



The Contributions of the Non-Profit Sector to the Rwandan Economy and the Creation of Dignified and Fulfilling Work for the Youth

2025

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The Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR-Rwanda)

ABSTRACT



The non-profit sector plays a significant role in economic development and social transformation in Rwanda, particularly in addressing youth unemployment. However, the extent of its contribution to empowering African economies, especially Rwanda, remains underexplored. This desk review examines how non-profit organisations support the Rwandan economy by creating dignified and fulfilling employment opportunities for young people. The analysis highlights the various mechanisms through which non-profits facilitate youth employment, including vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and labour market advocacy. The study synthesises findings from policy documents, scholarly literature, and national reports to assess the sector's role in job creation, skills development, and youth empowerment. Existing research suggests that non-profits contribute significantly by equipping young people with technical and entrepreneurial skills, supporting small business development, and advocating for inclusive labour policies. However, despite these contributions, challenges persist in terms of financial sustainability, alignment with national employment policies, and labour market integration. Findings indicate that non-profits are key actors in bridging gaps in formal employment by offering alternative pathways for youth to gain economic stability. The review also identifies knowledge gaps, particularly in quantifying the sector's impact on broader employment trends. While success stories demonstrate effective models of intervention, further policy engagement is required to ensure long-term sustainability and scalability. This analysis underscores the strategic importance of strengthening the non-profit sector to address youth unemployment and promote economic inclusivity in Rwanda. By reinforcing collaboration between non-profits, government institutions, and private sector actors, policymakers can enhance the sector's capacity to generate employment and foster long-term economic resilience.

Keywords: Nonprofits, Youth, Employment, Rwanda, Skills

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 Dr. 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, Prof. Alan Fowler, Prof. Jacob Mati and Dr. Simamkele Dlakavu. Thank you to everyone.

Bhekinkosi Moyo
CAPSI Director

This study was commissioned by the Centre on African Philanthropy and Social Investment (CAPSI) and conducted by The Institute of Policy Analysis and Research-Rwanda (IPAR-Rwanda) under the support of the Mastercard Foundation. The research team appreciates the support and guidance provided by Dr. Wycliffe Ouma throughout the review period. We further would like to appreciate the assistance we received from the IPAR-Rwanda management team during the research process.

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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.

Contents

ABSTRACT	1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
LIST OF TABLES & FIGURES	4
LIST OF ACRONYMS	5
01 INTRODUCTION	6
02 FORMAL AND INFORMAL SECTORS; EMPLOYED AND SELF-EMPLOYED IN RWANDA	8
03 METHODOLOGY	11
04 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS	13
05 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	24
REFERENCES	26

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1:	The percentage of youth working for wage by economic sectors, sex and age group (EICV5, EICV4)	17
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LIST OF FIGURES

FIG 1:	The distribution of NPOs projects per rural and urban settings (RGB, 2023).	20
FIG 2:	NPOs' domain of interventions (RGB, 2023).	21
FIG 3:	Percentage of citizens who have interacted with or were involved in any NPO projects in the last three years (RGB, 2023).	21

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AUC	African Union Commission
CAPSI	Centre on African Philanthropy and Social Investment
CBOS	community-based organisations
CPAF	Common Performance Assessment Framework
CSOS	civil society organisations
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
EDC	Education Development Center
EICV	Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey
GDP	gross domestic product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Corporation for International Cooperation)
HIDA	Human and Institutional Capacity Development
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPAR	Institute of Policy Analysis and Research
MIFOTRA	Ministry of Public Service and Labour
MOYA	Ministry of Youth and Arts
NYC	National Youth Council
NEP	National Employment Policy
NGOS	non-governmental organisations
NISR	National Institute of Statistics Rwanda.
RGB	Rwanda Governance Board
RPHC5	Fifth Rwanda Population and Housing Census
SMES	small and medium enterprises
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VVOB	Flemish Association for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing

01

INTRODUCTION



Globally, it has been recognised that the non-profit sector contributes to countries development (Kong, 2008). This has been demonstrated by different non-profit organisations (NPOs) that have shown their impact on poverty alleviation, agricultural produce, job creation, health and sanitation system, sports, human rights, environment and social protection, youth and women empowerment, just to mention but a few (Casey, 2016; Kong, 2008). Africa as a continent faces several problems, including high levels of poverty, unemployment, poor infrastructure, and poor health and sanitation. The non-profit sector players are trying to contribute to resolving these issues (Babangida & Sylla, 2021; Nwokolo et al., 2023; Yahie, 2000). However, the extent of their impact in addressing the continent's concerns remains uncertain.

African economies remain resilient amidst multiple shocks (Bowen et al., 2020; Yahie, 2000). The African Economic Outlook 2023 was published as African countries were dealing with multiple shocks, including the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, disruptions to global supply chains due to Russia – Ukraine war, and a tightening of global financing conditions (Africa Development Bank, 2023). These shocks have reduced the continent's real GDP growth from 4.8% in 2021 to 3.8% in 2022. However, African economies remain resilient, with average growth projected to stabilise at 4.1% in 2023–2024 (Africa Development Bank, 2023).

Despite a promising start at the start of the 21st century, Africa's long-term economic growth has been slow (Arbache, 2012; Jerven, 2010). The continent is home to the world's youngest and fastest-growing population, but its economic performance has lagged behind (Artadi & Sala-i-Martin, 2003; Jerven, 2010). Since 1990, its GDP per capita has grown just 1% annually, compared with 5% of India and 8% of China (Bosworth & Collins, 2008). The 2000–2010 decade saw an acceleration of economic growth on the continent, but growth retreated in 2010–2019 (Kuyoro et al., 2023).

Productivity across all sectors of the African economy is lower when compared to other regions of the world (Diao et al., 2017; Kuyoro et al., 2023). Despite a fundamental shift to services, Africa only added \$1.4 trillion to its economy, almost doubling the value added by services today (Bloom et al., 1998; Kuyoro et al., 2023). Rekindling industrialisation and increasing intracontinental trade will be crucial complements, together with boosting agricultural productivity to ensure the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of African (Jerven, 2010; Nwokolo et al., 2023). Further, the African Economic Outlook 2023 underscores the urgency to fast-track climate action and green transitions to drive the continent's inclusive and sustainable development (Africa Development Bank, 2023).

Most youths on the continent are engaged in informal jobs that put youth in poverty risks (Bowen et al., 2020).

African youth population continues to grow and the unemployment rate among young men and women is high. Therefore, most youths on the continent are engaged in informal jobs that put youth in poverty risks (Bowen et al., 2020). The high unemployment rate can be attributed to the scarcity of decent jobs, with most of the youths being engaged in the informal sector. Studies revealed that the rate of youth unemployment in Africa is estimated at 10.6% in 2020 (Ogbonna et al., 2023). In Rwanda, youth unemployment remains quite high, estimated at 22.4% (higher than the national average of 17.9%) according to the labour force survey of 2020. But by 2021, according to the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) youth unemployment (those between 16 and 30 years) has marginally increased to 25.5% (NISR, 2021).

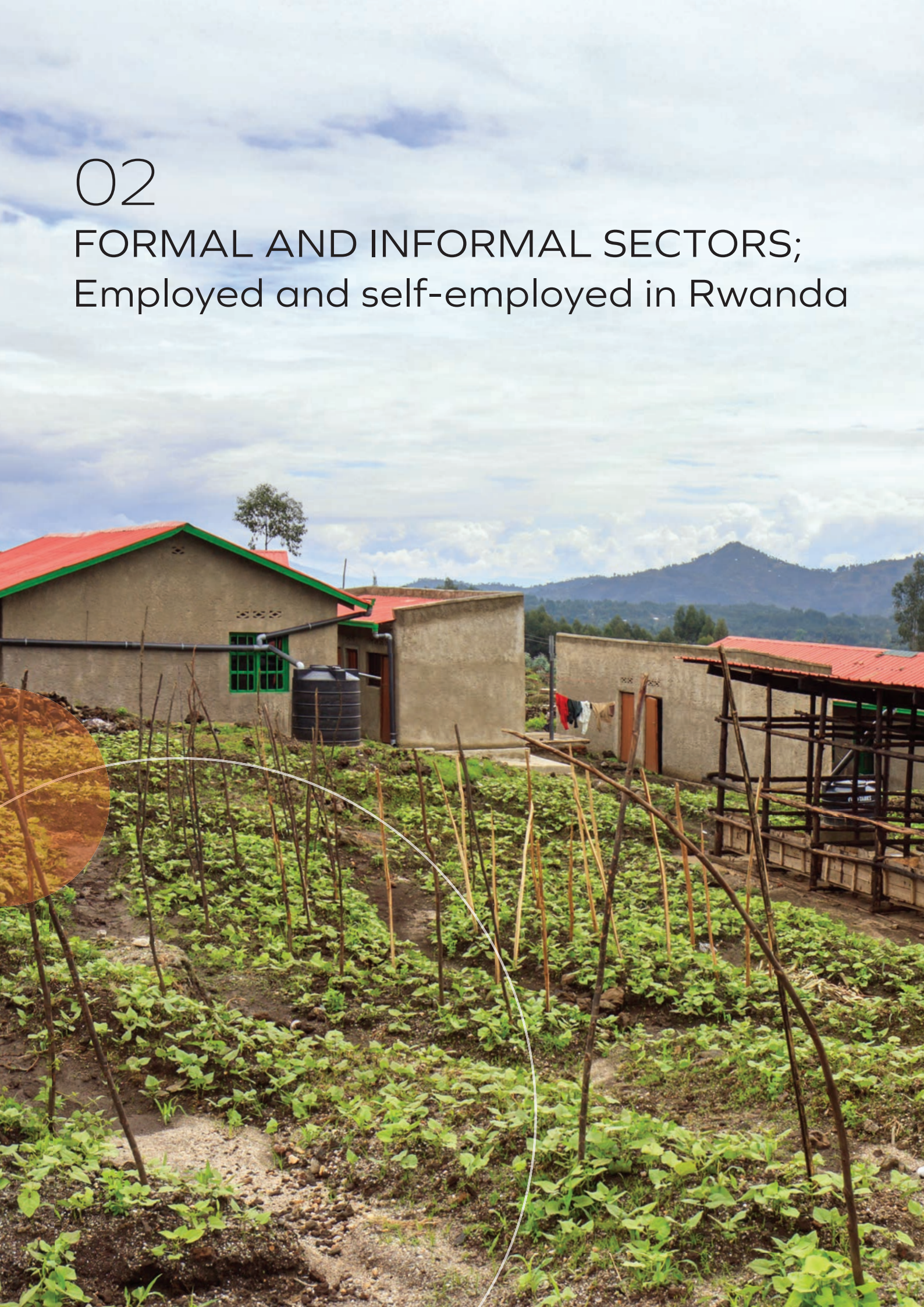
The youth in Rwanda are defined as the population between the ages of 16 and 30. The United Nations, however, defines youth as persons between the ages of 15 and 24 for statistical purposes. This is without prejudice to other definitions by member states. The Government of Rwanda prioritises job creation and self-employment for the youth. In the following paragraph, key facts about Rwandan youth are discussed (NISR, 2021).

According to the fifth Rwanda Population and Housing Census of 2022 (RPHC5), the youth constituted 27.1% (3.6 million) of the total population of Rwanda. There are slightly more females (1.8 million youth than males, 1.76 million). The majority of youth reside in rural areas (2.4 million) compared to 1.2 million in urban areas (1.2 million). Sixty-nine per cent of youth aged 16–30 years are single, while 30% are married. The remaining 1% of them are no longer in a marriage union. Marriage is more widespread among females than males, 55% of females aged 21–30 years were married compared to 39% of male youth. In rural areas, 52% of youth (21–30 years) are married compared to 39% in urban areas (NISR, 2016, 2021).

This review paper assessed the role of the non-profit sector contributions in creating dignified and fulfilling work for young women and men in Rwanda.

02

FORMAL AND INFORMAL SECTORS;
Employed and self-employed in Rwanda



This section differentiates the formal and informal sectors of employment with a special focus on Rwanda.

The Informal Sector

The International Monetary Fund defines the informal economy as “activities that have market value and would add to tax revenue and GDP if they were recorded.” The women’s advocacy organisation WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing) describes the informal economy as “a diversified set of economic activities, enterprises, jobs and workers that are not regulated or protected by the state.”

In Rwanda, the informal sector means economic activities that are not regulated by the government and generally operating outside the formal structures of employment, taxation, and business registration. These activities often lack social protection, labour rights, and other legal benefits provided to formal workers. The sector primarily includes small-scale businesses, self-employed individuals, and unregistered enterprises. Common informal sector activities in Rwanda include street vending, small-scale farming, artisanal work, and domestic labour. It is significant, especially in rural areas and among vulnerable populations. It plays a crucial role in providing livelihoods for a large portion of the population, with estimates indicating that the majority of workers in Rwanda are employed informally. According to NISR, the informal economy represents a large share of employment, though exact figures vary depending on the study and methodology.

Common informal sector activities in Rwanda include street vending, small-scale farming, artisanal work, and domestic labour.

In the same vein, the informal sector of Rwanda is characterised by (1) a lack of registration with official authorities and (2) an absence of formal contracts: employment relationships often lack formal agreements. (3) Limited access to credit: many informal businesses lack access to formal banking services. (4) Unregulated working conditions: there are no legal protections for workers in terms of wages, safety, or working hours, and (5) predominance of small-scale enterprises: the informal sector is mainly composed of microenterprises.

In 2019, the informal sector contributed 32% to the country’s GDP (Aikins & le Roux, 2024).

The Formal Sector

The formal sector in Rwanda encompasses a diverse range of economic activities regulated by the government and contributes to the country’s formal economy. It includes various components, such as public sector (government ministries and departments, public institutions, and agencies), private sector (corporations and limited liability companies, SMEs, cooperatives, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), foreign direct investments), organised labour (trade unions and labour associations and collective bargaining organisations), financial institutions (commercial banks, microfinance institutions, insurance companies, investment firms), professional services (law firms, accounting firms, consulting firms, architecture firms), manufacturing and industry (manufacturing plants, processing facilities, construction companies, mining, and extractive industries), agriculture and agribusiness (large-scale farms, agricultural cooperatives, agribusiness companies, food processing plants), services (retail and wholesale trade, hospitality and tourism, education and healthcare, transportation and logistics, ICT, and other sectors (energy and utilities, real estate, media and entertainment) (Booth et al., 2014; Laterite, 2015; Malunda & Musana, 2012).

These components collectively contribute to Rwanda’s formal economy, generating employment opportunities, driving economic growth, and contributing to the country’s development. The formal sector is subject to government regulations, taxation, and labour laws, which ensure fair competition, worker protection, and revenue generation for the government. However, the specific contribution of these sectors towards youth employment and fulfilling work still needs to be made public.

Employed

In the Rwandan context, “employed” and “self-employed” are defined within the framework of labour regulations and the economic system. These terms align with Rwanda’s efforts to formalise the labour market and encourage entrepreneurship.

An *employed person* is someone who works for another person or organisation and receives wages or a salary in return for their labour. This includes individuals working under formal employment contracts in private and public sectors. Employment in Rwanda is regulated by the Labour Law No. 66/2018 of 30/08/2018. According to the law:

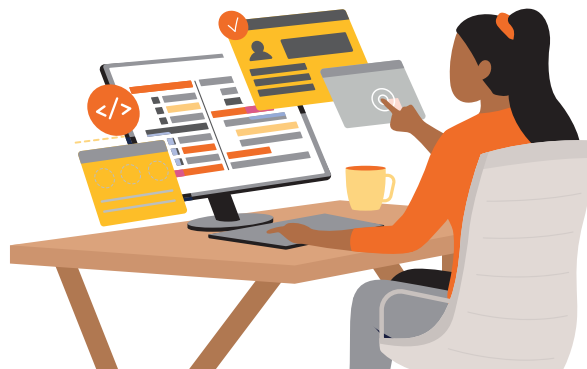
- 1) Employment contracts should define the terms of service, including working hours, pay, and other benefits.
- 2) Employees are protected by labour rights such as minimum wage regulations, paid leave, and social security.

Self-Employed

In Rwanda, a *self-employed person* is an individual who works for themselves and does not have an employer. This can include business owners, freelancers, and those in informal sectors. Self-employment is common in Rwanda, particularly in agriculture and small businesses.

Self-employed individuals are responsible for their own income generation. They manage their businesses or provide services on a freelance basis.

Self-employed people are expected to register their businesses and file tax returns with the Rwanda Revenue Authority (RRA). They may operate within formal or informal sectors, with informal employment being common in small-scale agriculture and trade.





03

METHODOLOGY

This review employed a comprehensive search strategy to identify relevant literature on the contribution of the Rwandan non-profit sector to dignified and fulfilling work for young women and men. We utilised academic databases such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and EconLit, searching for peer-reviewed articles, research reports, and policy documents published in English. Additionally, we utilised Rwandan government publications, reports from international organisations like the World Bank and International Labour Organization, and websites of established NPOs operating in Rwanda. Studies on the impact of non-profit interventions on job creation, skills development, entrepreneurship support, and advocacy for youth employment rights in Rwanda have been prioritised.

A rigorous data extraction process has been implemented. We recorded key information from each source, including youth unemployment challenges, policy responses to the youth employment crisis in Africa, and the creation of youth. Also, we provided examples of the contributions of selected NPOs in Rwanda and by types of non-profit interventions. This data was then synthesised and analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns and develop a comprehensive understanding of the non-profit sector's contribution to youth employment opportunities and working conditions in Rwanda.





04

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Youth Unemployment Challenge

Across the globe, governments and civil society offer a range of youth-focused programmes. However, these initiatives often lack coordination due to fragmented and ineffective frameworks for youth development. Consequently, tracking these programs' inputs, outcomes, and impacts becomes challenging. The presence of multiple frameworks results in ambiguity, compounded by varying definitions of youth across different entities. This discrepancy in age criteria and youth development metrics complicates efforts to create a cohesive youth strategy. The divide between programme implementers and stakeholders further exacerbates the issue, resulting in an incomplete assessment of the effectiveness of youth programmes (ILO, 2012).

More than half of Africa's youth population is active, mostly employed in agriculture and informal sectors (Fox et al., 2016). Both population groups share the characteristics of underemployment. The rest of the population is self-employed, most of whom are in the informal sector (Fox et al., 2016; ILO, 2012).

In simplified terms, unemployment arises from a sluggish increase in job demand compared to a rapidly expanding labour supply, further exacerbated by considerable population growth and migration from rural to urban areas (Brooks et al., 2013; Sumberg et al., 2020). Given the elevated levels of youth unemployment, young individuals often gravitate towards informal sector employment. With the formal job market failing to keep pace with the influx of young job seekers, the informal sector becomes a preferable alternative to outright unemployment for many youths (ILO, 2012; Yeboah & Jayne, 2020).

Mapping youth employment programmes would largely contribute to advancing the issue across the continent in the following ways: by providing diverse stakeholders with adequate information on youth employment project and programme status, and fostering the use of these tools by organisations to implement a wide range of developmental processes, both at local and regional levels (Nassar et al., 2019). The analysis indicates a notable deficiency in organisations' strategies to sustain their interventions. Merely implementing short-term programmes does not ensure a lasting reduction in labour market obstacles affecting youth employment. Most interventions lack a well-defined exit strategy, with only a few exceptions. It is imperative for international development organisations to focus on crafting effective phase-out strategies to maintain the ongoing benefits of their interventions. This involves actively involving the government in program implementation and prioritising capacity-building and institution-strengthening aspects in youth employment initiatives, thus ensuring sustainability and enduring positive effects (ILO, 2012; Sumberg et al., 2020; Tshiyoyo, 2022).

Merely implementing short-term programmes does not ensure a lasting reduction in labour market obstacles affecting youth employment.

The problem of youth unemployment and underemployment in Africa poses complex economic, social, and moral policy issues. The problem affects most adults in rural and urban areas, even if its incidence is higher amongst youth, women, and rural populations. Available statistics suggest that employment growth has not been impressive in Africa. Among the many factors, put simply, unemployment results from a relatively slow growth in demand for labour, combined with a rapidly-growing supply of labour – aggravated by the very high levels of population growth and rural-urban migration (ILO, 2012).

Due to the high rates of youth unemployment, young people tend to find more employment opportunities in the informal sector. Since the number of new vacancies in the formal sector is not catching up with the number of new young people looking for jobs, young people find the informal sector their next best alternative rather than remaining openly unemployed.

Most programmes lack evaluation information on outcomes or impact. Some interventions have evaluations that cover only gross outcomes and do not use a methodology (e.g., based on a control group) to estimate net impact. Most programmes that meet this evaluation standard do not include any cost-benefit analysis. Given the higher prevalence of skills training programs, the low numbers of evaluation reports are disappointing. This may be partly because the mapping includes completed programmes and recently started and ongoing interventions, with limited or no readily available evaluations (ILO, 2012).

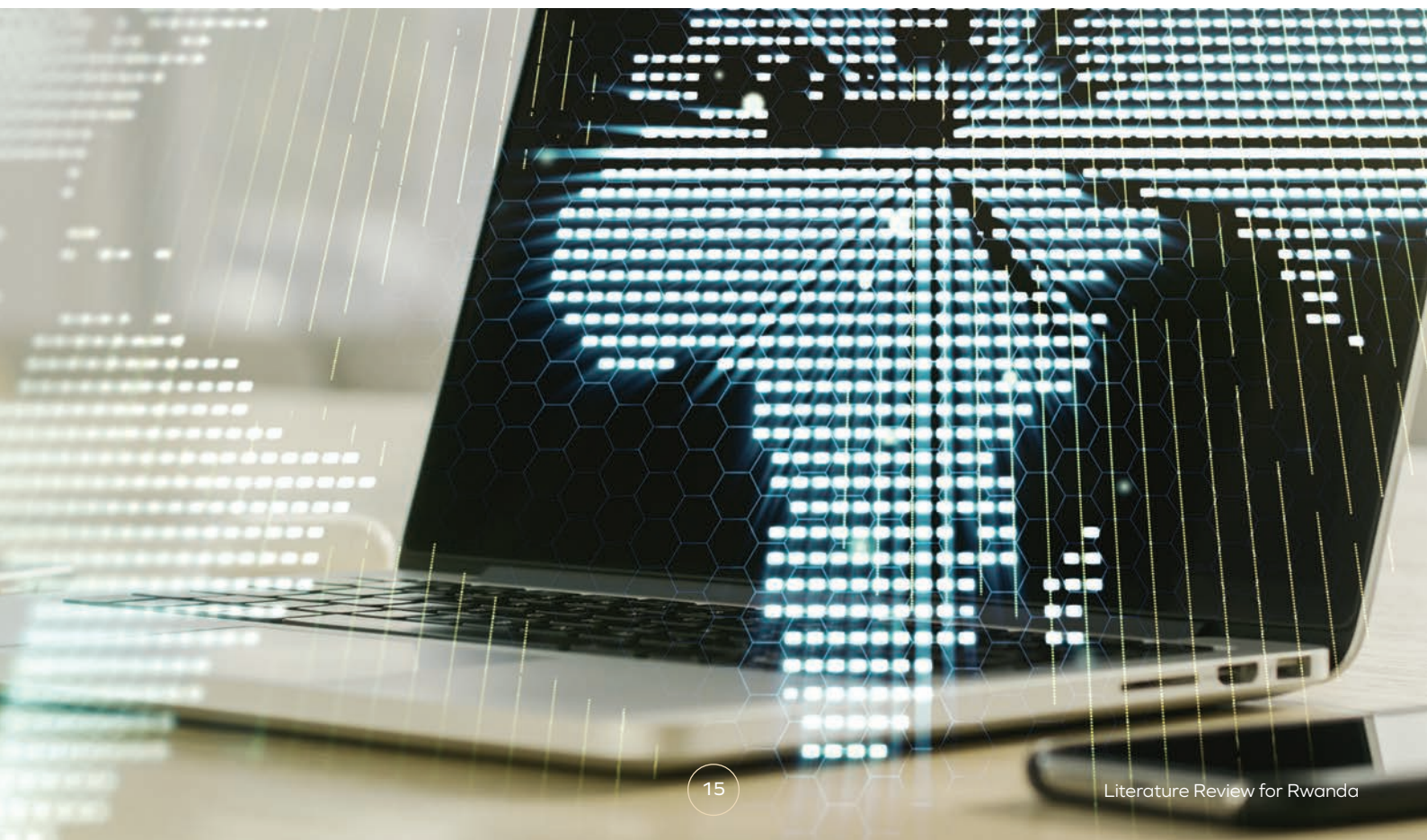
Measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of programmes and interventions is vital to deciding how replicable the interventions will be. In the general absence of quality evaluations, it is imperative to quantify, compare, and analyse existing interventions using evaluation reports that are already available.

Policy Responses to the Youth Employment Crisis in Africa

Studies have documented that, even during normal economic scenarios, Africa's youth face challenges entering into the labour market (Awogbenle & Iwuamadi, 2010; O'higgins, 2001; Shehu & Nilsson, 2014). Young people face even greater challenges in their transition to the labour market during crisis periods when labour market recovery is even slower than for other markets in an economy. Most African countries suffer adverse impacts since they are increasingly exposed and have relatively limited financial resources, institutional capacity, and a narrow policy space (ILO, 2012; Shiferaw et al., 2014).

Financing Youth Employment Programs: The July 2011 Summit: The 17th AU Heads of State and Government July 2011 Summit was held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, on the theme of "Accelerating Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development." The Summit deliberated on financing youth development and empowerment issues. It adopted a Declaration in which it was decided that the AU member states should advance the youth agenda and adopt policies and mechanisms for the creation of safe, decent, and competitive employment opportunities by accelerating the implementation of the African Youth Decade Plan of Action (2009–2018). African leaders also committed themselves to "reduce youth and women's unemployment by at least two percent annually over the next five years," as articulated in the African Youth Decade Plan of Action. Consequently, the AUC was requested to work on developing a comprehensive youth employment pact with international partners. The Summit called upon all partners and stakeholders to align all youth-related development programmes with the African Youth Decade Plan of Action (ILO, 2012).

Geographic Distribution of Interventions: One of the many primary goals of conducting the mapping exercise is an analysis of various youth employment interventions throughout Africa. Such a depiction helps to simplify and summarise the overall presentation and facilitates the gap analysis. There are 47 interventions by organisations participating in this mapping in almost all 54 African countries. Sub-Saharan Africa has more youth employment interventions than the North Africa sub-region, although in terms of the sub-regional analysis within sub-Saharan Africa, the distribution of interventions varies. Accordingly, the West African sub-region has a higher concentration of youth employment interventions, followed by East Africa. However, the youth employment crisis is concentrated far more in the North and Southern Africa sub-regions, with average rates of youth unemployment at 33% and 24%, respectively. Therefore, the analysis demonstrates a greater need for projects and programmes, and policy-level interventions in the sub-regions with a high prevalence of unemployment crisis. The section below looks at each sub-region's status with regard to the youth employment challenge and the number of ongoing interventions (ILO, 2012).



Africa is the youngest continent with children and youth aged below 30 years constituting 70% of the continent's entire population (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2009). By 2050, according to predictions, 29% of the total world youth population will reside in Africa. These young and energetic people of Africa, however, have the potential, ability, creativity, enthusiasm, and energy to achieve Africa's renaissance, as articulated by the continental leadership. Investments in their education and transition to employment, health, and social well-being are critical for the continent and Africa's global repositioning agenda (ILO, 2012).

In partnership with CSOs: This is a significant proportion and showcases how implementing the interventions at the grass-roots level creates suitable conditions for identifying the problems faced at the lower levels of the community and how adopting community-based solutions may ensure sustainability (ILO, 2012).

Mapping youth employment programmes would largely contribute to advancing the issue across the continent by providing diverse stakeholders with adequate information on the status of youth employment projects and programmes and fostering the use of these tools by organisations to implement a wide range of developmental processes, both at local and regional levels.

The private sector needs to be integrated into implementing youth employment programmes to meet sector requirements for recruiting young people and to ensure the sustainability of their employment. Nevertheless, the private sector shows lower levels of participation in implementing the youth employment interventions in this mapping. Only 11 interventions (23%) out of 47 involve the private sector, and creating more opportunities for young people of Africa in the employment sector is also necessary (ILO, 2012).

National and international NGOs have initiated and implemented various programmes that directly support youth to improve their prospects in the labour market. These interventions vary from small, local community interventions to continental and regional interventions that can impact upon the whole of Africa. In the past, implementation may or may not have been subjected to evaluations and revisions following the outcomes of those evaluations, and based on the lessons learned (ILO, 2012).

Skill development and training are the primary thematic areas for many of the interventions. This generally increases young people's relevance by making them more "demand-driven" and better able to cope with the demands of the labour market. This is because a skills mismatch has often been identified as one of the factors contributing to the high rate of youth unemployment in Africa (ILO, 2012).

Economic Contribution of the Non-Profit Sector to Youth Employment

In many African countries, real per capita GDP has fallen, and welfare gains achieved since independence in areas like food consumption, health and education have been reversed. The statistics are disturbing. In sub-Saharan Africa, per capita incomes dropped by 21% in real terms between 1981 and 1989. Development, it seems, has failed. This has been the context in which there has been explosive growth in the presence of Western and local NGOs in Africa (Amutabi, 2013). Today, NGOs form a prominent part of the "development machine," a vast institutional and disciplinary nexus of official agencies, practitioners, consultants, scholars, and other miscellaneous experts producing and consuming knowledge about the "developing world" (Amutabi, 2013; London et al., 2003).

The dramatic expansion of African NPOs in the last two decades has been attributed to specific factors ranging from the failure of government as an agent of development, the deteriorating economic conditions, the global political economic crisis, the development crisis, and the search for alternative mechanisms for change (Hasenfeld & Garrow, 2012; Lewis et al., 2020; Matthews, 2017). In general, government action or the lack of it is one of the most dominant factors that influence the character of the non-profit sector (Smith & Grønbjerg, 2006).

Across Africa, NGOs bearing different monikers, such as CBOs, CSOs, and NPOs, have long been responsible for designing and implementing developmental interventions to address varying challenges (Amutabi, 2013).

The evolution of NGOs' role in Africa means that their role in "development" represents a continuity of the work of their precursors, the missionaries, and voluntary organisations that cooperated in Europe's colonisation and control of Africa. Today, their work contributes marginally to the relief of poverty but undermines the struggle of the African people to emancipate themselves from economic, social, and political oppression (Manji & O'Coill, 2002).

NPOs contributions to economic development and youth employment in Rwanda

In Rwanda, the non-profit sector contributes substantially to the country's GDP and overall development. However, specific economic data are limited, while the NPOs' impacts extend beyond financial contributions to include social, environmental, and cultural benefits. There is, however, a lack of data to quantify its exact contribution to the country's GDP.

In 2016/2017, the proportion of youth who worked was 77.2%, where 16% were students. As an individual gets older, the chance of getting the work increases in both sexes. The percentage of working youth decreased from 79.1% in 2013/2014 to 77.2% in 2016/2017. Table 1 presents the distribution of working youth per institutional sector. Among the youth working in waged employment, the majority (97.6%) work in the private sector and 2% in the public sector. The youth employed in the private sector increased from 93% in 2013/2014 to 97.6% in 2016/2017. More females (2.9%) are domestic workers across all age groups compared to males (1.8%) (NISR, 2021).

TABLE 1: Percentage of youth in paid employment by economic sectors, sex, and age group (EICV5, EICV4)

EICV5	16-20		21-25		26-30		Total		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Total
Public	0.3	0.3	1.3	0.9	4.5	2.9	2.4	1.7	2.0
Private	99.6	99.5	98.4	98.7	95	96.7	97.2	98.0	97.6
NGO	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Others	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: EICV5.

EICV4	16-20		21-25		26-30		Total		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Total
Public	0.3	0.2	1.5	1.0	5.2	2.9	2.7	1.6	2.2
Private	90.8	88.5	93.9	93.8	93.1	95.2	92.8	93.2	93.0
NGO	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.3	0.4	0.3
Others	8.7	11.3	4.3	4.7	1.2	1.3	4.1	4.7	4.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: EICV4.

Creation of Youth Jobs in Rwanda

Several studies have been undertaken to assess the influence of economic growth, public expenditure, and private sector advancement on poverty alleviation and job generation in Rwanda (Habyarimana & Dushimayezu, 2018; Musahara, 2004). However, although these studies have resulted in policy, there remains a dearth of cohesive and actionable policy directives to guide the Rwandan government towards sustainable strategies for translating economic growth, public spending, and private sector development into enhanced employment opportunities, particularly for the youth. Though it is generally acknowledged that employment is pivotal for reducing poverty, Rwanda lacks empirical research on the impact of poverty reduction and employment.

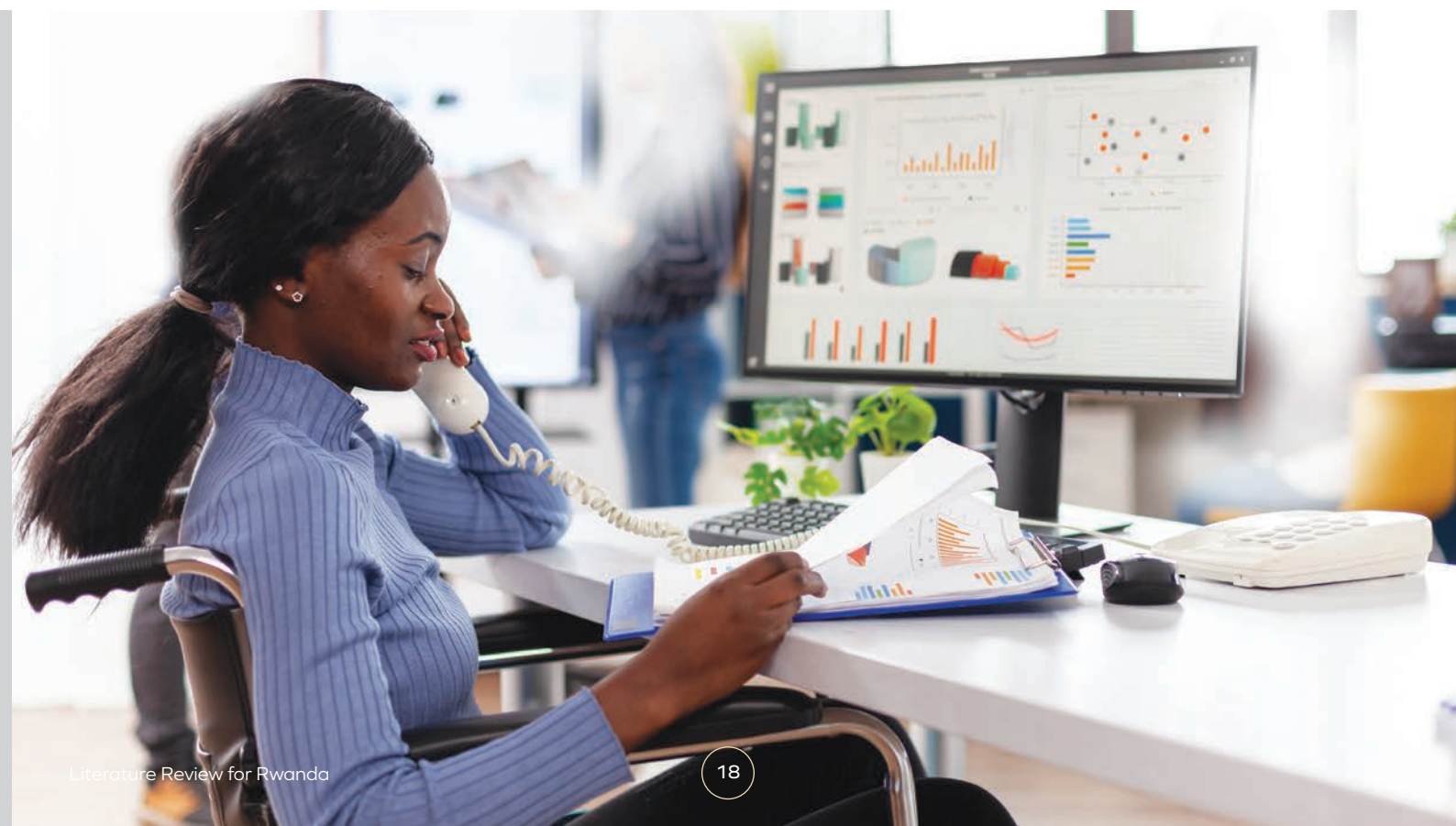
While there is a broad consensus that not all growth spells have the same impact on poverty reduction and employment creation, there have been relatively few attempts to systematically unpack the relationship between economic growth, employment, and poverty reduction in Rwanda. Part of the problem is attributed to the limited

monitoring of the various investment programmes, projects, and initiatives that donors and governments have implemented over time. The other part lies in the lack of panel household data in Rwanda.

The National Employment Policy (NEP) of Rwanda was adopted in 2007 by the Government of Rwanda. The main purpose of this policy was to achieve fully productive and freely chosen employment through economic growth. It provides a situational analysis of employment in the country by highlighting major constraints to employment and proposing solutions in several priority areas. The priority sectors include the rural sector, the private sector and entrepreneurship support, youth and women employment promotion, specific employment programmes for disabled people, human resource development and employability, and strengthening labour-intensive approaches in economic and social infrastructure programmes. Specific medium- and long-term policy objectives were also highlighted. This policy has guided the country's employment initiatives. It contained specific action plans for youth and women's employment. Several strategies have been implemented to address the identified challenges and significant outputs are expected to be achieved.

In terms of specific actions targeted at youth, the National Employment Programme focuses primarily on the provision of vocational training through the Government of Rwanda's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes. Many development partners, international and local NGOs, civil society actors, and private organisations are also implementing programmes aimed at helping youth gain productive jobs. Several donor country development agencies are either directly implementing or funding programmes addressing youth employment-related challenges. In line with the Government of Rwanda's focus, most of these programmes are trying to improve the general level of skills of the Rwandan youth. Among NGOs, the most notable international organisations addressing the issue are the Education Development Center (EDC) through its Akazi Kanoze training program, Oxfam with its Sustainable Livelihood microbusiness support initiative, VVOB (the Flemish Association for Development Co-operation), L'Association pour la promotion de l'Enseignement et de la Formation à l'Etranger and Belgian Technical Cooperation through their joint TVET Programme, and Plan International through its Village Savings and Loan programme. In addition to these efforts, a large number of local NGOs are deeply engaged in promoting youth employment.

With the government, many local CSOs, cooperatives, youth organisations, and professional and labour organisations are helping to promote youth employment and, in some cases, to deliver government programmes. One youth association, YES Rwanda, is trying to make youth voices better heard and incorporated into policymaking. From the supply side of the job market, the Private Sector Federation, the main business association, is a key partner of the Government of Rwanda in implementing the National Employment Programme and runs its initiatives to stimulate business activity in Rwanda.



Many development partners, international and local NGOs, civil society actors, and labour and professional organisations also implement programs. Most donor country development agencies try to align their programmes with those of the Rwandan government. Many CSOs in Rwanda are engaged in improving youth employment. Cooperatives, youth associations, and labour and professional organisations have drawn attention to the problem of youth employment and underemployment. Beyond advocacy, many also take concrete steps to address the issue directly (Balthazar, 2013).

Several NGOs operate in Rwanda. Most of them directly address the issue of youth unemployment and underemployment, while many others engage with the issue tangentially. International NGOs that work directly on youth employment primarily focus programming on supply-side issues, providing training and sometimes job search support to youths. The literature shows that two major donors appear to be the most active in youth employment issues: USAID and the German development agency, GIZ. USAID is financing the Akazi Kanoze program implemented in Rwanda by the (EDC. GIZ runs its own interventions – mainly on labour market intermediation and TVET education promotion – and appears to be the most visible international donor on the youth employment scene (Bryan, 2010; Kasherwa, 2020).

While the 2014 National Employment Programme is too recent to have been evaluated, it addresses many of the challenges highlighted on paper.

While the government and NGOs have engaged in some monitoring and evaluation (M&E) at the programme level, little evaluation has been done at the policy level. It appears that policymakers have addressed this deficit in the new National Employment Programme of 2014, which includes better provisions for M&E. The 2014 NEP policy assigns a central role to the Labour Market Information System unit of MIFORTA, where labour market statistics are being centralised and made public. Further, 1% of the NEP budget has been allocated to coordination and M&E, which is to be led by MIFOTRA. While the 2014 National Employment Programme is too recent to have been evaluated, it addresses many of the challenges highlighted above on paper. It aims to improve policy coordination by establishing a secretariat to whom the involved ministries and agencies will report; it improves ownership by assigning specific target outcomes to implementing bodies; and it includes provisions for consistent M&E.

There is a challenge in youth employment initiatives. According to LATERITE, in the literature, there is an effort on the part of international donors and NGOs to incorporate youth perspectives in the design of their research and programmes. However, government publications, particularly evaluations, do not appear to have made strong efforts to survey youth or report on their perspectives in research directly. To address this gap, this review examines reports that include youth perspectives, summarising what is known and proposing areas for additional research. From the literature reviewed, it appears that youth voices are not adequately represented in the youth employment debate in Rwanda.

While the government and NGOs have engaged in some M&E at the programme level, little evaluation has been done at the policy level. Policymakers appear to have addressed this deficit in the new National Employment Programme of 2014, which includes better provisions for M&E. The government and NGOs have supported several entrepreneurship and business development programs; yet, many of the ventures they assist have failed to grow. Lack of credit has been identified as a key constraint, but these businesses struggle for other reasons. The determinants of these firms' success and their ability to grow from small household enterprises into more established, formal employers have not been sufficiently investigated. This issue is highly relevant for Rwandan policymakers who see the formal private sector as a motor of employment growth.

The high political and policy momentum for youth empowerment has addressed the major hindrances to youth development. These include youth unemployment (20.6%) which remains higher than only for adults (12%). Youth labour force participation is 58.4%. Youth underemployment plummets at 61.5%. The level of education attainment for the big cohort of youth is only some primary education (56.7%) and only 3% have attained tertiary education. However, many youths still lack employable technical skills, given that only 3.1% attend technical or vocational schools. This results in a high level of poverty among youth (29.5%) and extreme poverty (11.3%), according to EICV 5.

The Ministry of Youth and Arts (MOYA) coordinates the youth sector, which has youth under its responsibilities, with the mission "To create an enabling environment for the socio-economic empowerment of the youth, promotion and development of arts." The National Youth Council (NYC) is a constitutional state organ (Act. 139 of the 2015 revised constitution) governed by the Law N°001/2016 of 05/02/2016. Article 2 of this law indicates that NYC

is “a platform that provides opportunities for the youth to share ideas for self and national development.” This law restructured the NYC to act as an implementing arm of the Ministry in charge of Youth, from the grassroots (Village “Umudugudu” and Cell “Akagali”) to the national level.

In its effort to fulfil its mission, the NYC aims to achieve the following objectives: (i) promote sustainable economic empowerment for youth; (ii) facilitate youth access to and use of information and communication technology (ICT), as well as networking opportunities; (iii) enhance youth health and social welfare; (iv) mobilise youth for the preservation and protection of the environment; and (v) promote leadership, civic education, and advocacy for youth at all levels.

Key Facts about the Non-Profit Sector in Rwanda

As noted earlier, NPOs play an important role in Rwanda’s development, particularly in youth employment, education, healthcare, and social services. They bridge the gap where government efforts might not reach and provide crucial support to communities.

The Rwandan government acknowledges the value of NPOs and emphasises collaborations for national development. The Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) is responsible for registering and monitoring NGOs, ensuring transparency and accountability.

There is a steady rise in the number of registered NGOs. As of June 2023, there were over 2,200 registered national NGOs, according to the RGB (2023). According to the RGB report, of 283 sampled NGOs, 248 (87.6%) were national NGOs, and 35 (12.4%) were international NGOs. Of these NPOs, 50.5% operate in rural, 18.6% in urban, and 30.9% in rural and urban settings (see Fig 1). The RGB report also revealed the diverse intervention domains for different NPOs, as shown in Fig 2.

The literature shows that NPOs in rural settings focus on addressing issues related to poverty alleviation, agriculture, healthcare, and education (Adjei et al., 2012; Sirisena & Shneor, 2018) while those in urban settings often address issues such as youth employment, entrepreneurship, vocational training, and social services (Galaskiewicz et al., 2013; Mariani & Cavenago, 2013).

FIG 1: The distribution of NPOs’ projects by rural and urban settings (RGB, 2023).

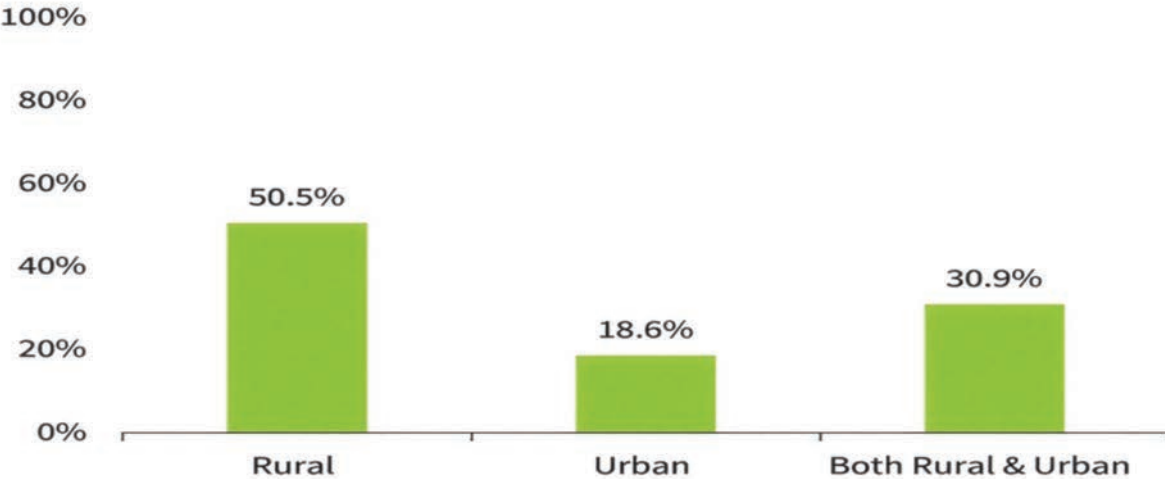
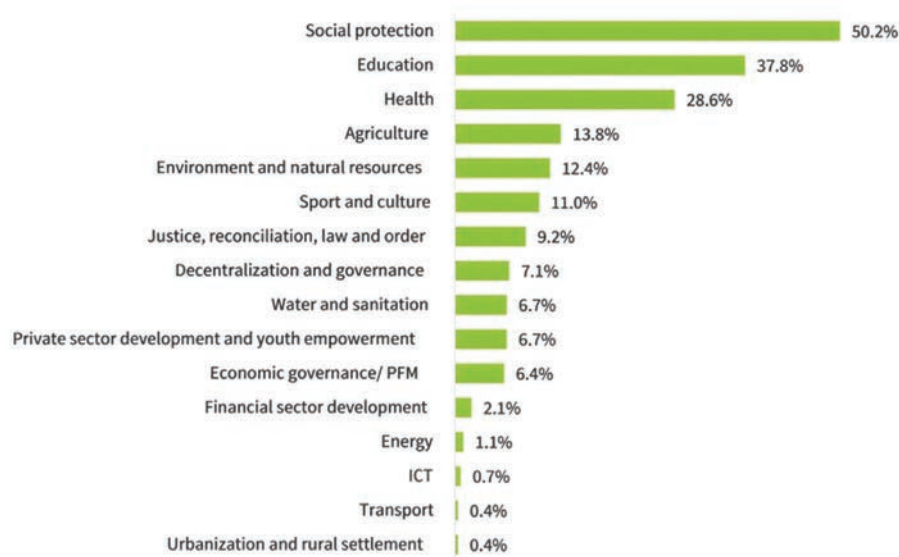
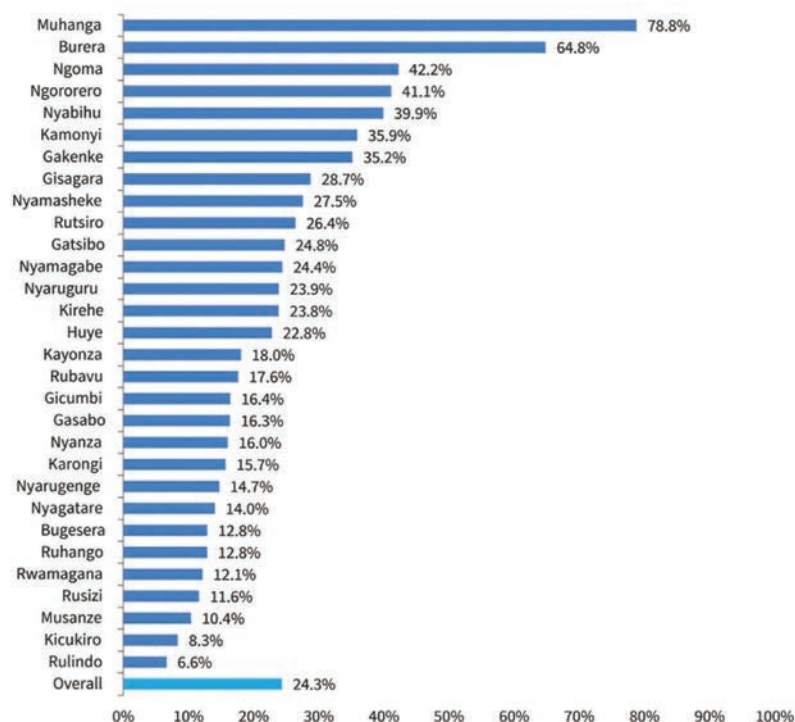


FIG 2: NPOs' domain of interventions (RGB, 2023).

Another important aspect revealed by the RGB report is citizen participation in NPO projects and activities. As shown in Fig 3, Muhanga and Burera districts had more than 50% of the respondents who affirmed to have participated in NPO activities and projects in the three years prior to the reporting time (2023).

FIG 3: Percentage of citizens who have interacted with or were involved in any NPO projects in the last three years (RGB, 2023).

The Sub-Sectors Prone to Contributing to Dignified and Fulfilling Work for the Youth

Among African NPOs, several sub-sectors contribute to dignified and fulfilling work for various youth categories. For instance, NPOs in the education sector provide opportunities for young people to work as teachers, educational

facilitators, curriculum developers, and mentors. These roles are not just jobs; they empower youth to contribute to the intellectual and personal development of others, fostering a deep sense of fulfilment and purpose (Miller, 2004).

In the healthcare sector, NPOs offer employment opportunities for young people as healthcare workers, community health workers, nurses, counsellors, and administrators. These roles allow youth to impact the well-being of individuals and communities, promoting a sense of fulfilment through service (Rosenthal et al., 2010).

NPOs focused on community development provide avenues for young people to actively engage in roles such as community organisers, project coordinators, social workers, and outreach workers (Gootman and Eccles, 2002). These positions enable youth to participate in initiatives to improve living conditions, infrastructure, and social cohesion within their communities, giving them a sense of pride and accomplishment.

In Rwanda, NPOs that focus on environmental conservation provide job opportunities for young people in various roles such as environmental educators, field researchers, conservation officers, and eco-tourism guides (Haigh, 2013). These positions enable youth to actively participate in the protection and preservation of natural resources and biodiversity, helping to cultivate a strong connection to the environment and a sense of responsibility for its stewardship.

In addition, non-profit social enterprises provide young people with opportunities to engage in entrepreneurial activities that address social or environmental challenges. Youth roles in these organisations may include social enterprise managers, business development specialists, marketing coordinators, and impact measurement analysts. By working in social enterprises, youth can combine their passion for social impact with their entrepreneurial spirit, creating a sense of fulfilment and purpose (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014; Haigh, 2013; Smith, 2008).

Arts and cultural organisations provide employment opportunities for young people in various roles such as artists, performers, arts administrators, cultural educators, and event coordinators. These positions enable youth to express their creativity, share their cultural heritage, and enrich society through artistic expression. In doing so, they foster a sense of identity and belonging (Menger, 1999; Schensul, 1990).

NPOs focused on human rights and advocacy provide opportunities for young people to work as activists, researchers, legal advocates, policy analysts, and community organisers. These roles not only empower youth to advocate for social justice, equality, and human rights but also provide a platform for personal growth and development, enabling them to contribute to positive social change and uphold principles of dignity and justice (Hasenfeld & Garrow, 2012).

Engaging in these diverse sub-sectors within the non-profit sector in Africa can help young women and men find dignified and fulfilling work that aligns with their passions, values, and aspirations while also making a positive impact on society.

Knowledge Gaps within the Non-Profit Sector and Its Sub-Sectors along with the State and Nature of Youth Employment

Emerging knowledge gaps within the non-profit sector and its sub-sectors, along with the state and nature of youth employment and engagement, vary across different regions and contexts in Rwanda. There is a significant knowledge gap regarding data and research on youth employment and engagement within the non-profit sector. Many organisations lack the resources and capacity to conduct thorough research and collect accurate data on youth employment trends, challenges, and opportunities. Also, as noted earlier, scholars have paid little attention to the role of NPOs in creating employment. This lack of data hinders the development of evidence-based policies and programmes to effectively address youth employment issues (Metz & Albers, 2014).

There is often a mismatch between the skills young people possess and the skills demanded by employers within the non-profit sector. While many young people may have academic qualifications, they may lack practical skills and experience relevant to the labour market. Bridging this skills gap requires targeted training and capacity-building initiatives tailored to the needs of the non-profit sector in particular and the labour market in general (Cappelli, 2015).

Young people, particularly those from marginalised communities, often have limited access to employment and engagement opportunities within the non-profit sector. Structural barriers such as lack of networks, discrimination,

and unequal access to resources hinder youth from accessing meaningful employment and engagement opportunities within the sector.

Youth voice and participation in decision-making processes within the non-profit sector need to be enhanced. Many NPOs struggle to effectively engage young people in governance, program design, and implementation. Empowering youth to actively participate in shaping the direction and priorities of non-profit initiatives can lead to more inclusive and impactful interventions (Zeldin & MacNeil, 2006).

In Rwanda, most NPOs face challenges of securing sustainable funding to support youth employment and engagement initiatives. Many initiatives rely heavily on short-term grants and donations, which limit their long-term impact and sustainability. Exploring innovative funding mechanisms and building partnerships with diverse stakeholders can help address these funding gaps.

There is a growing need for NPOs to harness the potential of technology and innovation to enhance youth employment and engagement. However, many organisations lack the knowledge and resources to effectively leverage technology for program delivery, monitoring, and evaluation. Investing in digital literacy and innovation hubs can help bridge this gap and create new opportunities for youth within the sector (Zeldin et al., 2005).

Addressing these knowledge gaps requires a concerted effort from NPOs, governments, donors, and other stakeholders to prioritise youth employment and engagement and invest in targeted interventions that address the needs and challenges young people face in Rwanda.

Possibilities and Opportunities to Increase Youth Employment in the Non-Profit Sector in Rwanda and Africa in General

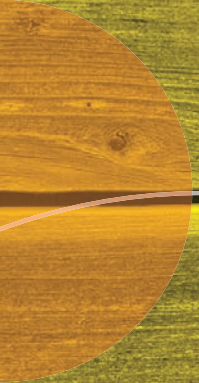
There are several possibilities and opportunities for increased youth employment in the NPOs in particular and the country in general. Among them, the literature reveals the following:

- Increasing the number and scope of NPOs in various sectors such as education, healthcare, environment, and community development can create more job opportunities for young people (Gootman & Eccles, 2002).
- Investing in training and capacity building programmes specifically tailored for young individuals interested in working in the non-profit sector can enhance their employability and skills (Barrington-Leach et al., 2007).
- Encouraging youth entrepreneurship in the form of social enterprises can create sustainable job opportunities while addressing social and environmental challenges (Davis, 2002; Terziev et al., 2019).
- Strengthening partnerships between non-profits, government agencies, private sector entities, and international organisations can foster innovative solutions and increase employment opportunities for youth (Barrington-Leach et al., 2007; Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2004).
- Leveraging technology and innovation in non-profit work can open up new avenues for youth employment, particularly in digital marketing, data analysis, and technology development (Chesbrough, 2003; Gupta et al., 2020).
- Advocating for policies that support youth employment in the non-profit sector and engaging with policymakers to create an enabling environment can drive positive change and create more opportunities for young people (Almog-Bar & Schmid, 2014; Smith, 2008).
- Supporting youth-led NPOs and initiatives can empower young people to take charge of their own development, contribute to positive social change, and create employment opportunities for themselves and their peers (London et al., 2003).
- Exploring alternative sources of funding beyond traditional grants and donations, such as impact investing and social impact bonds, can help non-profits expand their operations and create more jobs for youth (Gootman & Eccles, 2002; Salamon, 2014).

Rwanda, in particular, and Africa, in general, can harness the potential of their youth population to drive social and economic development through the non-profit sector by tapping into the opportunities mentioned above.

Rwanda has made significant progress in economic development; however, youth unemployment continues to be a pressing issue. The country's macroeconomic environment is marked by stable growth, a diversified economy, and a commitment to sustainable development, all of which present various opportunities for youth employment. It is crucial to identify the specific sectors and industries where growth is most likely to occur and to align the skills and aspirations of young people with these opportunities.

05 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Rwanda has one of the highest growth rates in Africa and is proving to be an increasingly attractive location for business and investment. However, this growth has yet to create enough jobs. Rwanda is, therefore, seeking to create 1.5 million jobs by 2024, and the Special Initiative is supporting this goal.

The non-profit sector contributes to creating jobs for youth and thus reduces unemployment among youth; along with government initiatives, they have worked together in order to address the issue of unemployment among youth. In the context of growing youth population, creating employment for them requires urgent attention. Therefore, the following are some recommendations for creating jobs for the youth in Rwanda:

- There is a need for more investments that would be used in creating decent work for youth in the long term.
- The government needs to focus on resource mobilisation in order to generate investments in youth employment and the non-profit sector.
- There is a need for strong collaboration between the government and the non-profit sector in tracking the needs of youth and acting accordingly to reveal gaps in current youth programmes and focus on creating dignified work for youth.
- Future studies that focus on understanding youth needs are needed; this would help in elaborating strong policies that would resolve issues related to youth employment.
- The private sector should strongly support initiatives of the government and non-profit sector to address the issue of youth unemployment.



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