



Contributions of the Non-Profit Sector to Youth Employment in Nigeria: A Review of the Literature

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ABSTRACT



Against the backdrop of rising youth unemployment in sub-Saharan Africa, governments have failed to prioritise the welfare of their citizens. The region's volatile economy, driven by dependence on primary commodities, poor terms of trade, undiversified markets, and features of the Dutch disease, has further compounded these challenges. With both the public and private sectors struggling to address these issues, the non-profit sector has emerged as a beacon of hope. In the absence of government and the private sector to address the developmental challenges facing African youth, non-profit organisations are making significant contributions to address such challenges, including youth unemployment. This review appraised the literature on the economic contributions of the non-profit sector in addressing the social and economic crises facing Nigerian youth, especially the problem of youth unemployment. It deploys a desktop approach and employs a thematic analysis. On the basis of this, it highlights the contribution of the sector to economic development, including gaps in youth achieving dignified and fulfilling employment; identifies gaps in the literature; and points to areas of further research.

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Bhekinkosi Moyo
CAPSI Director

DISCLAIMER

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and others (+)
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
NNNGOs	Nigerian Network of Non-governmental Organisations
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
NPOs	Non-profit Organisations
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WACSI	West Africa Civil Society Institute



01 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, youth unemployment, exacerbated by failed government, volatile economic conditions, and high population growth, has emerged as a major focus in Africa's development agenda. In Nigeria, the prospects of white-collar employment are increasingly non-existent for a combination of factors, including but not limited to patronage politics, limited opportunities in government institutions, and the closure of many private companies owing to infrastructure decay (Raheem, Oyeleye, & Adeniji, 2014; Yakubu & Adegbe, 2019). The effect is evident in the rising number of kidnappings, cultism, prostitution, militancy, and armed robbery in Nigeria (Ugal, Nwagbara, & Uyang, 2011).

Against this backdrop, the non-profit sector, also known as the 'third sector' has emerged as a mechanism to clean up the inadequacies of the capitalist state (Usman, 2019). Choto, Iwu, and Tengeh (2020) argued that the non-profit sector has and continues to create spaces for youths to contribute to society and join the fight against social injustices, address development/socio-economic challenges, and stand in the gap for the impact of the government's lapses. Similarly, Kotwala (2020) noted that non-profit organisations (NPOs) are crucial to building and stabilising societies by providing the much-needed services contributing to socio-economic development. Yet, they are often overlooked as a strategic sector making immense contributions to development in Nigeria. For example, the sector is said to have contributed to social entrepreneurship (Adeyeye, 2016); rural and community development (Agbola, 1994; Ngeh, 2013); and poverty alleviation (Emmanuel, 2012).

This review assessed the role of NPOs in contributing to youth employment in Nigeria; the justification is that Nigeria is the most populous African nation, with numerous non-profit organisations, a youth population bulge, and rising unemployment rates. This raises questions about the NPO sector's efficacy in bridging the employment gap while ensuring that work is dignified and fulfilling for Nigerian youths.

The historical evolution of NPOs in Nigeria predates the colonial period. The evolution could be categorised into three main phases, namely the pre-colonial and colonial era; the post-independence and Civil War/military rule era; and the post-military era (Abdullahi, 2021; NNNGO, 2020). In the pre-colonial period, foreign NPOs, such as those led by missionaries, were active in Nigeria, including the education sector through establishment of, administration of, and teaching in schools (AZ Research Consult, 2025). During the Nigerian Civil War of 1967 – 1970, international philanthropic organisations provided food and relief materials for the poor and those severely affected by the war (Okamoe, 2019). Subsequent crises in the Northern region and the Niger Delta encouraged the proliferation of NPOs, some in partnerships with their international counterparts. What began as an initiative to alleviate suffering quickly morphed into a social justice project spanning sectors like health, education, women's and children's rights, poverty alleviation, and the like (Okamoe, 2019). However, the role of the non-profit sector in promoting economic growth, human development and social cohesion remains an understudied and underappreciated area in African development scholarship (Olukoshi, 2006; Tshiyoyo, 2023).

In the pre-colonial period, foreign NPOs, such as those led by missionaries, were active in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, the non-profit sector, which includes social enterprises, has greatly contributed to the empowerment and job creation for the 'youth' sector of the population. Their activities have contributed to significant improvement in health, creating jobs, educating citizens, and contributing to the economic development of rural communities. The spill over effect of such opportunities is the reduction of societal ills because of a sense of inclusion (Abalogu & Nwokedi, 2024).

Nigeria is an important country to consider given that it is the second biggest economy in Africa. It is, however, characterised by high levels of economic inequality, dependence on oil production, and ethnic, religious, and political challenges. Nigeria has the largest youth population in the world with a median age of 18.1 years. With a population of over 200 million, young people represent about 70 per cent of the entire population. In the third quarter of 2023, 8.6 per cent of youth in the country were unemployed (NBS, 2024). The persistent situation of unemployment of young people results in the deterioration of human capital (Scarpetta, Sonnet, & Manfredi, 2010). Persistent unemployment has resulted in low productivity, increase in crime, lack of innovation, internet fraud, ritual killings and a willing and ready human machine waiting to be used for destruction and disruption during elections (Ayinla & Ogunmeru, 2018). According to the Nigerian Youth Action Plan (2021-2024), the services sector contributed 54 per cent to the GDP, and accounts for almost 45 per cent of the working population. NPOs are established to provide public services to communities where they operate (Smith, 2008) or to target groups.

This review aimed to map out the contributions of the non-profit sector to the Nigerian economy. Particularly, the review focuses on the role of the sector in youth employment. The key questions this review sought to answer included: What is the economic contribution of the non-profit sector to youth employment in Nigeria? How has the sector contributed to providing dignified and fulfilling work for Nigerian youths? What are the sub-sectoral contributions to dignified and fulfilling work within the non-profit sector in Nigeria? And, what are the emerging knowledge gaps within the sector and sub-sectors? Using thematic analysis, this review underscored the dominant themes emanating from academic literature on the subject matter of NPOs contribution to youth employment in Nigeria.

To achieve this aim, the review is structured as follows: the next section deals with the methodology used in conducting the review. This is followed by a section that defines the key terminologies used in the study and then the next provides context on the case study of Nigeria. An overview of its political economy especially the labour market, the challenges facing youths in the country, and the dynamics of the non-profit sectors sets the scene for the discussion on the economic contributions made by the non-profit sector to job creation for youth, particularly, dignified and fulfilling work as defined by the Mastercard Foundation (MCF) in the section that follows. In addition, emerging knowledge gaps within the sector and the nature of youth employment within sub-sectors of the non-profit sector are examined. Finally, the review examines the potential and opportunities to increase employment in the non-profit sector in Nigeria. It ends with a discussion of the implications of the findings and identifies areas for further studies.



02

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS



The main objective of the review was to examine the role of the non-profit sector in creating dignified and fulfilling work for youths in Nigeria. The review also aimed to examine the economic contributions and sectoral priorities of NPOs in Nigeria. In addition, it highlighted the gap on the subject matter of youth employment in Nigeria. To this end, the main research question this review sought to answer was:

How have NPOs contributed to dignified and fulfilling work in Nigeria?

The key sub-questions follow:

1. What are the economic contributions of the non-profit sector to youth employment in Nigeria?
2. What are the economic contributions of the non-profit sector to dignified and fulfilling work in Nigeria?
3. What are the sub-sectoral contributions to dignified and fulfilling work for various categories of young people?
4. What are the emerging knowledge gaps on the subject-matter?
5. What are the possibilities and opportunities for increased employment in the non-profit sector?
6. What are the areas for future research?



To answer these questions, the review drew on secondary data (desktop research) from a variety of scholarly and grey literature. Google Scholar, Google, and JSTOR search engines were used in sourcing for information on the NPO/youth employment nexus in Nigeria. Themes searched for included: NPOs in Nigeria; NGOs in Nigeria; economic contribution of the NPO sector; data on NPO contribution to youth employment in Nigeria; civil society organisations (CSOs) and economic contributions; youth unemployment; NPO sectoral priorities; and youth in Nigeria. The results from these 'base' themes were used to further probe the subject matter to gain insight into their work and contributions to youth employment in Nigeria.

Data was drawn from a selection of documents – journal articles, documents from websites, reports, books and book chapters, reliable blogs, opinion pieces/editorials, newspaper articles, conference proceedings, and YouTube videos on the subject matter. A thorough analysis of these documents was conducted to deduce recurring themes on the non-profit sector's contribution to youth employment in Nigeria. Also, where available, numeric and textual data were sourced and visualised for illustrative purposes (descriptive statistics).

Thematic analysis was needed to unravel patterns within the data. The review's focus was on the various contributions of the non-profit sector. The literature was thematically coded, identifying recurring themes that reflected the sector's contributions and the youths' perspective. This method was instrumental in highlighting commonalities and differences in understanding its role, the gaps in their contributions and possible strategies to bolster their capacity to provide dignified and fulfilling work to Nigerian youths. As a result, the review is not merely a synopsis of available literature but a detailed discussion of key recurring themes in the literature on the subject matter.

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03

DEFINITION OF TERMINOLOGIES

The definition of 'youth' varies worldwide, influenced by cultural, economic, and social factors. According to International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2025), youth are those between the ages of 15 and 24 years. The MCF adopts broader age range, acknowledging the varied experiences and challenges of youth across different ages, genders, and situations, clearly set out in its *Young Africa Works Strategy*. Specifically, it classifies youth as those between the ages of 15 and 24 while young adults cover individuals aged 25 to 35 years (MCF, 2015). In the same vein, regional and continental organisations in Africa such as the East African Community, the African Development Bank, and African Union classified youth as those between the ages of 15 and 35 years (PASGR, 2023). In Nigeria the age bracket for the classification of youth in the country have been moved from 18 to 35 years to 15 to 29 years (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2019). In contrast, the official statistical body, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) considered those aged 15 to 35 years as youth (NBS, 2024). This review adopts the NBS' classification of youth as those between the ages of 15 and 35 years.

3.1 Dignified and Fulfilling Work

This section defines dignified and fulfilling work – a concept that is popularised by the MCF. This focus is necessary to review the literature on the contribution of NPOs to economic development in Nigeria. It should, however, be noted that prior to its popularisation, the concept has been deployed in scholarship, including Nigerian scholarship. The concept has found expressions in Nigerian scholarship on youth un- and under-employment within the confines of 'decent and quality work' (Kayode & Agboola, 2019; Nioku, 2020; Okuwa, 2020).

When defining dignified and fulfilling work, it is important to recognise that this concept is influenced by cultural interpretations, societal norms, and individual aspirations, which can vary across different African nations (Beukman, 2005). There is no single definition that applies universally; however, some common elements include job stability, societal respect, purposeful employment, and opportunities for future advancement. This notion extends beyond merely earning a livelihood; it encompasses work that aligns with both individual and societal values, ultimately providing dignity and fulfilment (PASGR, 2024).

Similarly, the MCF (2015) offers a comprehensive definition of dignified and fulfilling work: employment that ensures financial stability, societal esteem, and individual growth, aligned with personal goals and societal values. Its 'Young Africa Works Strategy' initiative defines dignified and fulfilling work as underpinned by four main markers namely: reliable income, reputable work, respect in the workplace, and a sense of purpose. These markers were the main recurring theme from the MCF's 2015 youth aspiration surveys conducted with over 3 000 young people in Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, and Senegal (MCF, 2015).

According to the MCF, work fits the dignified and fulfilling criteria if it entails reliable income and one other marker (MCF, 2015). Reliable income implies that work undertaken by young people provides enough income for the youth and their respective dependents. Reputable work is respected by everyone, from family and friends to colleagues and clients. Respect in the workplace implies the feeling of being acknowledged and respected in the place of employment. Finally, the sense of purpose indicates if young people feel fulfilled in their respective employments. In conclusion, dignified and fulfilling work transcends mere financial compensation.

Reliable income implies that work undertaken by young people provides enough income for the youth and their respective dependents.

In terms of meeting the parameters of dignified and fulfilling work, undignified employment refers to young people who are in employment that do not meet any of the criteria set out above. Employment is considered as progressive if it entails work by young people who do not have reliable income but have one of the other markers, or progressively two of the other markers. Finally, work is dignified and fulfilling when it has reliable income and at a minimum, one of the other markers. Thus, dignified and fulfilling work is a spectrum, the closer the parameters get to include reliable income and one (or two) of the other marks, the more it is considered dignified and fulfilling (MCF, 2015). One shortcoming of this definition is the duration of reliability of income. This is an area that scholars and development practitioners need to address in subsequent studies. In the meantime, the four markers of dignified and fulfilling jobs set out by MCF are adopted in this review.

3.2 Non-profit Sector

Often dubbed as the ‘third sector’ (Laville, Young & Eynaud, 2015), the concept of the non-profit sector has been used interchangeably with associated terms like ‘charitable sector’, ‘independent sector’, ‘voluntary sector’, ‘tax-exempt sector’ and ‘civil society organisations’ (Salamon & Anheier, 1992). These create a conceptual problem. This review adopts Salamon and Anheier’s (1992) structural/operational definition. They define the third sector as a collection of organisations that are formal, private, non-profit-distributing, self-governing, and voluntary. They acknowledge that these conditions will vary in degrees across organisations, and some may qualify more easily on one criterion than another. However, these scholars argue that for an organisation to be considered part of the non-profit sector, it must reasonably show all five criteria (Salamon & Anheier, 1992). Organisations within the third sector are formal to the extent that they are institutionalised; private to the extent that they are institutionally separate from government; non-profit-distributing in that profits generated are not returned to owners but ploughed back into the basic mission of the agency; self-governing in terms of being equipped to control their activities; and finally, have the presence of voluntary input either in management or in the respective activities (Salamon & Anheier, 1992).

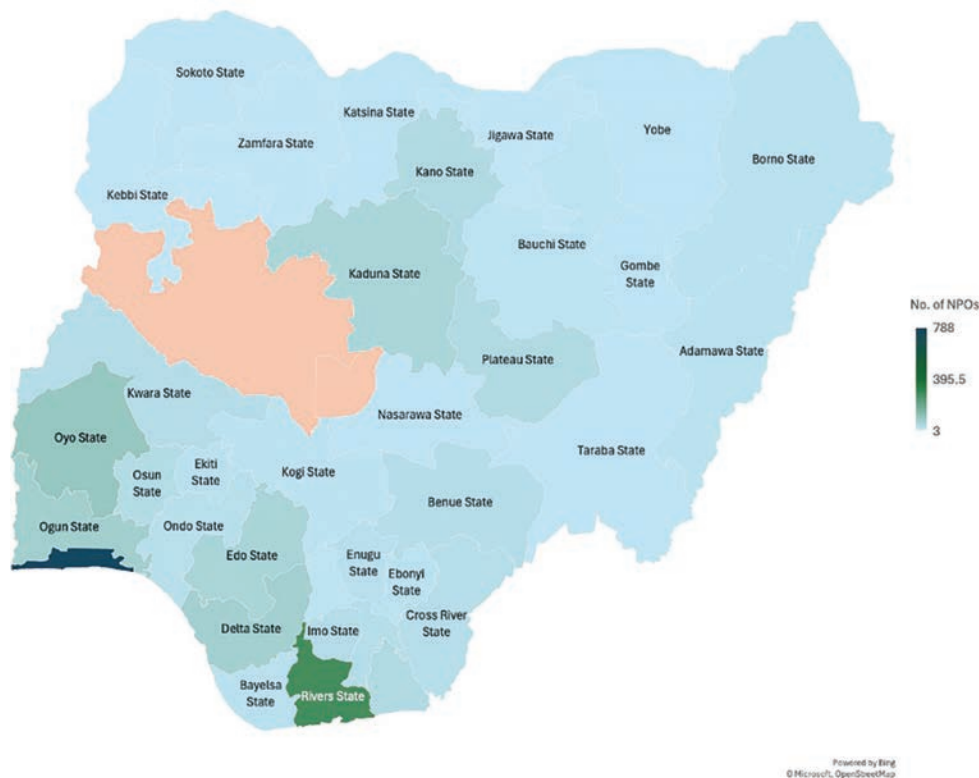
3.3 The Non-profit Sector in Nigeria

According to the Nigerian Network of Non-governmental Organisations (NNNGO), NPOs form a vital part of the civil society sector in Nigeria; hence, it is used interchangeably in tandem with NGOs and CSOs (NNNGO, 2020). On par with the global trend, CSOs in Nigeria began as philanthropic entities established to meet a development need – alleviating poverty – and have since morphed into a wider range of organised groups, including but not limited to trade unions, social movements, grassroots organisations, faith-based groups, NGOs, as well as online networks and communities (Nwachukwu, 2019). The mapping of CSOs in Nigeria report equally categorises these organisations according to their purpose into three broad streams namely governance and nation-building, agency and advocacy, and intervention and service assistance. In his study, Nwachukwu (2019) showed that 85.3 per cent of CSO participants indicated their core function was the provision of intervention or service assistance to disadvantaged groups in society, 9.8 per cent of CSO participants indicated that their core function was the promotion of good governance and nation-building, and 4.9 per cent of CSO fall under the category of advocacy – representing and promoting the interest of stakeholder groups (Nwachukwu, 2019).

In 2022, the main regulatory body for national-level CSOs in Nigeria is the Corporate Affairs Commission. It reported that there were more than 600 000 registered CSOs (USAID, FHI, & ICNL, 2023). It is important to note that the number of NPOs in Nigeria are more than these as most traditional NPOs are not registered with the Commission. They are formal and institutional to the extent that they have informal rules governing their activities, self-regulatory, and have regular meetings. To define NPOs purely as those registered with a governmental body misses the point. The NNNGO categorised registered CSOs according to their geographical distribution in Nigeria (NNNGO, 2024).



FIGURE 1: Mapping the number of NPOs by state in Nigeria



Source: Author's compilation (2024)

Figure 1 shows that Lagos State has the highest number of registered CSOs with (788), followed by Abuja (390), and Rivers States (286). These institutions are a combination of community-based organisations and not-for-profit/non-governmental organisations. The geographical distribution of CSOs is consistent with a study commissioned by ActionAid Nigeria in partnership with other NPOs to examine stakeholder perception of CSO distribution in Nigeria. The study shows that CSOs are concentrated in major cities (as depicted by the map). It however notes that most need infrastructural support, which is mostly available in large cities (ActionAid Nigeria, DevNet, CIVICUS, & UNDP, 2007).

04 COUNTRY OVERVIEW



In the first 14 years of the 21st century, Nigeria was one of the fastest growing economies in Africa. Thereafter, the growth rate slowed down partly due to decline in global oil prices, insecurity, and poor governance. This is in the context of a growing population which is estimated at 2.59 per cent yearly. As Edigheji (2020) noted, the economy is not growing fast enough to absorb the increasing numbers in the labour force. Drawing on the data of the NBS, he observed that “the number of unemployed people increased from 3.3 million in 2010 to 16 million in 2017... an unemployment rate of about 18 per cent in 2016... with a youth unemployment rate of 25.1 per cent” (Edigheji, 2020, p. 29). Between 2014 and 2023, youth unemployment rate averaged 22.97 per cent, reached an all-time high of 53.40 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2020, and a record low of 6.90 per cent in the first quarter of 2023 (NBS, 2023). The volatility in the rate of youth unemployment depicts a crisis necessitating an immediate, long-term, and sustainable intervention.

The country also performed poorly in social development. For example, in 2021, Nigeria ranked 163 in the Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme (2022), which is an indication of its poor development performance. By 2018, two scholars at the Brookings Institute, Washington DC, United States, dubbed Nigeria the poverty capital of the world, because according to the NBS, 62.6 per cent of its population, that is 112 million Nigerians were living below the poverty line by 2010 (Edigheji, 2020). On the economic front, in 2020, it ranked 131st worldwide with a general score of 56.9 on the ease of doing business index, with the highest scores obtained in the categories of starting a business, dealing with construction permits, and getting credits (Sasu, 2022). It ranked equally low in other indicators like cross-border trading and resolving insolvencies (Sasu, 2024).

The spatial dynamics are shaped by significant inequality, with human settlement patterns mirroring the country's socio-economic conditions. Madu (2006) found that high levels of inequalities exist between urban and rural areas as well as between geo-political zones. According to him, this is partly due to disparity between urban and rural areas in terms of literacy rates/levels, access to better-paying jobs, and the neglect of rural areas by successive governments (Madu, 2006). In addition, the politics are characterised by neo-patrimonialism, nepotism, tribalism, ‘religion-ism’ and ‘god-father-ism’, which undermined the availability of, and access to employment opportunities for youth in the country (Ijewereme, 2015).

A major consequence of this is high emigration rates, especially among young people in search of greener pastures – from rural to urban areas and outside the borders of Nigeria – the latter is now commonly referred to as ‘*Japa*’, a term originating from the Yoruba language which means to escape or run away. In general, Nigeria is experiencing a high level of ‘brain drain’, especially among the youth, due to a lack of economic opportunities, including employment. This has both negative and positive consequences for the country. On the negative side, the best brains, mostly the youth are emigrating to developed countries. On the positive side, remittance has become one of the major sources of foreign exchange in the country. Between 2015 and 2020, remittance flows as a percentage of GDP outpaced oil revenues. In 2018 alone, migrants’ remittances to Nigeria amounted to \$25 billion, accounting for 6.1 per cent of the country’s GDP (Aja, Nnaji, & Okorie, 2024).



Furthermore, employment in the country is not based on merit but on patronage. Consequently, youths without links to well-connected individuals are likely to be unemployed even if they have the right qualifications, with accusations such as reserving top-tier opportunities for family members and friends, rife. Major companies operating in Nigeria have been accused of failing to improve job prospects while contributing to development through corporate social responsibility (CSR). These companies are reportedly repatriating high profit margins to their home countries with bare minimum contributions to the host communities; this pattern is prevalent in Nigeria (Ezeudu, 2011). Examples, such as Shell in the Niger Delta (Shell Nigeria, 2024), have failed in CSR (Adeyeye & Adekeye, 2022). The initiative is voluntary as there exist no binding regulations enshrined in international agreements serving as enforcement mechanisms for CSR. Thus, the private sector has primarily failed to bridge the gaps or mend the lapses of government in creating employment opportunities to absorb the growing youth population in Nigeria (Ekeruche, Folarin, Efobi, Bahago, & Onyekwena, 2022). The inability of the private sector to meet their CSR and illicit financial flows worsen the economic situation, including the unemployment crisis. In light of both the public and private sectors inability to create employment in the country, there is a general consensus that NPOs could play critical roles in this regard, especially in creating dignified and fulfilling jobs for Nigerian youth, which is the focus of this literature review.

4.1 Economic and Youth (Un)Employment Trends in Nigeria

Young people are considered employed if they participate in the legitimate production of goods and services, contributing to Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP), a key element of national accounts, and receive compensation for their work. Thus, an unemployed youth is a person who in their active labour years, generally 15 to 64 years of age, was available to work, and actively seeking work, but unable to secure any (NBS, 2023). According to the NBS, unemployment is the proportion of those in the labour force, who were actively searching for work, but could not find work for at least 20 hours per week (NBS, 2023). Underemployment, however, occurs if a person works less than full-time hours, which is 40 hours per week, but works at least 20 hours on average a week, and/or if a person works full-time but is engaged in an activity that underutilises their skills, time, and educational qualifications. These definitions were coined strictly based on participating in economic activity as opposed to the nature of fulfilment derived from such activities (NBS, 2023). In Nigeria, most youth employment is in the informal sector. Consequently, most Nigerian youths are engaged in undignified and unfulfilling jobs. The informal economy constitutes 58.2 per cent of the Nigerian economy, which translates to over a trillion when adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP) (Nwankpa, 2024) This is approximately US\$1 230 billion of the GDP purchasing power parity levels (World Economics, 2024).

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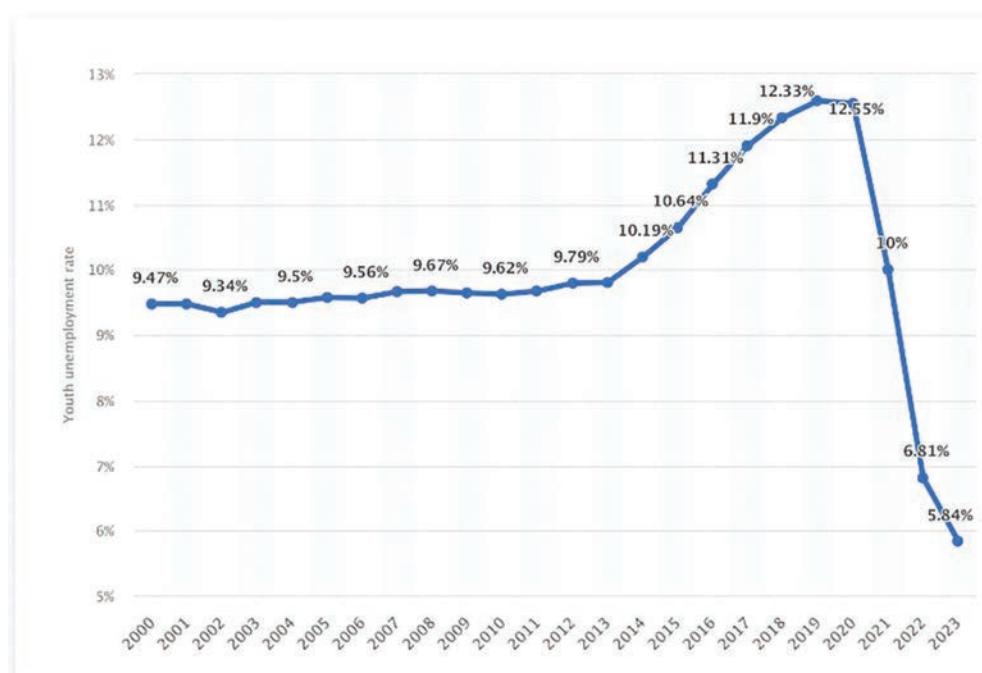
As noted earlier, Nigeria faces the crisis of youth unemployment and underemployment. The latter is exemplified by the fact that there is a mismatch between their remuneration and the level of their work/effort in a workplace. This shows that the jobs most Nigerian youth are engaged in are undignified and unfulfilling.

Although there are different definitions of underemployment among academic scholars, two elements reoccur in every definition: an inferior or lower type of employment (Omoniyi, 2016). The NBS of Nigeria defines underemployment as a situation where individuals are employed, but their employment is not up to the desired level of their skills, education, or income. In the first quarter of 2023, about 12.2 per cent of employed Nigerians were underemployed. Most work less than 40 hours per week and are willing to do more work (NBS, 2023).

Some even actively search for other jobs at their current job, showing a huge dissatisfaction with their current jobs or earnings (Lain & Pape, 2023). Studies have shown that underemployment is equally problematic as unemployment. Particularly, underemployed young people are deemed worse off than unemployed (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005). This is because the underemployed are confined to low-wage, and unsatisfying occupations that do not suit their skills. This hinders their ability to advance in their careers and maintain their financial security. This misalignment results in squandered potential, financial vulnerability, and psychological stress.

Figure 2 maps the youth unemployment rate in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023 (O'Neill, 2024), using the Statista dataset, which showed that from 2019 to 2020, youth unemployment was at an all-time high straddling 12.33 per cent and 12.55 per cent. This unemployment rate in the Statista dataset is lower than that of the NBS, perhaps due to different methodological reasons; however, both datasets point to high youth unemployment in Nigeria. The COVID-19 pandemic, and subsequent lockdowns imposed by governments at different levels, exacerbated the crisis of youth unemployment. However, the post-COVID-19 period has seen a decline in youth unemployment from 6.81 per cent in 2022 to 5.84 per cent in 2023.

FIGURE 2: Mapping youth unemployment in Nigeria, 1999 to 2023



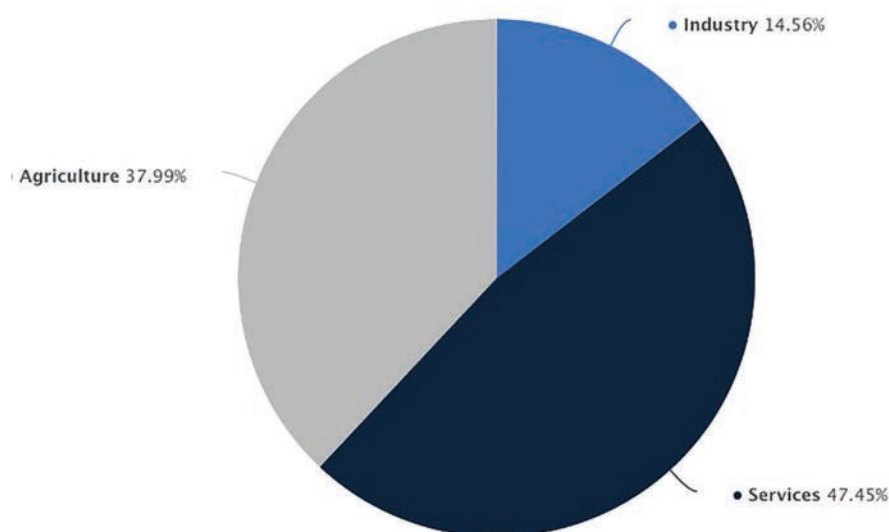
Source: Sasu (2024)

Economic growth comes from the accumulation of more capital and innovation that leads to technical progress, which can translate to improvement in socio-economic development. While there are varying determinants of economic growth, studies show a strong positive causal relationship with youth employment. Particularly, where infrastructure, sound policy environment, access to capital/finance, and technological innovation are present, they create an attractive and enabling environment for young people to take up employment and contribute to economic productivity and growth (Mohamed, Liu, & Nie, 2022).



Figure 3 shows the distribution of sectoral contributions to employment in Nigeria. The graph was sourced from Statista (Sasu, 2024). The growth of the service sector can be credited to the growth in migration from rural to urban areas and the prevalence (and affordability) of information and communication services.

FIGURE 3: Distribution of sectoral contributions to employment in Nigeria (2022)



Source: Sasu (2024)

The service sector has become an important mainstay of the Nigerian economy. The service sector recorded a growth of 3.98 per cent and contributed 56.55 per cent to the aggregate GDP (NBS, 2024). Services in this sector include telecommunications, wholesale and retail, finance and business, the film industry (known as Nollywood), the music industry and sub-sectors of the informal economy (Aliu, Kallamu, & Miracle, 2022). While this picture is useful in underscoring the dynamic of the Nigerian economy, it is equally important to ascertain the economic sectors accounting for high youth employment in Nigeria, for which data availability has proven challenging.

Nigeria's youth employment distribution by economic sectors has varied over time. With the emergence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the growing role of AI, Nigerian youth have capitalised on the access to technology for job creation. The service sector – comprising ICT, financial, public service, hospitality and tourism, trade, and entertainment, among others – is noted as the highest employer of youths in rural and urban areas (Edewor, Kollie, & Olaoye, 2023). Over the years, the ICT sub-sector contributed to youth employment in the country. The sector's contribution to employment increased from 124 617 employees in 2001 to about 1 721 145 employees at the end of 2011 (Aminu & Raifu, 2019).

In the fourth quarter of 2021, the sector contributed 9.88 per cent to the total nominal GDP. Nigeria is regarded as the Africa's largest ICT market with about 82 per cent of the continent's telecoms subscribers (ITA, 2023a). Examples of businesses in this sector include printing recharge cards, computer training 'colleges', service and repair centres for computers, cell phones and accessories, business centres – phone booths, cable and satellite TV installations and repairs, among others (Edewor et al., 2023). The demand for these services is high in Nigeria because of the unique challenges facing the country at large. For example, electricity poverty remains one of the biggest challenges in Nigeria. As a result, consumers struggle with everyday challenges like charging cell phones, printing or photocopying documents, having access to constant/stable internet/Wi-Fi connection at home (and in offices). Thus, business centres offering such services are in high demand – an opportunity many young job seekers capitalise on in Nigeria. The start-up capital for such businesses is low and the deregulation/liberalisation of telecommunication resulting in low-cost telecommunication products, have reduced barriers to market entry in this sector and served as strong incentives for unemployed youths (Edewor et al., 2023).

Also, trade forms an important part of the service sector in Nigeria. The sub-sector employs a significant portion of the population, including a substantial number of youths. Informal and formal trade activities span markets, wholesale, and retail sectors, offering diverse opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship. However, while

the sector plays a pivotal role in creating and providing jobs, several challenges and limitations persist. According to the NBS, the wholesale and retail trade sector accounts for over 10 per cent of Nigeria's GDP, significantly contributing to the economy (NBS, 2024). Youths constitute a large percentage of workers in this sector, particularly in informal trading, accounting for about 65 per cent of Nigeria's total trade activities (ITA, 2023b). Informal trading includes market vendors, street hawkers, and small-scale entrepreneurs who operate without formal business registration.

The barriers to market entry in the trade services sector vary according to the type of business. While experience is not crucial to entering the market/sector, the start-up capital needed to launch the business depends on the type of business. For instance, the start-up capital is higher for a provision store (a store where foodstuffs are sold) than for a phone booth. In the end, the trade sector offers a low barrier to entry for young individuals, requiring little capital and minimal formal education. Many youths leverage digital platforms to engage in e-commerce, which has grown rapidly due to increasing internet penetration.

4.2 Economic Contributions of the Non-profit Sector in Nigeria

The non-profit sector continues to play a significant role in Nigeria's economic landscape by contributing directly and indirectly to economic activities. Direct economic contributions include job creation, capital injection, and value-chain creation, while indirect contributions constitute capacity development and empowerment programmes like scholarships, training, and funding initiatives. Furthermore, there are practitioners in NPOs who have acquired capital to start other businesses such as real estate or agriculture. Thus, the sector has positive multiplier effects on job creation and promoting entrepreneurship in the country. However, there are challenges associated with adequately capturing and quantifying the economic contributions of the sector to Nigeria because of lack of data.

One of the most visible direct economic impacts of NPOs in Nigeria is job creation. They hire staff, volunteers, and consultants to implement projects and deliver services. Also, the sector has been instrumental in creating employment opportunities for youth and vulnerable groups (women and people living with disabilities). Additionally, NPOs often engage in capacity-building initiatives, training programmes, and skill development activities. Therefore, the sector contributes to human capital development and productivity growth in the economy (WACSI, 2023).

NPOs often engage in capacity-building initiatives, training programmes, and skill development activities.

The role of NPOs in capacity building in the country cannot be underestimated. For example, in July 2024, the AbleGod Women Development Forum announced that it will create employment opportunities for about 77 000 women in Nigeria through training and empowerment programmes (Memunat, 2024). Through this initiative, the organisation aimed to address the challenges of food insecurity in Nigeria, and to encourage more women to become active participants in the agricultural sector.

Another direct economic contribution of the non-profit sector in Nigeria is value-chain creation. NPOs have played a crucial role in connecting small- to medium-scale producers of various commodities to a larger market or consumer base. They serve as intermediaries, connecting small-scale farmers with large corporations to simplify supply chains while providing access to national, regional, and international markets. For example, TechnoServe, an international NGO, has been instrumental in creating sustainable value chains for staple crops in Nigeria (TechnoServe, 2024). In partnership with Nestle Nigeria, the Developing Inclusive Grains Project will help 5 000 smallholder farmers gain access to larger markets. This, in turn will help to equip these farmers with the necessary knowledge and skills to produce high-quality crops for national and international markets, thereby reducing the chance of rejection of their commodities in the international market. Crops like sorghum, maize, wheat, barley, soybeans, and millet are in high demand globally; equipping farmers with the skills to participate in the global food value chain is crucial to creating dignified and fulfilling jobs and to sustainable income generation and poverty alleviation.

The non-profit sector has equally contributed indirectly to Nigeria's economy through empowerment and capacity development programmes. Such programmes include the provision of scholarships, access to (specialised) training programmes, and funding initiatives (microfinance). Examples include the i-scholar initiative scholarship that provides scholarship to Nigerian youth; Youth Crime Watch of Nigeria – a youth-led movement committed to create a crime- and drug-free environment trains youth in communities and schools. Against the backdrop of high levels of poverty and poor social security where young people are unable to access and afford education and

other associated costs, NPOs provide scholarships to enable individuals from low/no income households and/or marginalised communities to access education. This, in turn, equips them with the necessary skillsets to pursue profitable ventures. The targeted nature of these scholarships helps to expose young people to fields that may ordinarily be out of reach.

A new trend is emerging not only in Nigeria but on the African continent where African businesses are establishing foundations to provide seed capital to start-ups. A good example is the Tony Elumelu Foundation (2024), which provides funding to young people, exposing them to education and training on entrepreneurship, forging toward home-grown 'afri capitalists' creating wealth on the continent.

Also, the MTN Foundation provides scholarships to students in the fields of science and technology. This is with the aim of strengthening Nigeria's capacity in these sectors of the economy (MTN Nigeria, 2024); in addition, the Agbami Medical and Engineering Scholarship, supported by Chevron, provides scholarships/bursaries to both medical and engineering students (ScholarAfrika, 2024); and, Beyond Leventis Foundation offers scholarships to train young people on eco-friendly and modern farming practices. Beneficiaries are also encouraged to return to their communities and implement the skills and knowledge gained, thereby creating a value chain and fostering local development and job creation (Leventis Foundation, 2024).

Various training programs have proven beneficial for young people in Nigeria, helping them secure dignified and fulfilling employment. One notable example is the Fate Foundation, an initiative established by Atedo Peterside in March 2000. This foundation offers skills training and vocational programmes designed to equip young people with valuable abilities, enabling them to start their own businesses or find jobs. It achieves this by providing business development training, access to funding, mentorship and advisory support to young entrepreneurs in Nigeria (FATE Foundation, 2024). Similarly, the Lift Above Poverty Organisation runs vocational training programmes where young Nigerians learn practical skills like sewing and embroidery, carpentry, and mechanical and electrical works. After completing the programmes, the youth apply the skills they have acquired to engage in productive economic activities that will, among other things, generate income for them. Some of the beneficiaries have reinvested the income they generated into other business ventures (WACSI, 2023). By doing so, they are also creating job opportunities for other young people. Additionally, NPOs offer economic support to youth to help them finance various business ventures. Microfinance refers to the financial services provided to low-income individuals or groups who are typically excluded from traditional banking systems. Microfinance institutions play a crucial role in this process.



As noted earlier, despite the contributions discussed above, the overall direct contribution of the non-profit sector to GDP is not quantifiable in the same way as for-profit businesses. This is because GDP data does not differentiate between for-profit organisations and NPOs. However, it is important to emphasise that the indirect contributions of NPOs are essential for social development, human capital formation, and economic progress in the countries where they operate, including Nigeria.

The foregoing review on the economic contributions of the non-profit sector to youth employment in Nigeria reveals two important issues. First, the third sector is crucial to the survival of Nigeria and its people, especially in rural and peri-urban areas where majority of people depend on NPOs for finance and skills acquisition. To adequately address the existing and persisting socio-economic challenges; achieve national, regional and continental development plans enshrined in Nigeria's Agenda 2050 and the African Union's Agenda 2063; a functional third sector is non-negotiable. Second, while the contributions have created avenues for job creation (directly and indirectly), it can be argued that given that the majority of Nigerians, especially the youth, are in the informal sector, the jobs they are employed in does not meet the criteria of dignified and fulfilled jobs as set out by the MCT. At best, some of those in the NPOs fall within what the ILO terms the working poor.

As noted earlier, MCF argues that work is dignified and fulfilling if it meets the criteria of reliable income and any other parameter (reputable work, respect in the workplace, and a sense of purpose) (MCF, 2015). The challenge of quantifying dignified and fulfilling work in the context of Nigeria largely lies in the fact that the sustenance of entrepreneurship especially those meeting local demands, is dependent on the purchasing power of consumers. The said purchasing power is determined by other factors like consistent payment of salaries and wages, payments of services delivered, among others. Thus, where business value chains are concerned, the extent to which work is dignified and fulfilling depends on strong intervening variables (cash flow within the economy, the cost of commodities, and affordability by consumers, among others). Hence, this review recommends primary data collection to establish the quality of work/employment created by the non-profit sector in Nigeria.

4.3 Sub-Sectoral Priorities of NGOs in Nigeria

Scholars like Trager and Osinulu (1991), Okoko and Olanrewaju (2000) and Francis et al. (1996) argued that NGOs in Nigeria focus on development-related issues with the aim of improving the livelihood of Nigerians. These include (but are not limited to) skill and capacity development, economic empowerment, conflict resolution, health, education, charity and peace building. Specifically, most NGOs in the country focus on the provision of basic services. One of the expected development outcomes is that this will reduce societal ills, such as crime and insecurity (Eze, 2023).

Thematically, NGOs in Nigeria have been categorised into six sub-groups, namely advocacy, service, operational, relief and development, human rights, research and education (NNNGO, 2020). Though useful, this categorisation is limited because they can be cross-cut. As an example, most human rights organisations in Nigeria such as the Civil Liberties Organisation and CLEEN Foundation undertake research, advocacy and human rights education programmes.

Some NPOs in Nigeria provide vital health services, including healthcare delivery, medical outreach, and awareness campaigns. For example, the Nigerian Cancer Society programmes focused on cancer prevention, outreach, and advocacy. Other NPOs implement programmes on maternal and child health, and HIV-AIDS treatment. Also, NPOs like the Nigerian Association of the Blind support people with disabilities, while the Mental Health Foundation Nigeria addresses mental health needs. Emergency health services are provided by Organisations like Médecins Sans Frontières in crisis areas. A case study of a non-profit Organisation, Health Strategy and Delivery Foundation has trained over 488 frontline workers in quality improvement methodologies across Lagos, Niger, and Imo states (Health Emergency and Initiative, 2023),.

According to the United Nations, article 26 of the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to education. NPOs in Nigeria have played a significant role in the education sector by focusing on access, quality, and empowerment, particularly for marginalised groups. Through initiatives like scholarships, school infrastructure development, vocational training, and teacher capacity building, NPOs such as The Oando Foundation, The Jim Ovia Foundation, and Teach for Nigeria have provided educational opportunities, especially in underserved regions. Further research could explore the long-term impacts of these programmes, especially to creating dignified and fulfilling jobs for Nigerian youths.

One of Nigeria's major challenges is Nigeria's food insecurity, despite having arable land, underscores the need for rapid and innovative response to the challenge. According to UNICEF, in 2023, nearly 25 million Nigerians were deemed food insecure. This is partly due to rising food prices, inflation, climate change, and insecurity (UNICEF, 2023). Children and vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, are mostly affected by food insecurity and malnutrition. The UNICEF report also shows that Nigeria has the second highest rate of stunted growth in the world, with a prevalence rate of 32 per cent of children under the age of five years. Six million of the 17 million food-insecure Nigerian children live in the Northeast and Northwest geopolitical zones: Adamawa, Borno, Katsina, Sokoto, Yobe, and Zamfara States (UNICEF, 2023). The report states that "An estimated two million children in Nigeria suffer from severe acute malnutrition, but only two out of every 10 children affected is currently reached with treatment. Seven per cent of women of childbearing age also suffer from acute malnutrition" (UNICEF, 2023: 1). This has profound adverse effects on the country's development. According to the UNICEF report, high rates of malnutrition pose significant public health and development challenges for the country. Stunting, in addition to an increased risk of death, is also linked to poor cognitive development, a lowered performance in education and low productivity in adulthood, all contribute to economic losses estimated to account for as much as 11 per cent of GDP (UNICEF, 2023: 2).

The problem is that Nigeria is unable to meet its domestic food production needs. Consequently, it spent \$10 billion to import food and agricultural production shortfalls (mostly wheat, rice, poultry, fish, consumer-oriented foods, and food services) in 2023 (Food & Beverage West Africa, 2024). This sector offers 'low-hanging fruit' opportunities for the third sector for a dual purpose – combat food insecurity in Nigeria and create youth employment that can be deemed dignified and fulfilling.

Over the years, to support the efforts of both the government and the private sector, NPOs have played a crucial role in enhancing local food production, particularly in rural Nigeria. Initiatives like Thrive Agric, a digital crowdfunding platform that provides farmers with necessary funding; Hello Tractor, which connects tractor owners with smallholder farmers; Farm Crowdy, which links farm sponsors with farmers; and Crop2Cash, a platform designed to improve smallholder farmers' access to formal financial services, have all been instrumental in addressing the challenges faced in local agriculture (GSM Association, 2020). It should, however, be noted that the efforts of NPOs to address the problem of food insecurity in the country have been hampered by the problem of insecurity in the country, as well as the continued reliance on traditional means of farming. In addition, most farmers have no irrigation and thus cannot farm all year round, which is a major impediment to addressing the problem of food insecurity in the country. NPOs' efforts in this regard have been limited, partly due to restricted financial resources and a lack of deployment of modern agricultural technology.



05
NON-PROFIT
AREAS OF
ATTRACTIVENESS
TO YOUTH IN
NIGERIA



To make an impact in fulfilling their mandates, NPOs need to consider areas of interest across gender, ethnic, and religious lines in Nigeria. This section examines the top three attractive areas for youth employment in Nigeria.

5.1 Youth Empowerment and Entrepreneurship Programmes

NPOs offer training, mentorship, and financial support to aspiring entrepreneurs. Young men are drawn to these initiatives as they provide practical skills, and guidance, in starting businesses and access to networks or entrepreneurial ecosystems, enabling them to become self-reliant and contribute to the well-being of their households and the economy at large (Aja-Okorie & Adali, 2014).

The Tony Elumelu Foundation Entrepreneurship Programme was founded by one of Nigeria's leading entrepreneurs, Tony Elumelu. This programme offers training, mentorship, and seed capital to young African entrepreneurs, including those in Nigeria. It aims to empower a new generation of African entrepreneurs to transform the continent. The foundation provides seed capital of \$5000 to aspiring entrepreneurs (Tony Elumelu Foundation, 2024).

5.2 Creative Sector

One of the core functions of NPOs is to preserve the culture of their communities (Bobek, Slanovc, & Horvat, 2022). According to the World Bank, the creative sector contributes about \$18 billion to the Nigerian GDP (MCF, 2021). In 2024, it was estimated that the sector employs 4.2 million Nigerians and will provide 2.7 million new jobs by 2025 (Umeh, 2024).

NPOs play important role in the creative sector especially in its sub-sectors of nurturing music, film, fashion, and literature. Through training, mentorship, and networking, Organisations such as the National Arts Theatre, Lagos Fashion Week, and The Creative Arts Foundation provide platforms for artists to showcase their work and gain income, thereby creating dignified and fulfilling jobs. These NPOs foster entrepreneurship and contribute to economic development.

5.3 Agriculture

This sector is largely attractive to men who, due to socio-cultural factors, own land (Chigbu, 2019; Madu, 2013). Land in Nigeria is a prized possession, passed down from generation to generation. However, NPOs in Nigeria's agricultural sector play a vital role in improving food security, supporting smallholder farmers, and promoting sustainable practices (Eneji, Obim, Otu, & Ogli, 2013). Organisations like IFAD, Oxfam Nigeria, and AGRA provide training, access to finance, and modern farming techniques, helping farmers increase productivity and income (IFAD, 2019; OXFAM, 2021; Sabiu, 2023). These organisations focus on empowering women. In some cases, NPOs help women to establish cooperatives. Among others, this increases productivity, finance, and markets. NPOs also advocate for agricultural policies and work with the government to improve rural infrastructure (FAO, n.d.).





06

EMERGING GAPS IN
THE LITERATURE ON
NON-PROFITS AND
YOUTH EMPLOYMENT
IN NIGERIA

This section focuses on the knowledge and empirical gaps regarding the contribution of the non-profit sector (NPOs) to youth employment in Nigeria.

6.1 Data Availability, Access, and Accuracy

The primary sources of data on social and economic development of Nigeria are from official national agencies, such as the NBS, and international agencies such as the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These are the data sources on GDP, employment, and human development (UNDP, 2022). Though the NBS (2024) has data on GDP and employment, including youth employment, the NBS, like the other sources, does not have data on the non-profit sector contributions to Nigeria's economy. However, where there are data, these are geographical or locations based. Specifically, the literature shows that existing studies and data on NPOs' contributions are focused on specific regions or locations, rather than national.

The NBS, like the other sources, does not have data on the non-profit sector contributions to Nigeria's economy.

For example, a Google search with the key phrases like 'NGOs, youth employment, Nigeria' and 'economic contribution of NGOs in Nigeria' produced feedback, most of which were region-specific. One of the articles that emerged from the search was 'This NGO is Toeing a New Path to Tackle Unemployment in the Niger Delta and It's Working' (Akinwale, 2022). The article shows how the Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND) targets youth unemployment in the Niger Delta in Nigeria. It notes that through the Youth Employment Pathway programme, PIND has been instrumental in facilitating over 55 000 jobs while leveraging ₦43.1 billion in investments in the agricultural and enterprise sectors for innovation and business growth in the region of the Niger Delta. Between 2018 and 2021, the programme trained over 9 800 young individuals in market-relevant skills across agriculture, construction, and ICT sectors. This initiative facilitated over 3 400 youths securing apprenticeships, internships, waged employment, or starting their own enterprises (Akinwale, 2022).

Another article titled "Contribution of Non-governmental Organisations to the Socio-Economic Development of the People of Borno State" highlights the positive contributions of NGOs in Northern Nigeria (Mohammed, Asur, R., & Mustapha, 2023). It shows that NGOs in Borno State have contributed significantly to socio-economic development by providing relief materials, healthcare services, education, and economic empowerment to internally displaced persons and host communities.

In this context, it is difficult to have a comprehensive overview of NPOs' contributions to economic development, including job creation. The lack of data from official sources is a major gap in the study of NPOs' contributions to economic development and youth employment in the country. This is an area that requires further research.

6.2 Contextualising Dignified and Fulfilling Work in Nigeria

Against the backdrop of rising unemployment, most youths in Nigeria focus on one main aspect of the MCF's pillar of dignified and fulfilling jobs: reliable income (Duntoye & Mbaegbu, 2023). The other parameters become secondary. The point is the primary focus of employment in the third sector is often to secure reliable income that meets immediate monetary needs. By not focusing on the other three pillars, people in those jobs might experience frustration and poor mental wellbeing.

In addition, the gender and disability questions need to be considered in the design of the study/area for future research. Given the importance of tradition and religion in Nigeria, the prospects of members of the LGBTQI+ community gaining access to employment in the non-profit sector might be a challenge. Also, gay and lesbian relationships are illegal in Nigeria; a major challenge for the LGBTQI+ community, which had to set up NPOs to advocate for dignified and fulfilling jobs for their members. This supports the point that external factors play a significant role on the impacts of the third sector to contribute to economic development, including the creation of dignified and fulfilling jobs for youths and women in Nigeria.

6.3 Cooperation over Competition

The reasons for starting a NPO can vary widely. For some individuals, it stems from a family legacy (Okamooe, 2019). In Nigeria, several family legacy NGOs make significant contributions to social and economic development. For instance, the TY Danjuma Foundation focuses on health, education, and income generation for underserved communities. The Aliko Dangote Foundation addresses economic empowerment, health, education, and disaster relief. The Tony Elumelu Foundation (2024) promotes entrepreneurship throughout Africa, while the Oando Foundation enhances access to quality basic education and infrastructure in public schools. Additionally, the Jim Ovia Foundation supports education and ICT development through scholarships and youth empowerment initiatives. Lastly, the Olusegun Obasanjo Foundation works on health, education, and youth initiatives.

For some NPOs, the primary aim is to meet specific needs and raise awareness about social issues. With numerous NGOs competing for funding and visibility, fostering collaboration rather than competition would be beneficial, especially since the overarching goal is often the same. A model that consolidates existing Organisations to leverage economies of scale and scope could be advantageous in the Nigerian context; however, further research is necessary to determine best practices. Additionally, existing literature on the non-profit sector in Nigeria tends to focus on vertical philanthropy, rather than horizontal philanthropy (Mati, 2017). In many communities, particularly in rural areas, horizontal philanthropy – where community members come together to share resources and create employment opportunities for youth – remains an underexplored and undervalued area (Kumi, 2020). Given that the informal and rural economy provides a significant portion of youth employment, it is essential to investigate these dynamics to effectively address youth unemployment in Nigeria.

6.4 Economic Contribution as a Metric for NPOs

It is a major challenge to expect NPOs to take on the responsibilities typically held by the government and private sectors in developing innovative strategies to address challenges. Given the broad mandate of NGOs and their crucial role in creating opportunities and fostering cohesion within communities, it is essential to incorporate socio-economic indicators when measuring the impact of the sector on young people in Nigeria and across Africa. This approach may overlook or minimise the contributions of smaller organisations, which, despite their inability to offer stable employment, play a significant role in addressing developmental needs and providing support where it is most needed. The nature of NPOs requires a distinct set of metrics to evaluate their success in tackling development issues. While many organisations cannot guarantee a reliable income for young individuals, they often provide a sense of purpose and community, which are also valuable outcomes.



07 CONSTRAINTS TO NPO's CONTRIBUTING TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CREATING DIGNIFIED AND FULFILLING JOBS FOR NIGERIAN YOUTHS



It is noted in previous sections that NPOs contribute to economic development and job creation, including for Nigerian youths. These are both internal and external factors.

An internal factor hampering the non-profit sector's contributions to economic development and job creation in Nigeria is corruption within NPOs and poor leadership qualities. As Ogunyemi and Nwagwu (2022) argued, NGOs are at the forefront of integrating sustainability goals for the environment, promoting social equity, and fostering economic growth. Thus, responsible leadership qualities are important in steering development in the sector.

External factors hampering the contributions to job creation, especially dignified and fulfilling jobs for Nigerian youths is their dependence on grants, especially from foreign development agencies, whose country's programmes change over time (Okamoe, 2019). This has two major implications. First, some of these NPOs have no sustainable funding. Thus, when workers are employed in the externally funded project, and the project ends, they are likely to be retrenched. Second, when foreign development agencies change their country's programmes, it might entail laying off workers who were recruited for the predecessor programmes. One implication is that some workers in NPOs do not have jobs that can be classified as dignified and fulfilling. The question that arises is what is the nature of the jobs of those working in NPOs? This has not been answered in existing studies. This is a major gap that requires interrogation – conducting research on the nature of jobs in NPOs, using the four markers of dignified and fulfilling jobs set out by the MCF.

The question that arises is what is the nature of the jobs of those working in NPOs?

Another external factor constraining the impacts of the third sector is the socio-economic development of Nigeria. In their study, Emmanuel and Gernah (2022) argued that NGOs in Nigeria have not made meaningful contributions to economic development owing to the high-levels of poverty in the country – a broader governance problem. Using poverty levels as a measure of economic contribution, the study notes that while NGOs have made significant contributions to improving the livelihood of Nigerians, their impact is hindered by a broader socio-economic, political, and societal problem. As Edoumiekumo, Karimo, and Tombofa (2014) argued, the scourge of poverty in Nigeria is an incontrovertible fact resulting in hunger, ignorance, malnutrition, disease, unemployment, social vices, poor access to credit facilities, low life expectancy, high infant mortality rates, poor access to clean drinking water, housing and sanitation. The central point being highlighted in this literature is that the broader context within which NGOs operate in Nigeria are not conducive for them to make meaningful impacts on economic development. As Edigheji (2020) showed, Nigeria is beset with leadership problems, lack of vision and clear development programme, policy somersault, corruption and weak institutions. The implication of this analysis is that the impacts of the third sector are largely dependent on the broader social, economic and governance contexts in which they operate.

The broader political economy context shapes NPOs' impacts in creating dignified and fulfilling jobs, especially for youths and women. In Nigeria, the non-profit sector thrives within the informal economy. In 2018, the most recent year for which data is available, the ILO (2024) reports that ninety per cent of all employment in Nigeria is in the informal sector, a sector that is characterised by low wages, low skills, unstable employment, hazardous working conditions, exploitation of workers, poor and low adaption of technology, lack of social project and social dialogue, and so on. Access to finance for youth and women to start their own businesses, even in the informal sector, is also a hindrance. Considering these, the contribution of NPOs to creating dignified jobs for Nigerian youths and women is minimal.

Considering both the external and internal factors that impact on NPOs capacity to create dignified and fulfilling jobs for youths and women, the point made by Brennan, Binney, and Brady (2012) is germane. According to these scholars, any attempt to study NPOs' activities and development must address the following issues, namely: (a) untangle individual behaviour from organisational structure; (b) disaggregate sector measures based on the understanding of the diverse roles of various organisational types – human service versus social organisations; and (c) growth and development and the role of NPOs are contextual, exhibiting significant regional and temporal variation (Brennan et al., 2012).

Furthermore, to understand the complexities associated with economic contributions of NPOs, it is important to be cognisant of their levels of contribution especially across geographical and/or spatial lines. For example, faith-based and smaller NPOs may provide non-monetary compensation to volunteers or staff members in exchange for their labour. In the same vein, others may offer indirect financial incentives to volunteers. As per anecdotal evidence, there are instances of faith-based organisations paying tuition fees for staff members and/or volunteers instead of offering monetary compensation. In this case, the economic contribution is indirect.

08

OPPORTUNITIES
AND POSSIBILITIES
FOR INCREASED
YOUTH EMPLOYMENT
BY NPOs



The term 'workable funding model' as opposed to 'sustainable funding model' is owing to the understanding that credible commitment problems such as time inconsistency constitute a major challenge to financing the non-profit sector in Nigeria. Uncertainty around the availability of funds and support increases the sector's precariousness (a state of uncertainty, instability, or insecurity, particularly in relation to employment, income, or living conditions). While the recommendations which follow are not sustainable, they are indeed workable and would provide the start-up capital or operational costs for NPOs.

To maximise their reach and effectiveness, it is crucial for the government, international partners, and larger Organisations in Nigeria to collaborate with NPOs strategically. Establishing sustainable funding models is imperative for NPOs focused on youth employment. This calls on NPOs to adopt diversified and sustainable funding models to thrive. NPOs like the CLEEN Foundation, Project Alert, and CentreLSD in Nigeria have set a powerful example by constructing office buildings where they operate. This has enhanced their operational capacity but also generates income through office rentals, which they plough into their programmes.

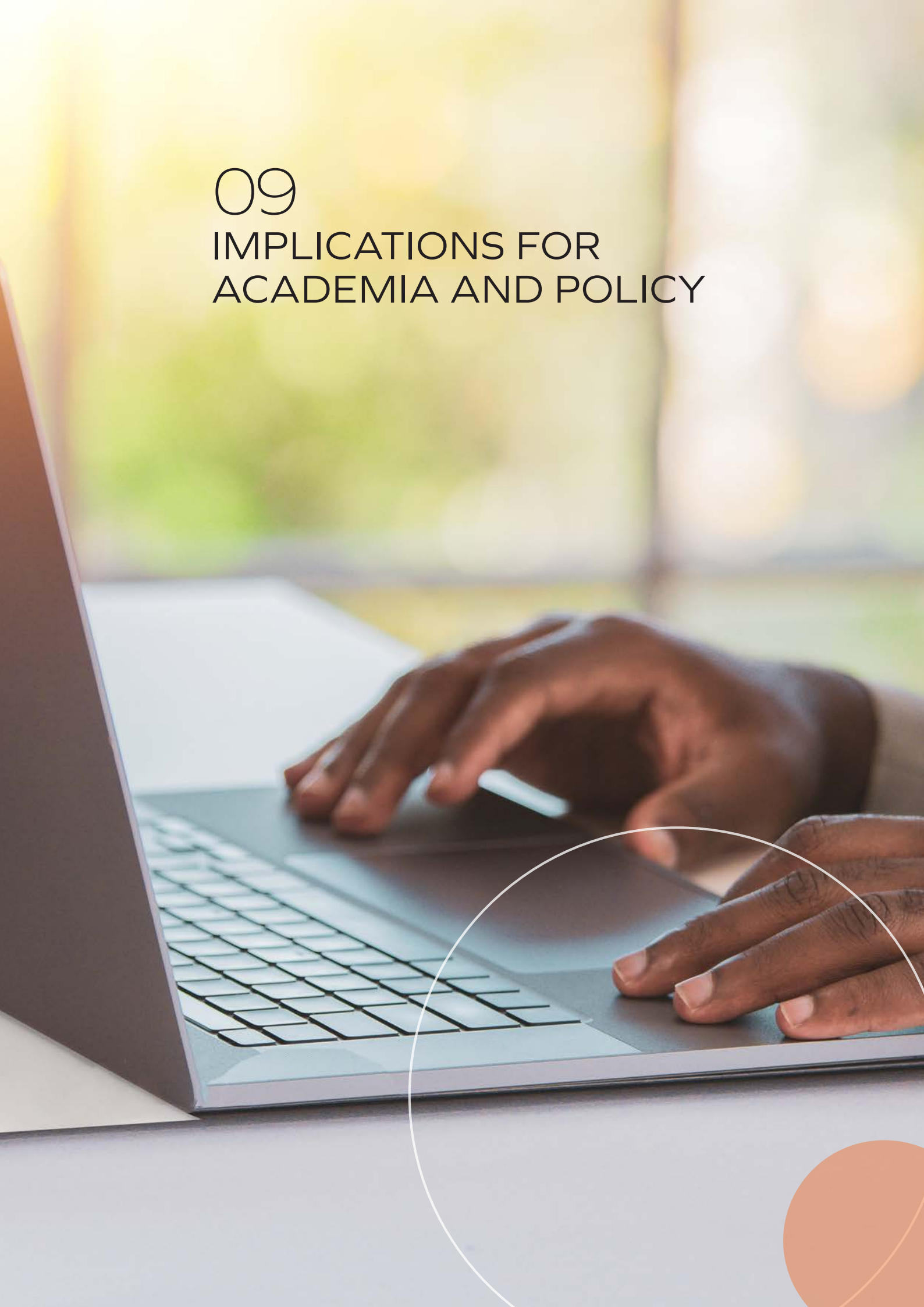
In addition, NPOs can collaborate with businesses to fund youth employment programs while aligning with the company's objectives and values; and addressing the crisis of youth unemployment in the country. Also, NPOs in the technology sector can partner with higher education institutions to offer courses to students, which will enable them to earn additional income that could be used to carry out their programmatic activities. While the NPOs will earn income from such courses, they will also enable students to acquire skills to gain dignified and fulfilling jobs upon graduation. Also, they could offer career counselling services to youth could charge fees for personalised coaching sessions or workshops, thereby generating income to fund other programmes.

Lastly, NPOs should actively engage with philanthropic foundations and individual donors to secure sustainable funding support. By building relationships with philanthropists and high-net-worth individuals who are passionate about youth empowerment and employment, could provide access to vital resources. Endowment funds or recurring donations from these donors can provide a stable income stream to sustain youth employment programs in the long term. However, the non-profit sector must remain flexible and responsive to changes in the funding landscape. NPOs should continuously monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of their funding models, adjust their strategies as needed, and develop diverse revenue streams to ensure financial resilience. By embracing innovation and collaboration, NPOs can establish sustainable funding models for the programmes to be more impactful in contributing to youth employment in Nigeria.



09

IMPLICATIONS FOR ACADEMIA AND POLICY



This review has implications for academia and policy. For academia, there remains an underexplored gap in the literature on the non-profit sector's role in youth employment in Nigeria. This is a niche worth examining in future research that will include data collection, interpretation, analysis and storage; theory-building on non-profit and youth employment in Africa. The implication on policy is premised on the need to craft policies that create an enabling environment for NPOs to thrive.

The review shows that the non-profit sector is making contributions to youth employment in Nigeria, although this is not easily quantifiable owing to the paucity of data that focuses exclusively on the youth. Furthermore, there is the challenge of sustainable funding model for the sector; hence, this review recommends that NPOs develop a diversified funding model.

The review found that the contributions of the non-profit sector to youth employment are both direct and indirect. The former is that the sector employs staff to carry out their activities, while the latter is through internships, volunteerism, capacity building, and skills development. However, because of a lack of data and dedicated studies on the NPOs' role in job creation, it is unclear if the jobs in the non-profit sector meet the four markers of dignified and fulfilling jobs (MCF, 2015). Making this transition requires the MCF, governments, the private sector, foundations on the continent, international development agencies, Centre on African Philanthropy and Social Investment (CAPSI), and other scholars in general to work together to ensure that jobs created by the third sector are dignified and fulfilling. It is, however, important to note that in the context where over 90 per cent of work in Nigeria is in the informal sector, it is a huge task for NPOs to make meaningful impacts on contributing to creating dignified and fulfilling jobs for the youth. In this regard, NPOs and organisations like the MCF should focus on the transformation of the structure of the Nigerian economy to enable the youth to transition from informality.

It is unclear if the jobs in the non-profit sector meet the four markers of dignified and fulfilling jobs (MCF, 2015).

There is also a gap between the skills acquired by the population that NPOs train and the application of the skills in the workplace to make skilled workers available for viable employment. This is because "in general, most CSOs prioritise the transfer of technology, skills, and knowledge" (WACSI, 2023, p. 31), however this remains inadequate. Despite these challenges, there are opportunities to increase youth employment by the non-profit sector, through the adoption of new technology and advocating for the transformation of the structure of the economy from low value-added to high value-added economic activities, and from unskilled/low-skilled to high-skilled economic activities.

The review shows that social enterprises, like NPOs focused on impact much more than diversifying their funding base for sustainability. This requires the urgent attention of NPOs to be impactful in their contribution to employment, including creating dignified and fulfilling jobs for the youth.

The review concludes with an acknowledgement that technology is changing work dynamics and, by extension, the nature and access to opportunities. Young Nigerians are capitalising on this opportunity to acquire skills that will open opportunities for them to secure dignified and fulfilling work. It is crucial for NPOs to not only adapt to new technology, but also to operate in the technological space. As an example, some NPOs could focus on AI, develop software, and offer training on AI.

10 CONCLUSION



The review examined the literature on the role of the non-profit sector in youth employment in Nigeria. It found that the sector is making contributions to economic development, including youth employment. This is being achieved through direct employment and provision of education/training, skills development, and other capacity-building programmes. Also, programmes of NPOs are contributing to the adoption of new technology, promoting innovation and entrepreneurship. As noted earlier, while these contributions have created different opportunities for young people, it is challenging to determine if the nature of work/opportunities created can be classified as dignified and fulfilling work. The review recommends primary data collection to establish the nature of work created by NPOs in Nigeria.

Also, the review shows that the contributions of the non-profit sector span different sectoral priorities. However, agriculture, healthcare, education/empowerment, governance and human rights, are recurring themes in its programmatic activities. The various ways in which NPOs have contributed to these sectors were discussed and highlighted in the review. However as noted earlier, the extent to which the sector contributes to creating dignified and fulfilling work requires primary data collection and analysis. This calls for NPOs to work with the NBS to incorporate questionnaires on NPOs in its Households and Labour Force Surveys.

Knowledge of the nexus between NPOs and youth employment is marred with data challenges. Thus, the ability to quantify and qualify the sector's contribution to youth employment was constrained by limited data and the failure of key government bureaus to collect, collate, and adequately document data on the sector given its centrality to socio-economic development in Nigeria. Where data were available, it could not provide a comprehensive picture of the economic contributions of the sector, including contributions to creating employment for the youth. For instance, in mapping the geographical distribution of NPOs across states in Nigeria, the review relied on data provided by the official website of NNNGOs (NNNGO, 2020). In some instances, the names of the institutions were misspelt or replicated in different states. This required some data tidying, as well as attempting to triangulate with other data sources to verify the existence of the institutions listed. While this was a challenge in conducting the literature review, it creates an opportunity for MCF and CAPSI in future to collect, collate, and store accurate information.

NPOs in Nigeria have demonstrated their ability to complement the efforts of the public and private sectors in tackling various socio-economic challenges that the youth faces, particularly youth unemployment. However, the review indicated that the broader environment is not supportive enough for the third sector to reach its full potential. Issues such as inadequate funding, gender disparities, stigmatisation, and the digital divide have hindered the non-profit sector from significantly contributing to Nigeria's economic development, including creating dignified and fulfilling jobs for young people.



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