



Nothing Stops a Bullet Like a Job

Humanity Intelligence Needs Fulfilling Jobs for Peace, Prosperity, and the Planet

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Claremont Graduate University

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It's graduation day at Homeboy Industries headquarters in Los Angeles. I had just eaten breakfast at Homegirl Café next door: a breakfast burrito con chorizo. A friend motions, says, "you should see this."

A large crowd has gathered below the spiral staircase that leads down to the reception area. In caps and gowns, some carrying babies or small children, the grads descend to receive high school diplomas and blessings from Fr. Greg Boyle, who started Homeboy decades ago. Cries of joy, shout-outs follow.

The grads are no longer teenagers. The prideful beams on their faces cover the tough lives they have led. Most have been in prison; all have been members of notorious L.A. street gangs. They are living proof of Homeboy's catch phrase, ["nothing stops a bullet like a job."](#)

Homeboy began as an exercise in the practical theology providing a pathway from gang life. It started [social enterprises](#) that employ former gang members, providing vocational training and an intentional community. Among its industries, Homeboy runs a commercial bakery, a silk screening and embroidery company, farmer's markets, electronic recycling, and its newest program, pet grooming. And it has several restaurants, including a diner at Los Angeles City Hall and a coveted eating spot at the Los Angeles International Airport.

Boyle made it his life's work. He has presided at the funerals of more than 260 of his beloved "homies" whose lives could not outrun violence. He's experienced failure before success. He persevered through illness to see Homeboy recognized as the largest and most successful gang

intervention and rehabilitation program in the United States. It has fostered similar programs in 230 locations.

Boyle, now in his 70s, continues to write and minister. His speeches are homilies in thin disguise; his writing is that of a contemporary mystic who sees possibilities where others see only punishment. In *Tattoos from the Heart*, he urges, “a compassion that can stand in awe at what the poor have to carry rather than stand in judgment at how they carry it.” In his newest book *Cherished Belonging* he returns to the core principles of his work and of Homeboy: we are all inherently good, no exceptions; we belong to each other, no exceptions.

Part I: Humanity Intelligence and The Fulfilling Jobs Problem

Fr. Boyle and Homeboy help introduce the fulfilling jobs problem. Decades ago, Boyle was the pastor of Dolores Mission, a church in the heart of Los Angeles immigrant community, and of its street gangs. He negotiated truces between warring gangs until he recognized that the temporary peace agreements only legitimated the gangs, as if they were little nations. He pivoted to finding alternative to the gang life, which requires an income—and therefore a job. As Homeboy found, a job also marks one as having status in society. Being good at a job creates self-worth, fulfillment. Just as former gang members thrive when they get fulfilling jobs, humanity at large needs them. If society wants to tackle existential problems such as bringing peace, creating prosperity for all, and ensuring that the planet thrives as a place for human habitation, it will need to create jobs that move humanity in that direction.

Humanity Intelligence and Jobs for Peace, Prosperity and Planet

Moving humanity toward fulfilling work is a fundamental task of Humanity Intelligence: making us all smarter about all of us. Humanity cannot get smarter about itself without good and fulfilling jobs, and those jobs need to be focused directly on the core tasks of peace, prosperity and planet.

Peace requires good jobs because every level of peace—from families to communities to nations—requires people with the dignity and membership in a social system that a good job provides. Prosperity requires the same thing. And it requires a world view in which there is only us and no them. Working toward planetary solutions requires that we direct human resources to a verdant planet creating jobs that get the big job done.

For the most part, economists see good jobs as those involving formal employment sector, those with core labor protections such as safe working conditions and collective bargaining rights and regulations against arbitrary dismissal. A good job allows a middle-class existence: sufficient food, housing, raising a family, a little savings and a career path. But a good job is not necessarily a fulfilling one.

People also seek jobs that soothe the soul. “There needs to be joy in work,” says theologian [Matthew Fox](#), “the joy we experience in it and the joy that others experience from our work.”

There has always been enormous tension between having employment and feeling the contentment of fulfilling work. These tensions are deeply baked in society. Survival requires people’s coordinated effort. Coordinated effort constrains personal liberty.

Even before industrialization, before agriculture, humans formed communities to survive. Very early—as the cave paintings at Lascaux remind us—humans developed divided work, specialized, celebrated the achievements of hunters, and enabled extraordinarily talented artists.

How work is organized changes its potential for engagement and fulfillment. Being a hamburger flipper at McDonalds is far different than being a pastry chef at a Michelin starred restaurant. Both are cooks, but the jobs are designed differently. Teaching can be designed as industrial work with the routines and timing determined by others, as a craft, as artistry, or as a profession. Systems constrain or expand individual choices.

Immigration is the most used individual choice worldwide. People in areas that lack good jobs move to places that may better sustain them. The migration from rural to urban areas has been going on for centuries, and it has been joined by movement from war or conflict, from harsh climates.

We can also expand individual choices by reforming labor markets to make them fairer. We can start new enterprises and create rules and economic incentives. We can buoy up new economic platforms. All possible.

But technical solutions are not sufficient. In addition, we need to understand the systems that are driving both unemployment and the proliferation of bad jobs. And we need to connect jobs with our fundamental values and deepest desires.

Finding personal prosperity and soulful fulfillment together is our goal.

The Jobs Problem Worldwide

The jobs problem is most readily seen by focusing on youth. The problem is nearly universal, worldwide. It represents a massive market failure and is as troubling in Morocco as it is in Ohio. University administrators in Morocco told me that unemployment was highest among the best educated of their youth. Low wage, low skill jobs were relatively plentiful, but the economy was not creating enough jobs for engineers, accountants, architects, or physicians. The country's most educated youth were migrating to Europe or North America.

In 2024, the [International Labor Office](#) reported that the market outlook for young people had improved, bouncing back from the pandemic. The unemployment rate for those in the 15-to-24-

year age bracket was 13 percent, lower than it had been for more than a decade, but that good jobs were in short supply and that youth were anxious about their futures.

The picture, however, is not the same across regions. In the Arab States, East Asia and South-East Asia and the Pacific, youth unemployment rates were higher in 2023 than in 2019. Moreover, the report finds that young men have benefited more from the labor market recovery than young women.

Also, official statistics probably understate the problems. The [ILO report](#) cautions that one in five young people ages 15 to 24 are not in employment, education or training. Two thirds of them are women.

Globally, more than half of young workers are in informal employment. Only in high- and upper-middle-income economies are most young workers today in a regular, secure job. And three in four young workers in low-income countries will get only a self-employed or temporary paid job.

Youth Anxious about Their Futures

Given these conditions, it is not surprising that youth and young adult anxiety have emerged as significant global public health concerns, with rising prevalence rates and profound implications for societal well-being. This trend is evident across various regions, with notable disparities between the Global North and South.

Anxiety disorders are among the most common mental health conditions worldwide, particularly affecting individuals aged 10 to 24. A [comprehensive study](#) analyzing data from 1990 to 2019 across 204 countries reported that in 2019, there were approximately 932 million incident cases of anxiety disorders among children and adolescents, with an age-standardized incidence rate of 739.29 per 100,000 population . The burden of these disorders indicates a significant impairment in daily functioning.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated this issue. The [World Health Organization](#) reported a 25% global increase in the prevalence of anxiety and depression during the first year of the pandemic, with young people and women being the most affected groups .

In the [Global North](#), higher reported rates of anxiety among youth are often linked to factors such as academic pressure, social media influence, and economic uncertainties. For instance, a study highlighted that in countries like the [United States, United Kingdom, and Australia](#), youth well-being has significantly declined over the past decade, particularly among young women . The rise of smartphones and social media, coupled with cyberbullying and body shaming, has contributed to increased feelings of isolation and anxiety among young people.

Conversely, in the [Global South](#), while reported prevalence rates of anxiety disorders may appear lower, this is often due to underreporting and limited access to mental health

services. Socioeconomic challenges, political instability, and limited healthcare infrastructure contribute to the underdiagnosis and undertreatment of mental health conditions in these regions. Moreover, cultural perceptions and stigma surrounding mental health problems can hinder individuals from seeking help.

The Consequences of Bad Jobs

Roughly two billion people live in countries experiencing situations of [fragility and armed violence](#), and another 200 million people are affected by the slow or sudden onset of disasters. Regardless of the cause, they all undermine people's livelihoods and lead to social unrest.

At a macro level, widespread unemployment and particularly the lack of good jobs for youth leads to the politics of self-victimization and scapegoating, and it builds support for authoritarian leaders.

For example, gang violence is [spreading in the Caribbean](#) particularly Haiti, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and Trinidad and Tobago, where 57 percent of the population is exposed to such violence. There is a vigorous debate about whether it is best to attack the problem only with punitive measures or to treat it as a [public health crisis](#).

Local officials and community leaders understand this. Mayors and school leaders viscerally understand the problem bad jobs and unemployment. Alcohol and drug use increases along with homicide and the number of mothers and children living in poverty. "Idleness" increases among young males, who are not employed and not in school. But often, communities and local officials lack the resources to adequately respond because the underlying problem is systemic, larger.

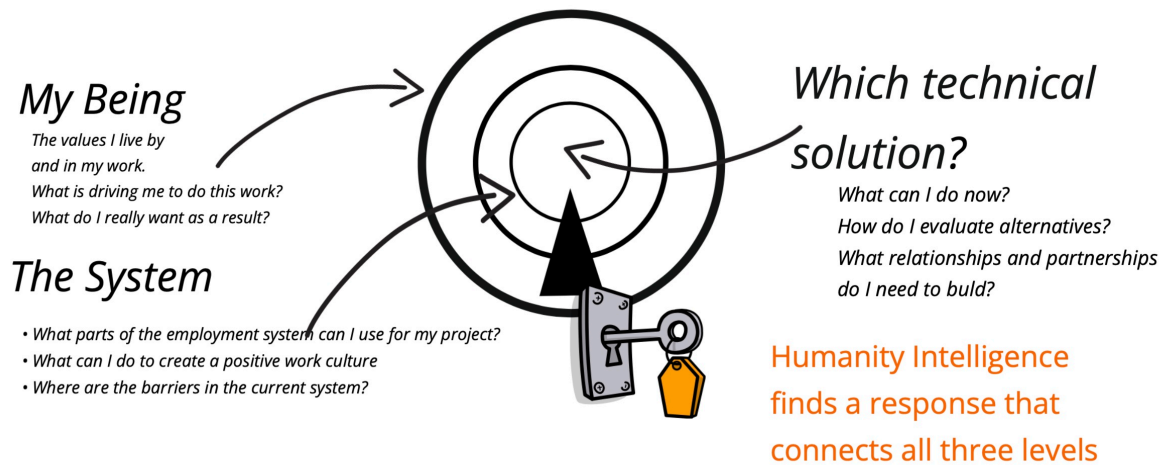
Part II: The Conscious Full Spectrum Response

The Conscious Full Spectrum Response is a basic design tool of Humanity Intelligence. It was first introduced by Monica Sharma in her book *Radical Transformational Leadership* and has been used by tens of thousands of people worldwide. I first experienced using the concept while taking a course she led, and I immediately sensed its power. CFSR, as it is called, is a bit hard to visualize. It is a triple helix of intertwining strands. First, there is who we are, our inner being, wisdom, and capacity for action. Second, there are cultural norms and systems that create structures and the "rules of the game." Third, there are of specific solutions to problems.

In teaching CFSR, Sharma collapses the three strands of the triple helix into three concentric circles, as in the illustration below.

Integrated Workforce Development

A Conscious Full Spectrum Response



The power of CFSR is in finding a response that connects all three levels and in revisiting this idea repeatedly as a project is designed and implemented. For example, as Monica Sharma and others design the Humanity Intelligence Academy®, they have reached out to potential partners. Some seem interested initially and then back away. “One door closes and another opens,” she is fond of saying. As they worked, they became more aware of more parts of the system that produces peace, prosperity and a thriving planet entered our minds. That is how the team became aware of the centrality of fulfilling jobs to solving the three existential problems. As we worked on the “jobs” issue, we became more aware of the complex nature of solutions.

We found that while creating fulfilling jobs is a global problem, the solutions are both large and intensely local and personal. Of course, people want jobs that will sustain themselves and their family. They want a legal system that prevents exploitation and provides them a safe working environment and a secure position. However, once basic needs are met, other factors come into play.

I recalled a successful screen editor, much in demand by famous producers and directors, who walked away from her job because the 24-hour-seven-days-a-week intensity of editing a movie with famous stars and an edgy director made raising her child extremely difficult. She became a court reporter, decently paid, not as Hollywood exciting, but much more family friendly.

And I thought of my wife, who became a special education teacher rather than a lawyer because the schedule of the job was more conducive to being a mom.

What looks like a good job in one’s 20s is not necessarily an aspiration decades later. My son was a firefighter in his youth. He loved the adrenaline rush, watching the cars scatter as he drove down the highway lights flashing and siren blaring. He gave little thought to his safety as he climbed on the roof of a burning building. Once, he drove his truck *through* the flames of a wildfire in the hopes that he could find safety on the other side. (He also knew that sheltering in

place under a fire truck had a limited chance of success.) He's older now, and the heat, smoke, and physical toll on the body are not as appealing.

The tension between job and finding joy can be seen in the polling data about work. When researchers from the [Pew Foundation](#) asked whether people were satisfied with their jobs, over 80 percent said they were. But when the [Gallup](#) organization asked whether workers were engaged in their work, only about 15 percent said that they were. Their jobs provided subsistence, but they found substance, vocation, joy, and love elsewhere. Hence, the design problem that allows a thoughtful designer to use CFSR to address.

A great deal of strategizing about fulfilling jobs necessarily begins with the question: Who am I? Now? In answering this question, Humanity Intelligence rests in part on the work of Daniel Goleman, the well-known author and psychologist who coined the words Emotional Intelligence. "I," as Goleman found, means "we." Humans are wired to connect and can "feel into" another person. The three sequential aspects of empathy are noticing another person's feelings, feeling what the person feels, and responding compassionately to another's distress.

Emotional Intelligence connects to job searches. In the classic, constantly updated, book *What Color is Your Parachute?* Richard Bolles approaches looking for a job as both self-assessment and a bundle of practical strategies. While it is important to understand the job market—and particularly how the internet has changed it—understanding oneself is more important. What are you good at? What do you care about? Why do you want to do the work: do you burn for justice?

(Bolles' book, which was written primarily for a North American audience, has parallels in other regions: *Africa's Business Heroes: How to Build a Successful Career or Business in Africa*; *The Start-Up of You (Adapted for Asia)*; *How to Get a Job in South America (and Keep It)*; *Career Development Practice in Africa*.)

Self-assessment is at the core of a CFSR approach to understanding fulfilling jobs, whether you are looking for a job yourself, helping family and friends, or designing a company or agency.

Sometimes the problem is best captured in a story, lightly fictionalized, taught as a parable.

The Parable of Two Jobs

Two pilgrims were walking on a path overlooking the ocean when they came across a man tending a garden. He was washing the leaves he picked that would become part of a meal for his guests. The pilgrims admired the garden and asked about the farmer and his work. The farmer—apparently in his middle years—looked earnestly at the pilgrims and said: "Best job I ever had." He returned to washing the leaves.

The pilgrims walked further and came across a woman bathing in a pool of warm water. She asked us and others, to join her, and more earnest conversation followed, mostly about our work. Tears began to form in the younger woman's eyes. She said, "I am not from here. My home is

over the mountains in a valley where there is a magic mineral that has given great wealth to many people. People worship the mineral. They have found a way to use it as a tool, and people believe that it can be intelligent. I am very good at using the tool, and the giant company I work for pays me very well. But it's sucking my soul dry. I hate my job."

The Tension of Three Jobs

The parable of two jobs creates a dilemma, which cannot be solved, but it can be managed. Consider the basic need shared by all: enough income. Enough is sometimes concrete—basic needs—but beyond that enough is a choice, sometimes not recognized. Then, consider expectations: what society, family, self tells us. Expectations can provide a dream and they can also serve as a psychic prison. There is always tension between the two. The gardener and the woman in the pool were viewing jobs from a soulful perspective, one finding fulfillment, the other decrying its absence.

Ideally, all three aspects of a job align, but they seldom do. We believe that the CFSR approach is a way of managing the tension.

Part III: Creating Fulfilling Jobs through Public Policy and Private Action

Now, let us get down to the design and solution process. The lack of sufficient good jobs results from failures in both the public and private sectors, both government and markets.

[Dani Rodrik and Charles Sabel](#) write that conventional models are failing throughout the world. In the developed world, the welfare-state compensation problem has been in retreat for decades and there are obvious limits to the free market, neoliberal alternative. In the developing world, the "tried- and- tested model of industrialization has run out of steam." In a perhaps unexpected way, underlying problem has converged. In both developed and developing countries we find inequality, exclusion, spatial and social segmentation. This produces loss of trust in governments and experts, a populist backlash, and a drift toward authoritarian politics.

The path toward good jobs is not a choice between governments and markets. Rather, the creation of enough good jobs requires cooperation and coordination between the two. There are many paths forward, and I will explore several of them before ending by advocating for what we call integrated workforce development, the combination of education, skilling, coaching, and coordinated relationships with employers.

Migration

My great-grandfather Thomas Donnell migrated to the United States from Ireland after the American Civil War. He was a stone carver by trade. Family lore says that he arrived only with

scant clothing and his work tools. Eventually, he settled in Mattoon, a farming and railroad town in the center of Illinois. He married, and he and great grandmother raised five children. He made a living carving tombstones, including one for a local family named Lincoln. (The gravestone he carved for Abraham Lincoln's father still stands in a little country churchyard.)

Thomas Donnell was not alone. During what has been called "The Age of Mass Migration" (circa 1850-1920), approximately 55 million Europeans migrated, largely to the Americas, with the United States absorbing nearly 30 million. Ireland had the highest emigration rate. In 1890 it was estimated that 40% of all Irish-born individuals lived outside the country. Each of them had a migration story.

The current wave of immigration is larger in numbers than the one in the 19th Century, about 281 million, but represents a slightly smaller percentage of the global population; about 3.6%. Modern migration is also more diverse, in both the sending and receiving countries, and economic opportunity mixes with conflict and environmental change as a driver of movement.

Where migration in the 19th century primarily involved unskilled workers seeking economic opportunity, over the last 25 years, international migration has increasingly involved highly educated and skilled individuals leading to a "brain drain" as talented professionals seek better opportunities abroad. In Africa, it is estimated that 70,000 professionals leave the continent annually leading to labor shortages in critical sectors. Similarly, the Philippines have experienced an outflow of healthcare workers. And in Nigeria, over half the doctors registered with its medical and dental council practice outside the country.

Alongside economic migrants, the world currently sees large numbers of displacements due to persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees estimated that in 2023, approximately 117.3 million people were displaced, particularly from countries such as Syria, Venezuela and the Ukraine. Climate-related disasters have displaced about 20-million people annually, particularly from Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and the Pacific Islands.

Now, let us apply some Conscious Full Spectrum Response thinking to migration. Migration looks different when viewed from the perspective of families and from the vantage point of national policy. It looks different when considered as a short-term problem response and a long-term national policy.

For individuals and families, migration is often a way out of intolerable situations: either bad economy or unsafe society. Families need a solution now.

For nations, losing a significant amount of an educated population can stranglehold development and further impoverish a country. Countries try various retention policies including greater career development opportunities, engagement of expatriates to contribute to their home countries through knowledge transfer and investments, and incentives to return. For example, [Portugal](#) has introduced tax incentives and housing assistance to attract young professionals back to the country.

However, most development policies take a long time to pay off. Investments in technical and higher education may eventually attract firms looking for a talented work force, but in the short run, education without jobs creates an incentive for individuals to migrate.

A more Conscious Full-Spectrum Response approach is encapsulated in *Development as Freedom* by Amartya Sen, a landmark book in development economics. Rather than viewing development solely as economic growth or increases in GDP, Sen redefines it as a process of expanding people's *capabilities*—their real freedoms to lead the kind of lives they value. Poverty is not just low income; it is a deprivation of basic capabilities, such as being healthy and participating in community life.

If a nation, first, removes unfreedoms, such as illiteracy, malnutrition, and social exclusion—particularly of women—then capability is increased even if actual income does not immediately soar. Consider the Bolsa Família program begun in 2003 in Brazil. It is a cash transfer program credited with reaching 11 million families and lowering the poverty rate by 27 percent. The program increased local formal sector jobs, and there is strong evidence that beneficiaries who were children found higher quality jobs. Most no longer needed the program as adults. The program did not reduce work incentives.

Large Scale Development and Its Progeny: The Internet and the Platform Economy

Nigerian content creator [Tayo Aina](#) reports on anything from emigration, to voodoo festivals and the last hunter-gather tribe in Tanzania. From a standing start in 2017, he has used the internet for self-training—learned film editing on You Tube—and as a channel for a growing income that allows him global reach.

His videos are changing the way youth see Africa: “Most of the media online was negative, and I saw that I was changing the narrative about Africa by showcasing it in a more [representative] light,” he says.

He is not alone. A [2024 report](#) on Africa’s internet content creator industry puts its annual income at more than \$3 billion a year projected to grow to nearly \$18 billion by 2030.

Aina’s livelihood and a huge social and economic revolution rests on research and development financed by a relatively small government agency in the United States. The U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), established in 1958, spends about .6 of one percent of the government’s budget (\$.37 billion in 2025). It created the internet, or more specifically ARPANET, which laid the groundwork.

Beyond its historical contributions, DARPA continues to invest in initiatives with significant social implications. For instance, the ["Building an Adaptive and Competitive Workforce"](#)

program awarded \$750,000 to teams developing AI-enabled tools aimed at upskilling adults for national security roles.

Such government-sponsored research and development (R&D) agencies have historically played pivotal roles in addressing complex societal challenges. Japan calls them "moonshot" initiatives, characterized by their ambitious goals and high-risk, high-reward nature. Such programs have not only driven technological advancements but also reshaped economies and labor markets. While most such agencies originated in high-income countries, their influence and models are increasingly informing efforts in developing nations and the implications flow globally.

Launched in 2019, [Japan's Moonshot Research and Development Program](#) represents a strategic shift towards addressing pressing societal issues through ambitious R&D goals. With an investment of approximately 195 billion yen (around \$1.3 billion), the program targets challenges such as aging populations, climate change, and food security.

The United Kingdom, European Union, China, Russia, South Korea, and Germany also have high-risk, high reward research and development programs.

Tayo Ania was the direct beneficiary of technologies developed in the U.S. One national policy that works well—and has for a long time—is the systemic adoption of technologies developed elsewhere. While the United States criticizes countries from copying its technology, its history reveals “reverse engineering” at the root of its manufacturing development. The term “Yankee Ingenuity” is often spoken with pride now. But originally, it was coined by the British to describe the habit of Americans visiting English manufacturing facilities and expropriating the technology to the western shores of the Atlantic. What comes around goes around.

The Platform Economy

Ania thrives because of what is called the platform economy, economic activity mediated by computers and digital communication. It has emerged as a transformative force in the 21st-century labor market, reshaping how services are delivered, consumed, and monetized. Characterized by digital platforms that facilitate interactions between producers and consumers, this economy encompasses a wide array of services, from ride-sharing and freelance work to e-commerce and content creation.

As of 2024, the global digital platforms [market is valued](#) at approximately \$410.66 billion. While this represents only about 4 tenths of one percent of the global economy (estimated at \$108 trillion in 2024), its influence on labor markets, commerce, and digital infrastructure is disproportionately large and growing rapidly. The platform economy is projected to reach \$1,189.5 billion by 2033, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 11.22%. Major participants in this economy include tech giants like Amazon, Uber, Airbnb, and Alibaba, which have established dominant positions by leveraging network effects and data analytics to scale rapidly.

Opportunities for Youth in the Platform Economy

The platform economy opens several doors for youth, especially in regions where formal employment is limited or difficult to access:

1. Flexible Income Generation

One of the most immediate appeals of the platform economy is its low-barrier access to income-generating work for individuals, often on a flexible schedule:

- [Upwork](#) and [Fiverr](#) – Allow freelancers to monetize skills in writing, graphic design, programming, translation, and more.
- [Uber](#), [Bolt](#), and [Lyft](#) – Provide gig work in ride-hailing, particularly in urban centers.
- [DoorDash](#), [Glovo](#), and [Rappi](#) – Food delivery platforms popular in North and Latin America.
- [TaskRabbit](#) – Offers local task-based services such as moving, assembling furniture, or light home repairs, mainly in urban U.S. areas.
- [Sweatcoin](#) and [Stepn](#) – Newer health-related platforms that reward movement or walking with crypto-based incentives.

Non-governmental agencies and community organizations increasingly make use of the platform economy:

- [Jobberman](#) (Nigeria) and [Fuzu](#) (Kenya, Uganda) – Serve as career development platforms tailored to African markets, used by youth employment NGOs.
- [Shortlist](#) – Helps NGOs and educational institutions match job seekers to employers in India and Africa.
- [Yoma](#) (Youth Agency Marketplace) – Backed by UNICEF and the African Union, Yoma enables African youth to build digital CVs and access income-earning microtasks and learning opportunities.

These platforms are also being adapted by youth cooperatives, local governments, and non-profits to design local “task platforms” or to aggregate gig workers for shared access to clients and insurance.

2. Skill Development

Platforms increasingly play a dual role: they don’t just match labor to tasks, but also serve as sites for skill acquisition and demonstration.

Promising platforms for individuals:

- [Coursera](#), [edX](#), [Udemy](#), and [LinkedIn Learning](#) – Offer affordable or free courses in coding, marketing, entrepreneurship, and AI, many with certification options.
- [Kaggle](#) – A platform for data science competitions, ideal for youth in technical fields to gain experience, network, and even earn.
- [Toptal](#) – For highly skilled freelancers (especially in software and finance), often used to transition into global consulting careers.

Promising platforms for NGOs and community organizations:

- [Generation.org](#) – Founded by McKinsey, this NGO partners with employers and governments to train and place youth into jobs using a hybrid online model.

- [Andela](#) – Originally launched to train African software engineers, Andela has become a platform for global tech placements and training.
- [Google Career Certificates](#) – Delivered via Coursera but implemented by many workforce development nonprofits and libraries.
- [Digital Opportunity Trust \(DOT\)](#) – A Canada-based NGO working globally to train youth in digital literacy and leadership, especially through peer-based training and platform-supported learning.

3. Global Reach:

The digital platform model is borderless by design, enabling youth in both income-rich and income-poor countries to access international markets, buyers, and employers as the examples below illustrate. The dominance of a platform also creates monopoly issues of fairness and exclusion. Some examples:

- [Shopify](#) – A leading e-commerce platform enabling microentrepreneurs to run global storefronts; widely used in regions like Nigeria, the Philippines, and India for niche product export.
- [Amazon's Marketplace](#) – Offers Fulfillment by Amazon (FBA) which allows even small sellers to reach global customers with logistical support.
- [YouTube](#) and [TikTok](#) – Content platforms where youth can monetize views, ads, and partnerships. Many creators from Kenya, Ghana, and Indonesia earn substantial income with globally targeted content.
- [SoundCloud](#) and [Bandcamp](#) – Give musicians a global stage and monetization channels without needing record labels.
- [99designs](#) and [DesignCrowd](#) – Match freelance designers to global clientele; useful for those in creative industries.
- [Remote OK](#) and [AngelList Talent](#) – Connect remote workers to startup and tech jobs globally, particularly suited for skilled digital workers.

The platform economy can be a critical bridge for youth to bypass traditional labor market constraints, especially in countries facing sluggish job growth. However, success requires strategic use: selecting the right platform, investing in targeted skill-building, and sometimes working with supportive ecosystems such as NGOs or co-operatives.

The Informal Economy as Problem and Opportunity

The informal economy serves as both a challenge and a potential avenue for youth employment, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. While it often lacks formal protections and benefits, it also provides a platform for entrepreneurship and innovation among young people. This section explores the dual nature of the informal economy and proposes policy interventions to harness its potential for youth empowerment.

The informal economy encompasses economic activities that are not regulated by the state and often escape taxation and labor laws. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), over 60% of the world's employed population operates within the informal sector.

In regions like South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa, the informal sector is a significant source of employment for young people. For instance, in Sub-Saharan Africa, informal employment accounts for 85% of total employment, with youth constituting a large proportion of this workforce. These jobs often lack job security, social protection, and adequate income, [perpetuating cycles of poverty and vulnerability](#).

Typically, informal sector workers do not have access to health care, pensions, or unemployment benefits. They struggle to obtain loans or credit to expand their businesses. Many lack the skills necessary for transition to the formal economy. Despite these challenges, the informal economy offers workers—youth in particular—the opportunity to start and manage businesses. It is a space for innovation and adaptability, and informal businesses often serve local communities, fostering strong social ties.

Transforming the Informal Economy

To harness the potential of the informal economy for youth employment, organizations such as the [International Labor Organization](#) have long advocated multi-faceted approaches involving policy reforms and public-private partnerships. Some examples:

1. Formalization Strategies

Governments can implement policies to facilitate the transition of informal enterprises to the formal sector:

- **Simplified Registration Processes:** Reducing bureaucratic hurdles can encourage informal businesses to register formally.
- **Incentives for Formalization:** Offering tax breaks, access to finance, and business development services can motivate informal enterprises to formalize.
- **Legal Recognition of Informal Workers:** Extending legal protections and labor rights to informal workers can improve their working conditions and security.

2. Skill Development and Education

Investing in education and vocational training can equip youth with the skills needed to succeed in the labor market:

- **Entrepreneurship Training:** Programs that teach business planning, financial literacy, and marketing can empower young entrepreneurs.
- **Technical and Vocational Education:** Providing practical skills training aligned with market demands can enhance employability.
- **Digital Literacy:** Teaching digital skills can open up new opportunities in the gig economy and online marketplaces.

3. Access to Finance

Improving access to financial services is crucial for supporting youth entrepreneurship:

- **Microfinance and Grant Schemes:** Tailored financial products can provide the necessary capital for young entrepreneurs to start and grow their businesses. Revolving loan funds are particularly attractive because of their [pay-it-forward approach](#) rather than loan repayment.
- **Financial Literacy Programs:** Educating youth on financial management can enhance their ability to make informed business decisions.

4. Public-Private Partnerships

Collaborations between governments, private sector entities, and civil society can create supportive ecosystems for youth entrepreneurship:

- **Incubators and Accelerators:** Peace, Prosperity, and Planet initiatives can establish platforms that provide mentorship, networking, and resources for young entrepreneurs.
- **Market Access:** Partnerships can facilitate access to markets through procurement policies that favor youth-led enterprises.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Joint investments in infrastructure, such as internet connectivity and transportation, can enhance business operations.

As an application example, consider [Generation Unlimited](#) (GenU), which was launched by the United Nations, as a global partnership that aims to connect every young person to opportunities in education, employment, and entrepreneurship. By fostering collaborations between governments, private sector, and youth organizations, GenU has reached over 300 million young people with programs that build skills and create pathways to employment.

Another UN program, [Solutions for Youth Employment](#), is a multi-stakeholder coalition that provides leadership and resources to increase the number of young people engaged in productive work. By leveraging public-private partnerships, S4YE implements innovative solutions to address youth employment challenges globally.

Social Enterprises

Social entrepreneurship is an increasingly vital concept in today's rapidly evolving world, where social challenges often outpace the solutions offered by traditional governmental and corporate systems. As a hybrid model blending mission-driven goals with innovative business strategies, social entrepreneurship redefines the boundaries of enterprise and activism.

What distinguishes social entrepreneurship from traditional entrepreneurship is not the tools used—marketing, funding, operations, etc.—but the purpose. While a traditional entrepreneur seeks profit, a social entrepreneur seeks measurable social impact, often reinvesting profits to further that mission.

Gregory Dees, a pioneer in the academic study of social entrepreneurship, describes [social entrepreneurs](#) as “change agents in the social sector who adopt a mission to create and sustain social value (not just private value), recognize and relentlessly pursue new opportunities, engage

in a process of continuous innovation and learning, and exhibit a heightened sense of accountability to the constituencies served.”

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM, 2020-2021), over 250 million people globally are engaged in some form of social entrepreneurial activity, accounting for a substantial portion of global employment and innovation:

- In the United Kingdom, social enterprises contribute over £60 billion annually and employ more than 2 million people.
- In the United States, a study by the Social Enterprise Alliance found that the sector contributes around \$500 billion to the economy, employing more than 10 million people.
- In India, social enterprises are particularly vital in bridging the urban-rural divide, providing essential services like education, healthcare, and clean energy to underserved populations. India is estimated to have more than 2 million social enterprises operating in various sectors.

Furthermore, the rise of impact investing—a market valued at over \$1 trillion as of 2023—demonstrates the growing interest from mainstream investors in supporting ventures that produce both financial returns and social good.

Leading Examples Across Continents

Social entrepreneurship manifests in diverse forms across different cultural and economic contexts:

In Kenya, [M-KOPA](#) provides solar-powered energy solutions to [off-grid homes](#) in East Africa. Using a pay-as-you-go model, customers can purchase solar kits through micro-payments via mobile phones. This model not only delivers clean energy but also creates jobs and reduces reliance on harmful kerosene.

Founded in 2011, M-KOPA has connected over 1 million homes, saving households millions in energy costs while significantly lowering carbon emissions. Its scalable and tech-enabled approach exemplifies how social entrepreneurship can address multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) simultaneously.

In India, [Araku Coffee](#) involves indigenous farmers in the Eastern Ghats of India. Founded by the Naandi Foundation, it helps tribal communities grow organic coffee using biodynamic farming techniques and provides them access to global markets. The project has transformed lives by raising incomes, improving education, and reducing migration from rural to urban areas. Araku Coffee is now internationally recognized for both its quality and social impact, selling in premium markets in France, Japan, and beyond.

Launched in 1991, [The Big Issue](#) in the United Kingdom addresses homelessness through economic empowerment. It publishes a magazine sold by homeless individuals, who buy it at a reduced price and sell it at retail price, keeping the profit. The Big Issue has expanded into investment through Big Issue Invest, supporting other social enterprises across the UK. The organization has helped over 100,000 vendors and provided millions in social investment funds.

Located in New York, [Greyston Bakery](#) is known not just for its brownies (famously used by Ben & Jerry's) but for its open hiring model. It provides jobs without asking for resumes or background checks, focusing instead on giving opportunities to people who face barriers to employment—such as formerly incarcerated individuals or the homeless. Business as a tool for social justice.

In Jamaica, [360Recycling](#) focuses on sustainable waste management and environmental education. They create furniture, building materials, and art from recycled plastics and other materials. The enterprise trains and employs local youth, especially those from underserved communities, helping to combat both unemployment and environmental degradation. Their efforts divert tons of waste from landfills, provide environmental education in schools, and creates jobs in the green innovation sector.

Founded In Chile, [Techo](#) is a youth-led nonprofit and social enterprise that addresses housing inequality in Latin America. It mobilizes volunteers to build transitional housing for families living in informal settlements while advocating for long-term policy solutions. Operating in 19 countries across Latin America and the Caribbean, Techo has built more than 100,000 homes, empowering thousands of families to access better living conditions and community development.

Public Policies Supporting Social Entrepreneurship

Social Enterprises are a prime example of private action enabled by public policy. Because these enterprises fall into a regulatory and economic zone that is neither business nor social service, they face a number of challenges. Often, they are too mission-driven for traditional commercial investors, and too business-oriented for traditional donors. In many countries there is no clear legal framework, making it hard to register, get tax benefits, or qualify for contracts or grants. These organizations frequently struggle to attract talent because positions usually pay less than in the commercial sector.

However, public policy can respond to these challenges.

Some countries have developed legal forms specifically for social enterprises, making it easier for them to operate and attract funding:

- The United Kingdom introduced the Community Interest Company (CIC) in 2005, offering a legal status for enterprises that use their profits for public good.
- In the United States, several states have adopted the Benefit Corporation (B Corp) status, which legally allows businesses to prioritize social and environmental goals alongside profit.
- In Italy, the concept of Social Cooperatives has existed since the 1990s, offering tax incentives and legal protections for enterprises serving public interests.

Many governments provide funding, grants, and tax breaks:

- France has created a robust Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) framework, which includes subsidies and preferential treatment in public procurement for social enterprises.
- South Korea offers significant support through its Social Enterprise Promotion Act, which includes certification programs, subsidies, and training.
- The European Union provides funding through initiatives such as the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Social Impact Accelerator, aimed at fostering job creation and inclusion.

Governments also invest in training, mentorship, and incubation programs to develop the social entrepreneurship.

1. India's Atal Innovation Mission includes support for social startups through incubation centers and innovation labs.
2. The Australian Government supports social enterprises through partnerships with impact investment firms and capacity-building networks like Social Traders.
3. Canada has launched initiatives like the Investment Readiness Program (IRP), offering support to help social enterprises prepare for investment.

Governments can stimulate demand for social enterprise services through public procurement:

- In the UK, the Social Value Act mandates that public sector bodies consider social value in procurement decisions, giving social enterprises a competitive edge.
- The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) includes provisions for minority-owned and mission-driven businesses to access government contracts more easily.

Integrated Workforce Development

Of all the public policy interventions to create good jobs, integrated workforce development appears most successful. In contrast, the much-used policy of job attraction through subsidy and tax incentives often falls short. Local and national governments outbid each other to win outside investments in new facilities and the number of new good jobs is often negligible.

Project Quest

Amanda Villarreal had a low paid clerical job in San Antonio when her coworkers told her about Project Quest. Quest brokers individualized workforce training in high demand sectors: currently healthcare, advanced manufacturing and trades, and information technology.

Villarreal's story—told in an [interview](#) with Quest counselor Maria Salazar—illustrates how the program's unusual configuration leads to success. Quest integrates instruction, mostly provided by local community colleges, and individualized coaching, assessment, and financial support.

Comprehensive Approach



At lunch with her coworkers, Villarreal said that she wanted to return to school to qualify for a better job in the medical field and then added, “I’m not in a position where I can afford...or even think about it.” A wise colleague suggested project Quest. Villarreal enrolled in the associate’s degree nursing program. With Salazar’s help, she is planning further education.

Reflecting on her experience, Villarreal says, “I think it is more than just financial [help].... Maybe you just don’t have the strength or support to get it done. Project Quest has been financial, it has been school, it has been a cheerleader.”

Research into how good jobs are created creation points toward workforce development—investing in workers and their training—rather than providing incentives to companies or industries through subsidies or tax incentives. Incentives frequently fail for reasons that are easy to understand. All firms want to control costs and to use labor as efficiently as possible. This leads firms to streamline jobs, set higher productivity levels and look for places in the world where they can produce at lower costs. Except when firms compete to attract highly skilled workers, the incentive to create good jobs decreases. Some researchers argue that firms can take the high road boosting profits by investing in employees, but evidence is thin.

But many workforce development programs fail, too. Training alone doesn’t lead to success. which makes the integrated approach illustrated by Quest so powerful. Participants attend weekly sessions that are part accountability and part support. In addition to instruction in skills, participants get lessons in subjects like time management and advice on how to navigate college-

level classes. Its services can include rental assistance, scholarships, job interview prep, funds for tuition and books.

The [organization](#) was born in 1992 in a low-income Hispanic community and was originally the brainchild of a longstanding community group that was started around the organizing principles of Saul Alinsky.

The long-term results have been dramatic. A [longitudinal study](#) followed participants for 11 years. The positive effects on income were both large and sustained. Six years after entering the program participants' earnings were \$5,754 (26 percent) larger than the control group. By year 11 they were \$4,616 (15 percent) larger. Participants were also more likely to be employed.

Quest's approach of picking [high demand economic sectors](#) for training and mentorship also produces positive effects.

Over 30 years, [the project yielded](#) over \$2 billion in increased income, about \$14 for each dollar invested. More than 14,000 have been filled, and over \$600 million has been saved in welfare payments and unemployment insurance. Seventy percent of the participants have been women, 65 percent Hispanic.

Quest has been replicated in the United States—including in Austin, Houston, and Dallas—and in England in London, Nottingham, and Birmingham.

Making Agriculture 'Cool' and Profitable

Agriculture suffers from an image and sustenance problem. For over a century, people have migrated from farms to cities in search of better work and a more comfortable lifestyle. Farm work is associated with drudgery and poverty. Where people's hearts are attracted to the countryside, their minds are engaged in urban settings and depopulation and decline have visited rural areas worldwide. Farming is not attractive, not cool. Alpha Sennon wants to change that.

Sennon wants young people to look at a field and see a future, not a fallback. The Trinidad-and-Tobago-born social entrepreneur, now pursuing a PhD in agriscience education at Auburn University, founded [WHYFARM](#) ("We Help You-th Farm") after realizing that school career days were full of pilots and doctors but "no farmers."



His answer is pure “agri-edu-tainment”: live school shows, comics, rap lyrics and, above all, a caped superhero called AGRIman, “the world’s most powerful food provider,” who turns photosynthesis into storylines and climate science into punchlines.

Sennon frames farming as a 21st-century moon-shot for youth: tech-savvy “agripreneurs” using drones, data and hydroponics to feed nine billion people and cool the planet. “The soil is the new oil and the grass is the new gas,” he tells students, arguing that the [post-petroleum Caribbean](#) can harvest prosperity from kale and cassava instead of crude oil.

He backs the rhetoric with starter kits, school gardens and a quickly growing “AGRiverse” of others.

WHYFARM’s logic is simple: the world’s farmers are ageing (average age ≈ 60), yet the global jobs crisis is youth centric. By rebranding agriculture as “agriKOOLture,” Sennon shows how tomorrow’s good jobs can sprout from soil, sensors and storytelling. As he says, “You have to inspire them, plant the seeds in their minds and let them know agriculture is a career option.” When those seeds take root, a new generation is ready to wear the farmer’s cape.

In addition to making farming “cool,” it must be profitable, a challenge particularly for small farmers who depart from industrialized agriculture.

The [Alliance of Rural Communities of Trinidad and Tobago \(ARC\)](#) is a coalition of 14 grassroots organizations from rural, forest-based, and indigenous communities working to reclaim agency over their livelihoods, environment, and cultural heritage.

Formed in 2015, ARC supports community empowerment through agroecology, sustainable forest management, climate resilience, and youth leadership. While each member community—such as Brasso Seco, Grande Riviere, and Paria—is distinct, they share common goals: to strengthen food security, resist environmental degradation, and promote economic self-determination.

ARC’s work centers on peer learning and collective action. Through workshops, farmer field schools, and participatory governance, the Alliance helps members adopt sustainable farming practices and develop small-scale rural enterprises, particularly in cocoa, herbal remedies, and community tourism. Their model is built on mutual aid and “ground-up” decision-making, emphasizing women’s leadership and youth engagement. As one member put it, “We are doing this not just for us, but to ensure our young people can stay in the community and thrive.”

ARC has also become a policy voice, engaging in national consultations on climate adaptation and food systems. Their advocacy bridges local knowledge with national agendas. During the COVID-19 pandemic, ARC communities expanded backyard gardening and seed saving to boost food resilience, illustrating the Alliance’s adaptive ethos.

In contrast to top-down models, ARC represents a community-led vision for sustainable rural futures—one where good jobs come not from extraction, but from regeneration, rooted in place and people.

Urban agriculture’s new wave is less about rustic allotments than about high-tech towers, rooftop greens and story-rich classrooms that reconnect city kids to soil. Johannes Langemeyer and colleagues argue that “[urban agriculture enhances urban resilience](#), sustainability and multifunctionality,” yet is still undervalued in land-use planning. Principled development can change that equation by making city farming simultaneously profitable, climate-smart and socially inclusive—especially for young people searching for purposeful work.

Nowhere is the transformation clearer than Singapore, a land-scarce city-state that imports more than 90 per cent of its food yet has pledged to produce [30 per cent of its nutritional needs locally](#) by 2030—the “30 by 30” agenda. Flagship projects such as [Sky Greens](#) stack 38 rotating troughs on nine-meter A-frames to grow leafy vegetables that reach supermarkets the same day. According to the company, “production yield ... is 5 to 10 times more per unit area compared to traditional farms,” while the hydraulic system runs on a [single 60-watt bulb’s worth of energy](#). The model illustrates Langemeyer’s multifunctional triad: local food supply, tiny land footprint, and green-tech jobs ranging from agronomists to equipment technicians.

Conclusion: Returning to L.A.

This paper began with a story about Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles. We now come full circle. Homeboy has grown beyond its motto “nothing stops a bullet like a job.” The [deeper idea is healing](#). “Kids join gangs because of a lethal absence of hope,” Fr. Greg Boyle says, “and

because they're traumatized and have mental health issues." So, in addition to supplying jobs and an education, the goal is to infuse hope. And the ultimate goal is to "enter exquisite mutuality where there's no daylight that separates us."

Instead of wraparound services, Homeboy creates a wraparound place: somewhere gang members and drug pushers, people that society has discarded, go to realize their humanity. Like Quest in San Antonio, Homeboy offers a full menu of education, training, counseling, and jobs, often beginning with erasing the marks of gang life with tattoo removal. But the purpose is not simply skilling or gaining competence. Jobs are not the endpoint in the story. In his latest book, *Cherished Belonging: The Healing Power of Love in Divided Times*, Boyle continues to tell the stories of his beloved homies. He tells of Alicia who after her first tattoo removal session wrote, "I'm inspired by the air in the place. I felt belonging" (p. 195).

There is a deep organizational story to be told about Homeboy. Universities have written teaching cases about its organization, and master's thesis and doctoral dissertations have been written about its growth and progression. There is now a worldwide network of programs that grew from its inspiration. The structure and organization of Homeboy invite your attention, but the fundamental truth about Homeboy is that it tells a new story.

"Everybody loves a story," [Boyle claims](#), adding, "None of it is about trying to win the argument. It is about hearts."

Humanity Intelligence starts with telling a new story, too: about connecting our inner selves with the capacity to create peace, shared prosperity, and a thriving planet. Telling that new story becomes a primary skill for those working to advance Humanity Intelligence.