and a lack of consensus on categorisation make it difficult to assess and measure decent work outcomes comprehensively (ANDE, 2022). Understanding and evaluating the dignity and quality of decent work requires a holistic approach considering global, contextual, and methodological dimensions. Global contextual challenges to dignity at work range from “the financial turmoil and economic downturn of the last two decades to growing unemployment, informal employment, insufficient social protection, and labour migration” (Rantanen, Muchiri, & Lehtinen, 2020, p. 4). Tailoring the conceptualisation of dignity and fulfilling work to local contexts and cultural considerations is crucial, as applying Western theories in Africa may yield contradictory findings due to oversight of cultural nuances, customs, collectivist values, and religious beliefs related to work (Vigan & Giaque, 2016). Integrating cultural considerations is essential for accurately assessing employment quality and work satisfaction. Challenges in evaluating decent work deficits in the informal economy arise due to sector-specific characteristics and socio-cultural differences (ILO, 2018).

Integrating cultural considerations is essential for accurately assessing employment quality and work satisfaction.

Utilising analytical methods recommended by the ILO is essential for accurate evaluations. Vulnerable groups, including youth, women, and people living with disabilities, demand special consideration in assessing the dignity of work. For example, Rantanen et al. (2020) emphasised the lack of international research on the dignity of work for disabled individuals. To fill this gap requires the need for improved disaggregated data at national and international levels. Persistent gender pay gaps, influencing dignified and fulfilling work, underscore the urgency of transformative measures to address systemic disparities in the workplace (ILO, 2019a).

Despite noble intentions, challenges persist in evaluating the quality of employment through the concept of decent work. Issues such as the absence of internationally compatible data, researcher biases, and a somewhat vague definition of decent work complicate the practical implementation of the evaluation process (Burchell, Sehnbruch, Piansa, & Agloni, 2014). About the popularly used ILO definition of decent work, it is noteworthy that the ILO’s work in Africa is part of its broader global mission; yet it has not taken into consideration the cultural sensitivity, consideration of informal economy complexities, and recognition of the diverse nature of dignified and fulfilling work experiences in the region. This argument is supported by other studies that have found that efforts to extract the elements associated with decent work into cross-country comparative analysis encounter obstacles. To remedy this situation calls for methodological refinement (Burchell et al., 2014).

In conclusion, there are problems with the existing conceptualisation of dignified and fulfilling work, which make it difficult for comparability across countries, and for empirical operationalisation.



2.3 Informal and Formal Employment

In this review, understanding the contradictions between formal and informal jobs is crucial. Initially defined in 1970 by Keith Hart based on descriptive income opportunities, the informal sector and economy were later characterised by the International Labour Conference (ILC) in 2002 (Hart, 1985). The ILC defined the informal economy as “all economic activities by workers and economic units that are, in law or practice, covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements” (ILO, 2002, p. 25). . This informal economy often thrives in contexts of high unemployment, underemployment, poverty, gender inequality, and precarious work. The challenges are exacerbated in conflict-affected and fragile situations, where engaging in the informal economy becomes a primary means of securing livelihoods with no viable alternatives (ILO, 2023c).

On the other hand, formal employment implies a legally binding employment relationship between a registered company and an individual employee (SEJP, n.d.; Wamuthenya, 2010). It includes public and private sectors, with well-protected wages, social insurance, and adherence to labour laws ensuring decent work and human dignity (ILO, 2023c).

As Bigsten et al. (2004) described, the Jua Kali (meaning ‘hot sun’) sector encompasses a mix of small self-employed endeavours and dynamic enterprises, primarily concentrated in urban areas. The informal sector includes self-employed individuals, informal wage labourers, paid domestic workers, those with a monthly salary, and casual labourers (Wamuthenya, 2010). Informal firms in this sector are often unregistered and may have limited legal obligations in terms of labour rights and labour relations laws (Bigsten et al., 2004).



03 YOUTH EMPLOYMENT LANDSCAPE IN KENYA



The Kenyan population in 2023 was estimated at 55 100 586 with a median age of 19.6 years. It represents 0.68 per cent of the total world population, and it is ranked at number 26 globally (Worldometer, 2023).

There is very limited literature on the youth population in Kenya, however, the 2021 youth statistics placed 75 per cent of Kenya's population under the age of 35 and 40 per cent under the age of 15 years (The Youth Café & IRI, 2022). The statistics indicate that Kenya is a youthful country. The statistics are in line with the African youth population statistics indicating that Africa has the youngest population in the world, with 70 per cent of SSA under the age of 30 years (Mulikita, n.d).

Although various studies have positioned the youth as key actors for economic growth and innovation in society, unfortunately, research indicates youth unemployment and underemployment have been a major issue in Kenya for years (Ajiambo, 2021). In 2023, youth unemployment was estimated to be as high as 35 per cent (4.5 million young men and women between the ages of 15 and 34 years), compared to the national unemployment average of 10 per cent (Statista, 2023). It is reported that one in every three people under 35 is unable to find a job, despite actively seeking work (Ajiambo, 2021).

Differences in youth unemployment rates between urban and rural areas are evident, with Omolo (2013) emphasising higher rates in urban areas, particularly among those aged 15 to 25 years, while Ouko, Ogola, Ng'on'ga, and Wairimu (2022) contended that most unemployed youth reside in rural areas. The discrepancy in their findings may stem from the absence of precise figures regarding youth migration between rural and urban areas. Omolo (2013) attributes high urban unemployment to rural-to-urban migration, driven by a lack of appealing opportunities in rural regions. This perspective is echoed by the ILO Youth Country Briefs (Kenya) of June 2023, which notes significantly higher rates of those not in employment, education, or training (NEET) in urban areas for both young women and men (ILO, 2023b).

Young females in Kenya face higher unemployment rates than their male counterparts, with the NEET rate for women at 26.7 per cent in 2019, nearly double the 14.9 per cent rate for men, and the gender gap widening slightly since 2016 (ILO, 2023b). Equileap's (2023) report revealed a 32 per cent average wage gap between Kenyan women and men, surpassing the global average of 23 per cent. The 2023 gender gap index score of 0.71 indicates a 27 per cent lower likelihood for Kenyan females to have equal opportunities as males. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated NEET rates for young women, almost doubling those of young men in the first half of 2020 (ILO, 2023b).

These stark statistical disparities underline significant wage gaps and gender inequality in the Kenyan workforce, potentially leading to economic inequality, poverty, limited career advancement, and reduced economic independence. The Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender (ROK, 2019) in Kenya suggested that female inactivity, more prevalent than in male youth, is often linked to



homemaking duties. This indicates unequal access to employment opportunities for women and men in the country. This calls for an understanding on the specific role of NPOs in addressing gender disparities in employment and wage gaps in Kenya's rural and urban areas.

Apart from the issue of male and female disparities at work, other subgroups including people living with disabilities seemed to be excluded from the employment mainstream. Even though there is no specific data on the employment situation for people with disabilities in Kenya, research shows that in developing countries, 80 to 90 per cent of people with disabilities of working age are unemployed (UN, n.d). Kenya's commitment to promoting the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities aligns with international agreements such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNC-CRPD). Even further, studies on other youth minority groups such as single mothers, refugees, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ), EX-convicts, are non-existent. However, there is limited knowledge of how government agencies, NPOs, and other stakeholders integrate disability issues into their programmes and policies.

Another key challenge to the youth seeking employment is underemployment, meaning individuals accept work below their potential value. Underemployment poses a significant challenge for youth employment, reflecting inadequacies in the current labour markets (Churchill & Khan, 2021). Furlong (2016) defined underemployment as a consequence of an increased number of qualified workers, leading to a surplus of highly educated and skilled individuals. This problem like in other African countries is attributable to the structure of the Kenya economy with the service sector contributing 55.47 per cent to gross domestic product (GDP), followed by agriculture (21.3 per cent) and industries (17.12 per cent) in 2023 (Statista, 2024). The service sector is low value-add, while agriculture is mainly subsistence farming. This situation forces graduates in Kenya to accept non-graduate positions, face unemployment after graduation, or pursue further education to enhance their employability (Onsomu, Munga, Nyabaro, & Munene, 2022). The Quarterly Labour Force Report for quarter 1 in 2019 revealed a combined underemployment and unemployment rate of 11.9 per cent, with youth aged 15 to 29 years experiencing the highest underutilisation at 16.0 per cent (KNBS, 2019). The elevated youth underemployment rate in Kenya is due in part to the fact that the economy is unable to absorb skilled workers. This imbalance compels graduates to accept suboptimal positions or remain unemployed after completing university.

Overall, the stark reality of the high rate of youth unemployment and underemployment is a matter of serious concern that cannot be attributed solely to the government, but also to other key players, including the private sector and non-profit sector. This review focuses on exploring the extent to which the non-profit sector, including SEs, has recognised and harnessed the potential of youth in Kenya, contributed to youth employment, and created dignified and fulfilling employment.





04

ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION OF THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR

4.1 Context

In the literature review, it is critical to investigate and clarify how the non-profit sector is contributing to creating dignified and fulfilling work for youth in Kenya. Guided by the definition of dignified and fulfilling work as defined in the introductory section of this literature review, the question worth answering is, What is the economic contribution of the non-profit sector to dignified and fulfilling work for young people in Kenya?

It is important to first foreground the discussion of NPOs' contribution to Kenya's economic development and creating dignified and fulfilling jobs for the youths. In this context, it should be noted that in Kenya, the informal sector plays a significant role in addressing youth unemployment and underemployment. Several studies indicate that the informal sector is the primary employer, employing roughly 16.7 million individuals in 2023, which represents about 83.5 percent of the total number of people employed in the country. The majority are young people aged 18 to 34 years, with a nearly equal proportion between men and women (Cowling, 2024). According to the most recent Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) (KNBS, 2020) economic survey, the informal sector accounts for 83 per cent of employed individuals in Kenya, and approximately 90 per cent of all new jobs are informal.

In Kenya, the prominent informal employment sector is the Jua Kali sector. The dominance of informality raises the problem of the labour market's inability to create dignified and fulfilling jobs in the country. This puts sharp focus on the structural dimension of the economy, where the service sector, mostly low-value-added services, is the major contributor to Kenyan GDP.

Youth unemployment in Kenya is a major challenge that requires collaboration among government, NPOs, the private and non-profit sectors. Despite consistent annual GDP growth exceeding five per cent, the youth unemployment rate has shown minimal improvement (British Council, 2017). This presents a crucial opportunity for the non-profit sector to upscale its role in contributing to economic development and youth employment, especially to dignified and fulfilling jobs.

An economic contribution is defined "as the gross changes in a region's existing economy that can be attributed to a given industry, event, or policy" (Watson, Wilson, Thilmany, & Winter, 2007, p. 141). Analysing policies or events for their support of gross economic activity is a key aspect of this assessment (Watson et al., 2007). In the context of the non-profit sector in Kenya, measuring its contribution to GDP and economic growth is challenging due to its diverse sub-sectors, varied activities, and funding sources. Accurate figures are elusive, given the lack of data and literature on the subject.

The NPOs including SEs have been instrumental in the economic prosperity of Kenya. Statistics from 2000 indicate that the non-profit sector contributed up to US\$270 million, representing at least 2.5 per cent of the GDP (Kanyinga & Mitullah, 2007). In the fiscal year 2021/2022, NGOs contributed Sh175.9 billion to Kenya's economy and employed 71 096 people (Angira, 2022). Micro and small businesses, constituting 80 per cent of the economy, contributed 20 per cent to Kenya's GDP (YGAP, 2022). In project implementation, NGOs allocated a combined expenditure of KES 118 billion. Of this amount, KES 102 billion (86 per cent) was utilised within Kenya, while the remaining KES 16 billion (14 per cent) was spent in other countries. Health-related initiatives accounted for the largest share of expenditures in Kenya at 31 per cent, followed by children's programs (10.4 per cent) and education (10 per cent) (NGO Co-ordination Board, 2023).

The presented statistics demonstrate a significant contribution of the NPOs including SEs to Kenya's economic development. This contrasts with the literature indicating challenges for young people in finding work due to limited employment opportunities, skills mismatches, and lack of work experience, particularly in developing countries like Kenya (AfDB, OECD, UNDP, & UNECA, 2012). The following discussion delves into how the NPO sector is addressing and mitigating disparities in the youth employment landscape in Kenya.



4.2 Direct Employment and Volunteerism

While specific data on NPOs directly offering jobs to youths in Kenya may be limited, literature highlights their role in providing employment opportunities through full-time, part-time, and seasonal jobs, internships and volunteerism. Berg (2013) recognised NPOs as sources of steady employment with specialised personnel running daily operations. The 2009 census revealed that NGOs employed around 80 per cent of youths in Kenya, making a substantial contribution to youth economic empowerment (Madu & Muhingi, 2017, Maracci, 2013). Contrary to the perception that all NPO workers are volunteers, Suresh (2013, cited in Choto, Iwu, & Tengeh, 2020) noted that many NPOs also have paid staff, albeit earning lower wages than their counterparts in the private sector. By implication, most jobs in NPOs are not dignified and fulfilling. Additionally, NPOs frequently engage students during vacations, offering opportunities for skill development and practical experience.

Volunteerism serves as a prominent avenue for NPOs to provide jobs to the youth, contributing significantly to enhanced social integration within communities; a vital aspect of youth development (Patel, 2009). The principles of social integration and decent work are fostered through youth volunteering. Globally, many NPOs leverage youth volunteerism as a valuable resource, benefiting both the community and the young individuals involved. According to the ILO (2023c) report, young people often lack core employability skills (CES), which are typically acquired informally through on-the-job training and work experience. NPOs play a crucial role in promoting youth employment by offering CES through their volunteerism programmes, particularly for first-time job seekers.

For example, various health-based organisations, such as the World Health Organisation in partnership with local NPOs, especially community-based organisations (CBOs), collaborates to actively engage volunteers in executing community health projects (Brown & Green, 2015). Raising Futures Kenya is another example, providing job opportunities and supporting the well-being of Kenya's youth through a network of volunteers who collaborate with individuals, NGOs, and local governments to train young Kenyans in diverse fields (Fair Planet, 2019). These volunteerism-based programmes contribute to the economy, with volunteers receiving tokens of appreciation or stipends/salaries in some cases (Brown & Green, 2015). CBOs, numbering at least 40 000 as of the year 2013 in Kenya play a crucial role in facilitating youth volunteerism and employment, particularly at the grassroots level, aiding in various community development projects for social transformation (Ngotho, 2013).

However, the extent to which the NPOs including SEs, directly provides employment for young men and women in Kenya or a comprehensive understanding of the size and quantity of jobs provided has been a subject of limited scholarly exploration. In addition, there is no recent data on the direct jobs created by NPOs.



4.3 Skills Development, Education, and Training

The non-profit sector in Kenya plays a crucial role in providing skills development, education, and training to enhance youth employability. Human capital theory emphasises education as a valuable investment, contributing not only to individuals, but also driving economic growth for the entire country (Tan, 2014). Skills are recognised as essential for accessing the labour market, building human capital, securing decent and stable employment, and reducing youth inequality (Hope, 2012). In SSA, skills development is identified as an important intervention for youth employment (Assan & Nalutaaya, 2018).

The Kenyan 2010 constitution recognises the importance of youth access to relevant education and training, aligning with the 2030 vision Agenda (Hope, 2012). Policy interventions, including the Kenya Youth Development Policy (KYDP) and the National Skills Development Policy (NSDP), aim to create sustainable decent jobs and develop a skilled, employable, and competitive workforce (ROK, 2019). However, studies reveal that in SSA, current education systems often fail to equip young people with the necessary skills, leading to unemployment even among the highly educated (British Council, 2014).

NPOs play a critical role in enhancing youth employability through various educational and skills development initiatives. These include job training, second chance education, internships, job shadowing, vocational training, mentorship, and the creation of learning materials (Gongera & Okoth, 2013). These programmes aim to provide young individuals with technical, creative, and general employability skills. In the process, they fill gaps not covered by formal education (Assan & Nalutaaya, 2018; Madu & Muhingi, 2017). Additionally, NPOs in Kenya collaborate with government and private sectors to create job opportunities, placement programmes, and networking opportunities, contributing to bridging the education-employment gap, empowering youth with essential skills, and creating access to employment opportunities (Mbugua, 2015).

NPOs in Kenya collaborate with government and private sectors to create job opportunities, placement programmes, and networking opportunities.

Although there is no database of all these NPOs and the particular roles they play, this review utilised various websites and available literature to highlight how NPOs contribute to youth employment through skills training and education.

RTI International, notably through the Kenya Youth Employment and Skills (K-YES) programme, has played an important role in promoting youth employment in Kenya. This initiative targets disadvantaged youths, providing them with essential skills, assets, and support to meet current market demands. The organisation has successfully reached around 300 000 Kenyan youth, linking them with financial services for business skills and mentorship for start-ups. Moreover, over 50 000 youths have secured employment in various sectors through this programme (RTI International, 2020). Another impactful initiative is Young Africa Works in Kenya, supported by the Mastercard Foundation, focusing on micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSME) growth, digital skills training, and connecting young people to opportunities. Its ambitious goal is to help five million young Kenyans access dignified and fulfilling work over the next five years (Mastercard Foundation, 2019).

In 2012, Vijana Na Ajira Foundation through their Youth Economic Empowerment Initiative embarked on a youth programme called Entrepreneurship Education Training (EET) in Nairobi to economically impact at least 10 000 unemployed youth in Kenya (Madu & Muhingi, 2017). In addition, Raising Futures Kenya offers education and training programs and has since 2001 educated and trained more than 2 000 youths (Raising Futures Kenya (2022). Findings show that 86 per cent of Raising Futures Kenya graduates are either employed or self-employed, and 89 per cent contribute to their family's monthly needs (Raising Futures Kenya (2022).

Shining Hope for Communities (SHOFCO) focuses on transforming urban slums, particularly for women and girls, operating in ten slums across three cities. Their Sustainable Livelihoods programme provides employability and entrepreneurship training, and the SHOFCO Urban Network (SUN) facilitates community groups and an entrepreneurial investment fund. Notably, 954 youths secured jobs or internships, and \$146 000 was saved through group savings and loans (SHOFCO, 2022). The Kenya Youth and Opportunities Project (KYEOP) has benefited 310 889 vulnerable youths, with 86 per cent earning wages or becoming self-employed and 48 per cent of business support recipients creating jobs for others (World Bank, 2024). Raising Futures, Kenya has educated and trained over 2 000 youths, with 86 per cent of graduates either employed or self-employed (Fair Planet, 2019).

Entrepreneurship training under the Kenya Youth and Opportunities Project (KYEOP) by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (USAID, 2022) empowers youth for self-reliance and enterprise creation. This initiative allows youths to explore their potential, leading to successful stories such as Zeinab, a 25-year-old woman from Kongowea in Mombasa County, who utilised programme skills, mentorship, and support to establish her food joint (USAID, 2022). Moreover, several NPOs, including SEs, have provided scholarships and educational support for youth. Notable examples include Vijabiz Kenya, Youth Banner Kenya, Youth Empowerment and Support Initiative, Equity Group Foundation, Kenya Education Fund, Wings to Fly Foundation, KCB Foundation, Elimu Scholarship Programme, and Safaricom Foundation.

Some studies have emphasised a skills gap in Kenya, indicating a mismatch between training institutions and labour market demands (ILO, 2019b). This mismatch contributes to high youth unemployment and underutilisation, with 62 per cent having education below the secondary level (Brookings, 2022). Currently, most policies address the supply side, adapting education and training systems. Some countries focus on asymmetric information, improving career guidance (ILO, 2019b). This underscores a gap in NPO needs assessments for identifying local skill gaps and job opportunities.

Despite the non-profit sector supplementing government and private sector efforts in skills development and education, a gap exists in translating these endeavours into employment, evident in the rising youth unemployment rate. The absence of demand-driven training, determined by actual labour market needs, is highlighted as a deficiency despite an abundance of formal academic curricula in the country (Hope, 2012; World Bank, 2020). Examining current gaps and challenges in establishing effective linkages between NPOs and technical and vocational training is crucial for creating demand-driven training and promoting dignified and fulfilling youth employment. While entrepreneurship and vocational training have been proposed as solutions to youth unemployment, these initiatives have not sufficiently enhanced employability. Notably, there is a deficit in both capital investment and essential skills for youth success in start-ups and business innovation (Assan & Nalutaaya, 2018).

4.4 Entrepreneurship and Small Business Enterprises Support

NPOs including SEs actively involve young people in entrepreneurial activities, contributing significantly to job creation and economic growth. In Kenya, MSMEs play a pivotal role, constituting 98 per cent of all business entities, providing 75 per cent of jobs, and contributing 24 per cent to the GDP. MSMEs facilitate the transition of youth, women, and persons with disabilities from the informal to the mainstream economy. A British Council report highlights SEs as a significant source of meaningful employment for Kenyan youths (British Council, 2014).

The actual data or research on NPOs including SEs contributing to the economy through youth employment is unavailable. However, various NPO websites are utilised, but only a few examples are provided for illustration.

Kenya's NGOs and microfinance organisations vigorously support small business enterprises, fostering entrepreneurship and economic empowerment. For example, AFRILINK Kenya, an NGO, focuses on combating poverty by empowering young entrepreneurs to establish businesses and generate employment, particularly for marginalised populations (AFRILINK, 2014). Other microfinance institutions, such as the Joyful Women Organisation (JOYWO), a social enterprise, are critical in promoting financial inclusion and providing employment opportunities, particularly for youth. JOYWO implements 'table banking', where small groups of women regularly meet to borrow and lend, funding small-scale entrepreneurial activities (DAI, 2016). With over 110 000 women in 6 000 groups across 41 counties in Kenya, JOYWO has significantly contributed to women's employment, including through employment (Ruto, 2022). Similarly, the Social Economic Empowerment Women Organisation (SEEWOW), an NPO operating in Kericho County, boasts over 2 000 members in 100 groups focusing on empowering women and youth through initiatives such as table banking, entrepreneurship, and education (50MAWS, n.d).



NPOs like Garden of Hope Foundation and Taka Taka Solutions empower youth, particularly women, through entrepreneurial endeavours and computer skills. They promote job creation and self-reliance in the labour market (Barran et al., 2020; Garden of Hope Foundation, 2023). Taka Taka Solutions, a waste management enterprise, employs 250 low-skilled individuals and aims to provide 2 700 decent jobs through the Challenge Fund for Youth Employment (CFYE) (Barran et al., 2020; CFYE, 2021).

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, an international NPO, supports MSMEs in Kenya through grants and financial assistance, such as donating \$4.48 million to Sidai Africa social enterprise in 2016 (Africa HR Solutions, 2018). The Jua Kali industry also employs youth in Kenya through the Kenya Youth Employment Programme (KYEP), which involves government and NPOs providing training and business grants (Franz & Omolo, 2014). Over 26 922 businesses each received Kenya shillings 40 000 in grants and coaching on business management. More than 80 per cent of grant recipients have created employment for themselves and fellow youths, therefore contributing to poverty eradication and creating dignified and fulfilling jobs for the youths (KYEOP, 2022).

The Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund (AECF) supports business ideas and innovations through grants, funding mechanisms, training, and capacity building for entrepreneurs and businesses in sectors like agriculture, renewable energy, and technology (AECF, 2023). In over 15 years, AECF has supported 2 520 986 households and sustained 4 709 jobs in Kenya. It also recently launched the Investing in Women in the Blue Economy in Kenya (IIW-BEK) Programme, funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) amounting to CAN \$9.7 million. Their work not only empowers 110 women-owned enterprises but also promises to create 1 490 direct jobs, thereby contributing to the growth of entrepreneurship in Kenya (AECF, 2023).

Smith and Darko (2014) highlighted various support organisations for entrepreneurship in Africa, including SocEntLab, iHub, CIC, and Nailab. Universities such as Jomo Kenyatta University's UniBRAIN, KCA University's Centre for Entrepreneurship and Leadership, Strathmore University's iLabAfrica, and Kenyatta University's Chandaria Business Innovation and Incubation Centre offer incubation space and curriculum for social and environmental innovation. Networking and membership organisations in Kenya, including the Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs, Trickle Out Africa Project, East Africa Social Enterprise Network, and SOSEK, collaborate with SEs.

Efforts to address youth unemployment through entrepreneurship and vocational training, as noted by Assan and Nalutaaya (2018), have yet to yield the desired employability outcomes, hence the high rate of youth unemployment, especially among young women. Challenges like limited capital and insufficient skills hinder the success of youth in start-ups and business innovation. The 2018 British Council report highlighted a preference among youths for 'dream jobs' in stable, white-collar professions (British Council, 2018), despite the informal nature of the sector where only 20 per cent of 7.4 million MSMEs operate as licensed entities (Mulae, 2022). The formal sector's slow growth fails to absorb most entrants. While entrepreneurship is often touted as a solution for youth employment, a study on the Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) found that jobs generated by social entrepreneurs are primarily self-employment, with an average addition of only two jobs per enterprise, often short-lived (Maisiba & Gongera, 2013). These findings raise questions about the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of NPOs' programmes in providing sustainable and fulfilling employment opportunities for youth. Importantly, this shows that the contribution of NPOs to dignified and fulfilling jobs is minimal.



4.5 Technology and Digital Advancement

NPOs significantly contribute to leveraging technology and digitalisation to enhance youth employment (Carvalho, Melo, & Ferreira, 2016; Gilch & Sieweke, 2020). In the modern world, information communication technology (ICT) has become crucial for job creation, offering lucrative careers and opportunities for innovation through networking sites (Chege, Wang, and Suntu, 2020). According to the World Economic Forum Report (WEF, 2020), nine out of 10 jobs in the next decade will require digital skills. This trend is concerning, especially considering that automation changes disproportionately affect vulnerable, low-skill populations, particularly youth from rural areas and lower socio-economic backgrounds. Ryan (2019) highlighted that these changes would likely significantly affect women, as automation could eliminate many administrative, clerical, and non-skilled jobs traditionally dominated by women. McKinsey and Company's Women Matter Africa report underscored that women in emerging economies like Kenya constitute approximately 40 per cent of clerical support workers (Moodley, Holt, Leke, Desvaux, 2016). In the context of the digital economy, clerical work is a sunset job, and they are likely to be phased out in the near future.

NPOs offer programmes that provide grants, entrepreneurship training, and assistance in developing business models to encourage self-employment opportunities for youth (Morrar & Rios-Avila, 2021).

NPOs also promote digital adoption and utilisation, acting as 'sensory organs' to identify skills gaps and facilitate organisations' adaptation to digital transformation (Gilch & Sieweke, 2020). Through training initiatives, they develop technical and soft skills for youth to navigate the evolving job market (Carvalho et al., 2016; Chioda, Contreras-Loya, Gertler, & Carney, 2021). Additionally, NPOs offer programmes that provide grants, entrepreneurship training, and assistance in developing business models to encourage self-employment opportunities for youth (Morrar & Rios-Avila, 2021). These initiatives are effective in bridging the digital divide and promoting digital usage among youth (Samsuddin, Mohamed, & Bolong, 2021).

Several NPOs in Kenya, such as Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) in collaboration with Sama have been pivotal in providing digital training and job referrals to empower youth for employment (Atkin, Schoar, & Koshy, 2021). Notably, the Sama data annotation company specialises in machine learning algorithms, extended training, and job opportunities for low-income youth in Nairobi, addressing formal job employment gaps. This programme equipped participants with skills in artificial intelligence, resulting in a 30 per cent increase in earnings and a 10 per cent reduction in unemployment among participants (Atkin et al., 2021).

The Craftfeng Computer Training Bus project in Nairobi has empowered Kibera youths individually and economically by providing free ICT training covering basic, intermediate, and advanced skills. The programme has shown some successes, with 26 per cent of graduates securing employment and 12 per cent initiating careers in the ICT sector (Craft Silicon Foundation, 2023; Feng, 2012). Another initiative, the Ninaweza Youth Empowerment Program, supported by the World Bank and the International Youth Foundation, focuses on imparting digital skills to young women from marginalised backgrounds. Since its inception, the program has trained 1 350 youth, with approximately 1 265 successfully graduating (ACWICTS4E, 2010).

The ICT sector significantly contributes to youth employment in Kenya, with NPOs actively involved. For example, the CAP Youth Empowerment Institute trains youths in entrepreneurship, digital livelihoods, and creative arts, particularly empowering women refugees. The project, addressing artistic talent customisation and COVID-19 coping, opened over 10 digital businesses, enhancing skills in record keeping, online marketing, and savings (CAP Youth Empowerment Institute, 2023). Organisations like YPARD and ACTS reshape youth perceptions of agriculture through technology and ICT training for agribusiness (Rono, Tonui, Nderitu, & Kirui, 2012).

While the NPO sector has made an effort to promote technology and ICT education in Kenya, there are still significant gaps and challenges that NPOs should address to enhance their impact. NPOs should focus on addressing gender disparities, preparing the workforce for automation, reducing ICT infrastructure disparities, enhancing entrepreneurship support, filling awareness gaps, and integrating technology into traditional sectors to create a more inclusive and resilient digital economy in Kenya.

4.6 Advocacy and Policy Influence

The evidence on their website shows that NPOs are actively shaping Kenya's youth employment policies. Youth Agenda advocates for inclusion and participation in policy, while Haki Elimu promotes quality education and civic engagement. Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW) advocates for gender equality and women's empowerment, while Action Aid Kenya prioritises youth employment in government agendas. African Youth Trust fosters a supportive environment for youth entrepreneurship, and the National Council of Churches of Kenya's (NCCCK) youth department works on various policy issues affecting young people (ROK, 2019).

Furthermore, the non-profit sector in Kenya actively involves diverse categories of young individuals in shaping initiatives to advance their productive and fulfilling livelihoods through collaborative efforts. In partnership with Twende Pamoja, organisations like Team Kenya focus on education, women's empowerment, and community transformation, emphasising global citizenship and gender equality (Team Kenya, 2023). Similarly, Oxfam GB's Women's Rights Fund collaborates with grassroots organisations like the Association of Women Accountants of Kenya (AWAK) to advocate for women's rights and enhance the skills of women and young women farmers (Oxfam, 2023). Inclusive movements, championed by organisations like Womankind Worldwide, strive to broaden the women's movement to encompass the rights of young women, rural women, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LBT) individuals, and women with disabilities (Womankind Worldwide, 2023). CREAW Kenya, a national feminist organisation, contributes by strengthening the institutional capacity of grassroots women's rights organisations (CREAW, 2023).

As noted by Bikuri (2003) and Ponge (2019), NGOs face challenges in fully realising their potential in addressing youth unemployment. Limited resources and capacity hinder effective program implementation, while difficulties accessing funding and forming partnerships constrain impact (FKE, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated youth unemployment challenges in Kenya, necessitating innovative solutions from NPOs, especially in digital skills and entrepreneurship training (ILO, 2023b). The literature also highlights pervasive corruption in education and employment systems, disproportionately affecting disadvantaged youths (British Council, 2018), urging NPOs to enhance their advocacy roles in addressing systemic challenges.

Insufficient advocacy for digital technology careers among girls in Kenya contributes to a gender gap in the ICT workforce. Addressing the underrepresentation of women in digital technology is crucial for promoting gender equality and unlocking the digital economy's full potential. Additionally, concerns raised by Kenyan youth with disabilities, including fears of being overlooked and employers' reluctance to provide accommodation, highlight broader challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in education and the workforce. Reports and studies globally and in Kenya underscore gaps in policy and support for youth with disabilities (British Council, 2018; IEL, 2021), emphasising the need for inclusive policies and efforts to ensure equal opportunities for all youth segments in the evolving digital careers landscape.



4.7 Research and impact assessments

NGOs in Kenya have been instrumental in driving initiatives, conducting research, and implementing programmes to enhance youth employability. They collaborate with the government, stakeholders, and international organizations to address the challenges of youth unemployment through programmes, scholarships, advocacy, and skills training initiatives. Their contributions are well-documented in the literature, and their impact is evidenced by the data and examples provided.

Several NPOs in Kenya conduct research and impact assessment to enhance the effectiveness of their youth employment programmes. Drawn from their websites, KCDF focuses on data-driven improvements, while AFIDEP and APHRC address development issues, health, population, and education closely linked to youth employment. FSD Kenya conducts research for improved financial inclusion, which is crucial for youth entrepreneurship. They generate insights informing policy and program development. KIPPRA, a government-affiliated think tank, collects data and provides policy recommendations on youth employment. Dalberg, a social impact advisory firm, collaborates with NGOs to conduct research and impact assessments on youth employment programmes.

Despite commendable efforts by NPOs to tackle youth unemployment through research and impact assessments, there is still a huge knowledge gap about their impacts on youth employability in Kenya.

In light of the above, there is a need for longitudinal studies to comprehensively evaluate the sustained impact of initiatives implemented by NGOs on the long-term employability and career trajectories of the youth, especially young women. Additionally, existing research offers insights into general employability challenges, but there is a gap in understanding sector-specific needs, adversely impacting the targeted interventions. While organisations like the Center for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW) focus on gender equality, potential knowledge gaps may exist regarding how other intersectional factors, such as age, ethnicity, and disability, influence youth employability. Identifying and addressing these gaps is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of interventions and ensuring sustainable youth employability.

Existing research offers insights into general employability challenges, but there is a gap in understanding sector-specific needs, adversely impacting the targeted interventions.

There is also an existing data gap in Kenya concerning the economic scale, quality, and impact of the non-profit sector's contributions to dignified and fulfilling work for diverse segments of young people. This gap includes women, single mothers, individuals with disabilities, migrants (refugees/displaced segments), rural populations, and prisoners. The absence of comprehensive data hinders informed decision-making and targeted interventions by NPOs. Addressing this knowledge gap through research is crucial for NPOs to design effective strategies, policies, and programs that cater to the unique needs of marginalized youth and foster their access to dignified employment.

Furthermore, the dynamic job market introduces gaps in understanding emerging trends and evolving skill sets demanded by industries. Despite the focus on entrepreneurship training, gaps may exist in understanding barriers hindering youth from establishing and sustaining enterprises. With the emergence of new technology, especially AI, a knowledge gap exists concerning specific digital skills required for current and future employment. Collaborative efforts aim to influence policy changes, and rigorous evaluations are needed to assess the impact of policy advocacy on the ground. Addressing these knowledge gaps is crucial for developing more targeted and effective interventions to enhance youth employability in Kenya.

05 FACILITATING THE TRANSITION TO DIGNIFIED AND FULFILLING JOBS



The informal sector, while significant, faces various challenges that could be effectively addressed through formalisation. These challenges include the absence of standard employment contracts, limited social and income protection, insufficient pay, and restricted access to financial services (Ohnsorge & Yu, 2022). Informal economies are associated with high poverty rates and substantial deficits in decent work, marked by low-quality employment, inadequate social protection, poor governance, and low productivity. Scholars, including Chen (2012), assert that these challenges pose serious obstacles to achieving dignified and fulfilling jobs. Without formalisation, the realisation of decent work for all and equity in society will remain elusive (ILO, 2023c).

NPOs and SEs are instrumental in facilitating the shift from informal to formal employment, explicitly focusing on Kenya's youth. Workers' unions, such as the Central Organisation of Trade Unions (COTU), actively participate in social dialogue, advocating for the rights of informal sector workers, as emphasised in the 2018 ILO report. Social dialogue entails negotiations to secure formal sector employment benefits, capacity building, sectoral union organisation, social protection, and compliance with informal economic policies (Otieno, 2018).

The CFYE, in collaboration with private and informal sector actors like Mr. Green Africa (MGA), actively contributes to promoting decent work for Kenyan youth. CFYE and MGA work together to introduce innovative solutions for safe and equitable working conditions in the informal sector, aligning with SDG 8. MGA's decent work programme emphasises formalising informal employment, enhancing financial stability, raising wage standards, promoting youth social inclusion, and contributing to sustainable economic transformation (Khanaghyan & Smith, 2023).

Workers' unions, such as the Central Organization of Trade Unions (COTU), actively participate in social dialogue, advocating for the rights of informal sector workers.

Despite the progress made by NPOs and SEs in contributing to the transition of young individuals from informal to formal employment in Kenya, several knowledge gaps and challenges persist. Scholars and development practitioners recommend a context-specific and comprehensive approach to the transition, emphasising the creation of more decent and formal jobs rather than relying on informal employment (Chen, 2012).

Efforts to transition from informal to formal employment in Kenya necessitate the registration of informal enterprises. This registration is vital for effective regulation, extending state protection to the informal workforce, and preventing illegal exploitation and mistreatment (Chen, 2012). Vanek Chen, Carré, Heintz, and Hussmanns (2014) stressed the importance of data-related studies and analyses to gain a deeper understanding of the informality landscape. Additionally, Avis (2016) highlights spatial solutions as a priority, advocating for well-designed urban planning that incorporates informal and SEs. This approach underscores the significance of planning for social inclusion and building partnerships with other sectors to ensure a comprehensive and sustainable formalisation.

Promoting formal self-employment through entrepreneurship is recognised as a key anti-poverty strategy in developing countries (Gindling & Newhouse, 2014). Although current initiatives by NPOs and SEs have demonstrated impact, sustaining the transition from informal to formal employment poses challenges. Long-term success requires strategies and programmes that are impactful and resilient to changes in economic conditions, policies, and external factors.



5.1 Contribution of Non-Profit Sector

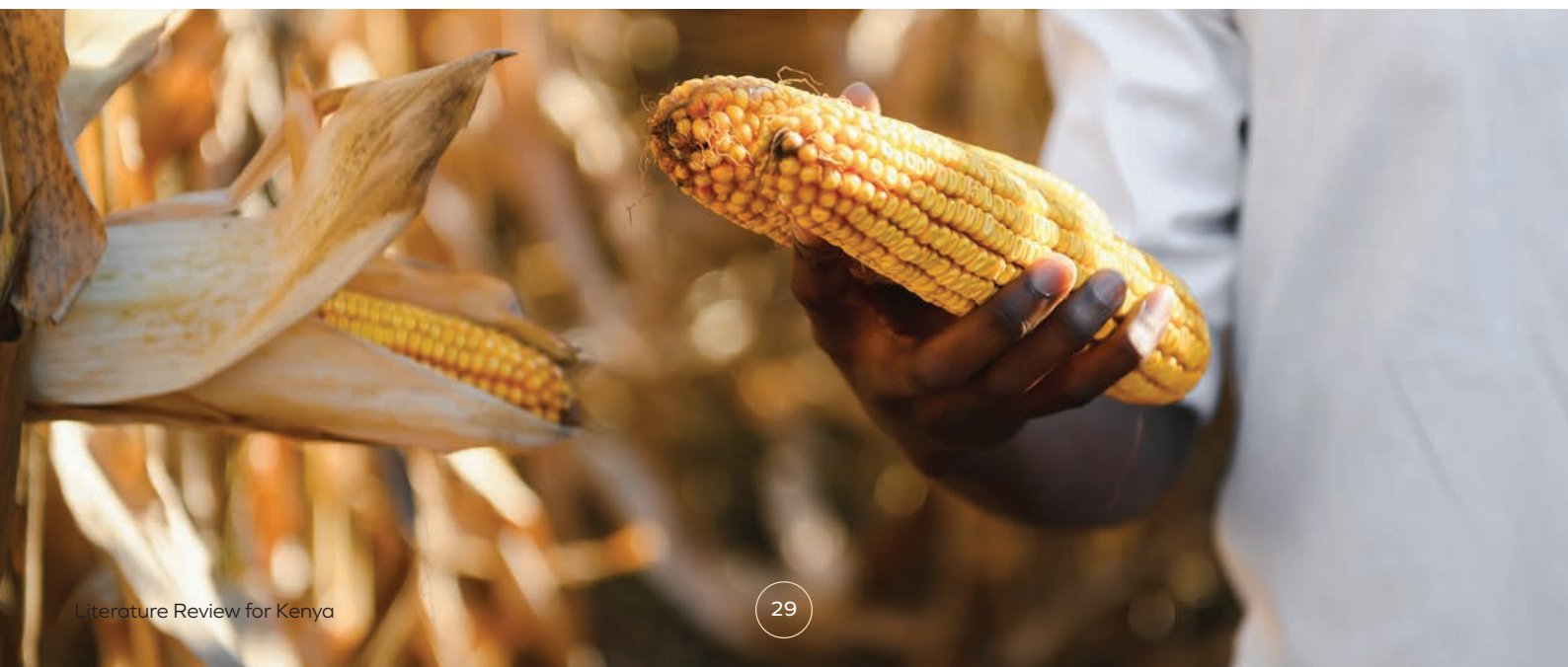
Although not an industry, the non-profit sector encompasses diverse institutions operating across various sectors, such as health, education, and social services (Salamon & Newhouse, 2019). Studies by the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) (AERC, 2021) highlighted common sectors and subsectors where NPOs focus on youth employment and empowerment strategies. These include the agricultural sector, MSMEs and business ventures, informal employment, self-employment, formal employment, trade, tourism and hospitality, construction, and ICT sectors.

Research on the leading sub-sectors for youth employment in Kenya faces challenges due to limited and inconclusive studies. Despite this, studies contributing to understanding job creation dynamics in Kenya have shed some light on key sectors. Notable studies include the Master Plan Study for Kenyan Industrial Development (MAPSKID) in 2007 and the Cluster Analysis Study by the KIPPRA in 2010. KIPPRA's study highlighted the significance of horticulture in job creation, aligning with the findings of the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) in 2012, which identified agriculture, especially the livestock sub-sectors, as a favourable sector for employment generation (KIPPRA, 2012). Hall (2017) ranked the agricultural sector as the leading overall source of employment for youth in Kenya, a conclusion supported in research by Mainar-Causapé, Ferrari, and McDonald (2018), that emphasised the importance of specific value chains within agriculture, such as vegetables, fruits, livestock, and dairy, for job creation.

Building on the existing research, Boulanger et al. (2018) employed linear multipliers and value chain analyses, revealing that Kenya's agricultural and livestock sectors have the highest employment multiplier values. This underscores the important role of large-scale farming, particularly in agricultural exports. Munga et al. (2021) expanded on this exploration, identifying trade and repairs, ICT, and horticulture as sectors with the greatest job creation potential, emphasising smallholder farms' absorption of unskilled labour and the diverse opportunities within these sectors. Specific sectors such as agriculture, fishing, and forestry lead in job creation, followed by finance, real estate, business services, and trade, while manufacturing, hotels and restaurants, and electricity and water exhibit lower employment multipliers (Onsomu et al., 2022).

Numerous studies emphasise the informal sector as the primary source of employment for Kenyan youth, constituting 80 per cent of employment opportunities with favourable wages (Hall, 2017). The rural informal sector, particularly in agriculture and pastoralism, ranks prominently as a leading source of youth employment, encompassing over 60 per cent of the workforce (Njora & Yilmaz, 2022). Additionally, the services sector, thriving in urban areas like Nairobi, Kisumu, and Mombasa, offers substantial job opportunities for youth employment, particularly in waste management, transportation, and the food industry (Hall, 2017).

This review highlights research gaps regarding the distinct role of NPOs in fostering dignified and fulfilling work across diverse sub-sectors for young individuals in Kenya. A nuanced understanding of the non-profit sector's contribution is essential for informed policy formulation, and how those in the informal sector can transition to formal sector. Moreover, there is a notable dearth in research exploring the potential of sectoral development policies in promoting youth employment; an aspect that O'Higgins (2017) indicated has received limited attention.



5.2 Increased Employment in Non-Profit Sector

The non-profit sector in Kenya is playing a significant role in addressing youth unemployment by engaging young individuals as direct employees under formal employment structures and as volunteers for various projects. This multifaceted approach, as discussed by Kanyinga and Mitullah (2007), underscores the sector's potential to contribute to reducing youth unemployment and creating dignified and fulfilling work. The sector's emphasis on project implementation, community engagement, strategic partnerships, and inclusivity aligns with the principles of decent work advocated by the ILO.

The success of NPOs in addressing youth unemployment is intricately tied to strong partnerships with donors, the government, and the private sector. The collaborative efforts create an environment conducive to programmes such as the K-YES initiative, emphasising the significance of robust relationships for successful implementation (Resonance, 2023). Additionally, investing in skill development programmes is a key opportunity for NPOs to enhance youth employability. By offering technical training in areas such as plumbing, welding, or ICT, NPOs contribute to equipping young individuals with valuable skills, as exemplified by World Vision Kenya's technical skills training for women, leading to increased job opportunities and self-reliance among graduates (World Vision Kenya, 2022).

Achieving uniform and equitable progress in addressing youth unemployment in Kenya requires NPOs to ensure that their programmes are comprehensive, addressing both rural and urban contexts. NPOs can focus on rural transformation by providing digital skills training and investing in smart farming, agribusiness, and other technical skill development initiatives. Often, ICT training tends to concentrate on urban youth, neglecting those in rural areas. Initiatives such as those led by Young Professionals in Agriculture Research and Development (YPARD) and the Africa Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS) have been instrumental in altering youth perceptions about agriculture, increasing interest in agribusiness, and promoting employment in rural areas. Their training, particularly on using GIS and GPS to tackle challenges in agriculture and the environment, is crucial for incorporating technology into the agriculture value chain and fostering youth employment (Rono et al., 2012).

Furthermore, the emphasis on ICT and digital transformation for MSMEs in NPO-led youth empowerment and entrepreneurship training has 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 organisations like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, particularly in youth employment coaching through the Sidai Africa social enterprise, has had a substantial impact (Africa HR Solutions, 2018). In addition, NPOs have the potential to create youth employment opportunities when they focus on projects that promote environmental conservation. Given the pressing issue of climate change, providing youth with job opportunities in environmental areas, particularly in the waste management sector, is crucial (CFYE, 2021).

The emphasis on ICT and digital transformation for MSMEs in NPO-led youth empowerment and entrepreneurship training has significantly expanded opportunities for young individuals.



06 EMERGING KNOWLEDGE GAPS WITHIN THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR

Despite the significant contributions that the non-profit sector, including SEs, have made towards dignified and fulfilling employment for the youth, there are still a lot of gaps and areas that need to be improved on. These areas range from contributions of NPOs, including SEs, to various categories of youth, financial and non-financial support systems as facilitators towards dignified and fulfilling work, nature of jobs contributed, sector-specific challenges, and NPO sector capacity and capability to execute their role. Although many of the gaps were highlighted in the respective sub-sections above in this literature review, a summary of these gaps is provided in this section.

6.1 Gaps in Education and Skills Training

This section was covered under section 4.3. In summary, the literature highlights a significant skill gap between training institutions and the demand of the labour market, leading to youth unemployment and underemployment. NPOs' efforts to develop skills are limited, emphasising the need for demand-driven training. The NPO's youth empowerment training has focused on employing training and skills that increase opportunities for youth employment. However, it seems that NPOs do not consider youth graduates with the necessary training for jobs but who still are unemployed. What programs can be best for this category in line with the dignified and fulfilling jobs? To address this question requires a skills gap analysis that needs the collaboration of the government, the private sector, academic institutions, the donor community, and NPOs.

6.2 Gaps in Technology and Digital Economy

Despite the efforts by the NPO sector to promote digital and ICT skill training for youth and digital employment in Kenya, the sector still requires serious intervention. Even in developed countries like China, the digital divide is still a major challenge in the transition to digital employment (Bai, 2023). Future studies should focus on reducing the knowledge gap in youth ICT and digital skills, especially in the vulnerable and remote areas of Kenya with limited internet and energy infrastructures for digital transformation. Furthermore, gender inclusion in the NPOs technology training would ensure that no gender is sidelined in the digital skills training programmes.

6.3 Gaps in Agricultural Sector

The agricultural sector in Kenya faces several critical gaps that impede youth engagement and interest, ultimately hindering the sector's potential for economic growth. According to Njora & Yilmaz (2022), the challenge lies in the negative perception among young people, who view agriculture as unprofitable and associated with failure. This perception contributes to a broader issue highlighted by O'Higgins (2017), a notable shift of young workers away from agriculture, indicating a substantial gap in attracting and retaining youth in the sector. Another hindrance is the insufficient government promotion of agriculture for youth employment, as documented by Njora and Yilmaz (2022) and O'Higgins (2017). This reflects a critical gap in policy focus and implementation.

Furthermore, inadequate technology investment, innovation focus, and research in agribusiness pose challenges to maximizing the immense potential and interest of the youth in the agricultural sector (Njora & Yilmaz, 2022; Ouko, Ogola, Ng'on'ga, & Wairimu, 2022; O'Higgins, 2017). This deficiency not only limits modernisation, but also hinders the realisation of the full potential of the agricultural sector. Additionally, limited awareness of agriculture as an economic tool among the youth necessitates initiatives from the government, NPOs, and profit sector players to enhance large-scale and scientific agricultural production (Njora & Yilmaz, 2022).



6.4 Gaps in Entrepreneurship

The literature highlights various gaps in supporting entrepreneurship and small business enterprises towards providing dignified and fulfilling jobs. NPOs aiming to promote youth employment in Kenya face numerous challenges, including the absence of a consistent definition and comprehensive data on social enterprises, which creates difficulties in their incorporation into youth employment programs. Additionally, there is a notable gap in social entrepreneurship education, offering NPOs the opportunity to design programs that cultivate 21st-century skills among the youth. Another significant area for exploration is the untapped potential of fourth industrial revolution applications by social enterprises, representing a knowledge gap that could be leveraged for innovative technologies in youth employment.

Furthermore, there is a pressing need for NPOs to conduct a thorough analysis of existing youth employment policies, ensuring interventions address specific challenges faced by diverse sub-groups within the youth population. The informal sector's role in fostering entrepreneurship and empowering women entrepreneurs through NGO programs necessitates focused strategies from NPOs. To enhance their approaches, NPOs should prioritize comprehensive awareness creation campaigns, attitude change, and rigorous evaluation of past investments in promoting youth employment through small enterprises in Kenya. Additionally, guiding youth in obtaining funding for startups and agribusiness, particularly in proposal writing for grants, emerges as a crucial aspect that requires exploration. Lastly, transitioning university students into successful entrepreneurs' demands attention to bridge the capital investment and skills gap for youth success.

6.5 Gaps in Conceptualisation of Dignified and Fulfilling Work

The literature conceptualising dignified and fulfilling jobs identifies critical knowledge gaps in understanding and evaluating the two concepts from a universal approach. First, there is a call for a holistic evaluation framework encompassing global, contextual, and methodological dimensions. The literature emphasises the necessity of tailoring the conceptualisation to local cultures but lacks detailed methodologies for cultural nuance integration, particularly in Africa. Furthermore, challenges specific to the informal economy's evaluation and a lack of specialised assessment frameworks for vulnerable groups, such as youth and people with disabilities, remain unaddressed. Although the ILO's definition of decent work is widely used in the African context, there is still a need for methodological refinement and cultural sensitivity to advocate for region-specific considerations. In terms of measurement instruments, there is a prevalent reliance on instruments originating from Western countries, which have proven ineffective; hence, there is a call for the contextualisation of these measurements.



6.6 Gaps in Transition from Informal to Formal Employment

These gaps are sector-specific in the informal employment sector, and need to be explored to maximise youth employment in Kenya. Generally, there is still little knowledge in transitioning from informal to formal. This transition process remains ambiguous as to whether informal jobs are being turned into formal jobs or whether the informal jobs are designed for workers to enjoy benefits that exist in the formal sector while still working in the informal sector. This needs to be addressed and clarified. In this regard, NPOs should focus on bridging the gap in policy and regulation in the informal sector, which still lacks sufficient focus in terms of research propositions to improve the sector through legal interventions.

6.7 Gaps in Advocacy and Policy Influence

NPOs in Kenya play a crucial role in advocating for youth employment policies, involving organisations like Youth Agenda, Haki Elimu, Uraia Trust, CREAM, Action Aid Kenya, African Youth Trust, and NCKK. However, challenges limit their impact, including resource constraints, funding difficulties, and the overarching effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth unemployment. Corruption in education and employment systems poses a significant hurdle, particularly for disadvantaged youths. Moreover, gender gaps persist in digital technology careers, requiring focused advocacy efforts. The concerns of youth with disabilities highlight broader challenges in policy and support, emphasising the need for more inclusive initiatives. Closing these gaps necessitates strategic planning, increased resources, and targeted advocacy by NPOs to enhance their contributions to youth employment in Kenya.

6.8 Gaps in NPO Sector Capacity

Many NPOs in Kenya rely heavily on foreign donors for funding, a reliance that can make them vulnerable to external factors thus influencing their sustainability. Recent changes in donor policies, such as funding reductions or fund utilisation restrictions, have presented challenges to NPOs. Co-financing arrangements may undergo alterations, limiting funds to specific activities, and short-term funding commitments may be subject to new terms for renewal. These changes necessitate NPOs to explore alternative funding sources, leverage technology for efficiency, reduce operational costs, implement value-for-money programs, and enhance accountability to retain and attract donor funding.

According to the Annual NGO Sector Report, 81 per cent of funds received by NGOs in 2021/2022 came from sources outside Kenya, with the majority of the funds received from North America (48.3 per cent) followed by Europe (32.6 per cent), and then Africa (16.9 per cent) (NGO Coordination Board, 2023). This overdependence on external funding, coupled with a lack of income-generating activities among many NPOs, poses a threat to their long-term sustainability. NPOs should diversify their funding streams and develop strategies to become more financially resilient despite evolving donor landscapes.

For the non-profit sector to provide dignified work for youths successfully, depends largely on how effectively it manages its human capacity. This involves addressing key questions, such as whether the organisation has the appropriate number of staff to fulfil its mission and objectives. Also, ensuring that staff members possess the right skills and experience is crucial for effectively executing responsibilities, necessitating ongoing training and development initiatives. Competitive remuneration is also essential to retain and attract talent, requiring organisations to review staff salaries regularly and compare to market rates. Furthermore, integrating technology is crucial for internal processes, implementing programmes, and facilitating efficient and quick task execution. By addressing these aspects, NPOs can enhance their organisational capacity, cultivate a skilled and motivated workforce, and optimise their operations for greater impact (Rhoden, 2014; Singh, Martins, & Tefera, 2022).

Competitive remuneration is also essential to retain and attract talent, requiring organisations to regularly review staff salaries compared to market rates.

07 CONCLUSION



In conclusion, this literature review sheds light on the significant economic contributions of the non-profit sector to youth employment in Kenya, particularly in providing dignified and fulfilling jobs for individuals aged 15 to 35 years. NPOs, including SEs, play a pivotal role in this landscape through various youth-oriented programs. These programs encompass vocational training, entrepreneurship promotion, facilitating access to credit and financial support, investing in sustainable rural development, and ensuring ICT infrastructure access for digital transformation. These efforts contribute significantly to the GDP by enabling youth to generate income across various employment sectors under the guidance of NPOs.

The key sectors attracting youth employment include ICT and digital, the broader informal sector (including agriculture and services), and MSMEs. NPOs have assisted youth particularly in informal settlements, offering employment opportunities in collaboration with various sectors in Kenya. Despite these noteworthy contributions, there are persistent gaps and areas for improvement. These include addressing diverse youth categories, enhancing the effectiveness of financial and non-financial support systems, understanding the characteristics of created jobs, tackling sector-specific challenges, and building the capacity of the NPO sector to fulfil its vital role. Closing these gaps is essential for maximising the impact and effectiveness of the non-profit sector in advancing dignified and fulfilling employment opportunities for the youth.

NPOs have assisted youth particularly in informal settlements, offering employment opportunities in collaboration with various sectors in Kenya.



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Contact:

Centre on African Philanthropy
& Social Investment **(CAPSI)**

2 St David's Place, Parktown,
Johannesburg, South Africa, 2193

P.O. Box 98, Wits, Johannesburg,
South Africa

admin@capsi.co.za

www.capsi.co.za