




## Beating the Employment Challenges: How Unemployed Youths Generate Income for Their Households

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### Abstract

Youth unemployment remains a global threat to the achievement of the United Nations' sustainable development goals. It impedes the fight to end poverty in all its forms, limits opportunities to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, and undermines a country's ability to reduce inequalities. In Sub-Saharan African nations, the unemployment rate is particularly high because the environment is prone to volatility caused by poor governance, chronic conflicts, and corruption. Unemployed graduates who lack effective strategies risk failing to generate income for themselves and their families. Thus, my purpose in this qualitative multiple case study, which was grounded in achievement motivation theory, was to explore the strategies unemployed youths use to generate income for their households. Four unemployed South Sudanese graduates were interviewed and directly observed, and the gathered data were thematically analyzed. Three themes emerged: exploitation of available opportunities including taking on casual work, working for others to get starting capital, and engaging in trade and microbusiness. A key recommendation was developed: i.e., provide training programs to help unemployed graduates change their mindsets, which value white-collar jobs over casual work, trade, and microbusiness; they can then embark on the identification and exploitation of available opportunities that can create anything of economic value. The implications for positive social change include evidence that unemployed graduates are adopting appropriate strategies to improve their household income. The findings also have the potential to help youth empowerment institutions address the gaps in strategies for directing youths to generate income.

**Keywords:** United Nations' sustainable development goals, South Sudan, achievement motivation, unemployment, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, end poverty, reduce inequalities

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### Introduction

Unemployment remains a global problem and a major threat to the progress of developing nations, particularly countries that experience governance failure, corruption, and protracted conflicts (Buheji, 2019). In Sub-Saharan African nations, the unemployment rate is high because the environment is prone to volatility caused by poor governance, chronic conflicts, and corruption (Adelaja & George, 2020; Oluwaleye, 2021). The

effects of unemployment in African nations include the migration of young people to Europe, a high crime rate, drug abuse, terrorism, and a cycle of violent armed conflicts (Adelaja & George, 2020; Bagchi & Paul, 2018). Despite recent improvements in African economic growth, youth unemployment remains a great challenge to policymakers, youth empowerment agents, and investors (Alfonsi et al., 2020). The high youth unemployment rate in Africa is of great concern and warrants urgent solutions (Maulani & Agwanda, 2020). Unemployment among youths of working age remains a major problem for assuring global peace and security; therefore, policies and strategies aimed at reducing youth unemployment rates can benefit the society, the nation, and the global community (Buheji, 2019).

Although endowed with ample natural resources, South Sudan has been experiencing governance failure, widespread corruption, protracted armed conflicts, and polarization of communities, which have resulted in displacement and unprecedented poverty. Therefore, my aim in this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies unemployed youths use to generate income for their households. Even though youth unemployment in South Sudan is high, some youths have been generating income for themselves and their families. Their success encouraged me to explore the strategies they use to generate income for their households.

## Background of the Study

Although the population of South Sudan is small compared with that of many neighboring countries, youth unemployment is a major concern, as it impedes the nation's fight against hunger and poverty (East African Community, 2020). There are few available job opportunities, which are usually accessed by those with strong political connections (Chukwuemeka et al., 2013). Thus, graduates can spend many years looking for white-collar jobs and eventually resort to either menial labor or pass their time at tea places where, for years, they discuss unproductive politics or play cards, dominos, Ludo, and chess (Masquelier, 2013).

Although unemployment among graduates remains high, some unemployed graduates have decided to look for alternative means of income to sustain their families. They do this even though only white-collar jobs are valued in South Sudan.

## Problem Statement

Youth unemployment remains a global threat to the achievement of the United Nations' sustainable development goals (Buheji, 2019). It impedes the fight to end poverty in all its forms, limits opportunities to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, and undermines the ability to reduce inequalities, thereby jeopardizing the peace and stability of many African countries (Iduser et al., 2022). In Sub-Saharan African nations, the unemployment rate is high; as a result, terrorism, crime, drug abuse, and violent armed conflict are prevalent, motivating many young people to pursue a desperate journey to North America and Europe (Adelaja & George, 2020; Oluwaleye, 2021). Therefore, graduates need strategies to generate income for their households to enable them to end poverty, promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, and reduce inequalities in Africa.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies unemployed youths use to generate income for their households. For this purpose, four unemployed South Sudanese graduates were interviewed and directly observed, and the gathered data were thematically analyzed.

## Significance to Social Change

The findings yielded by my research will help society end poverty in all its forms, promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, and reduce inequalities. The findings may help unemployed youths adopt appropriate strategies to improve their household income. The findings may also help change the graduates' mindset, which values white-collar jobs and neglects other work opportunities that provide income, such as taking on casual work, toiling in a trade, and starting and running a microbusiness. My findings also can help youth empowerment institutions address the gaps in strategies for directing youths to generate income. Youth empowerment institutions can disseminate the findings through training programs, workshops, and conferences targeting young people of varying ages.

## Research Question

What strategies do unemployed youths use to generate income for their households?

## Interview Questions

1. What strategies have you used to generate income for yourself and your family?
2. What strategies did you find worked best for generating income for yourself and your family?
3. What major obstacles, if any, have you overcome to implement the strategies to generate income for yourself and your family?
4. How did you overcome the major obstacles?
5. What additional information would you like to share regarding strategies you have used to generate income for yourself and your family?

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was achievement motivation theory (AMT). McClelland revealed that motivation varies according to one's desire for achievement and improving the efficiency with which an activity is performed (Werdhiastutie et al., 2020). Atkinson postulated that individual achievement motivation is based on hope for success and the desire to avoid failure (Werdhiastutie et al., 2020). Unemployed youths who are providing food to their households have the responsibility to generate monthly income for themselves and their families and to avoid failure at any cost. I selected the AMT as the conceptual framework for this study because achievement-motivated individuals focus on goal attainment; performance improvement; and desire to do things in a better, more effective, and more efficient way; and strive to avoid failure at any cost (Anderman, 2020; Singh, 2011; Locke & Schattke, 2019; Nolen, 2020). Therefore, AMT would assist me in identifying and understanding strategies that the participants developed and implemented to generate income for their households.

## Literature Review

Unemployment remains a global problem and a major threat to the progress of developing nations, particularly countries that experience governance failure, corruption, and protracted conflicts (Adelaja & George, 2020). In Sub-Saharan African nations, the unemployment rate is high because the environment is

prone to volatility caused by poor governance, chronic conflicts, and corruption (Adelaja & George, 2020; Oluwaleye, 2021). Despite improvements in African economic growth, youth unemployment remains a great challenge to policymakers, youth empowerment agents, and investors (Alfonsi et al., 2020). The effects of youth unemployment in African nations are felt beyond the African continent, including Europe and North America, as poverty causes migration, crime, terrorism, and a cycle of violent armed conflicts (Adelaja & George, 2020; Bagchi & Paul, 2018). The failure of African governments to develop sustainable economies and provide employment opportunities to the working-age youth population is the major booster to violent armed conflicts, crime, terrorism, and migration (Mukosa et al., 2020; Okolie & Igbini, 2020).

Lack of employment opportunities for working-age youths is a critical waste of human resources; it leads to the propagation of the cycle of poverty in the society because those who have failed to get employment opportunities feel marginalized by the government and resort to crime, such as theft, prostitution, robbery, and murder (Buheji, 2019; Mukosa et al., 2020). Lack of employment opportunities affects peoples' capacity for social development, poverty alleviation, and social integration because persistent unemployment has detrimental effects on social development (Buheji, 2019). Long-term youth unemployment generates low self-esteem and frustration and increases youths' vulnerability to drugs, crime, diseases, and violence (Buheji, 2019). Persistent youth unemployment leads to the marginalization and exclusion of young people from contributing to the economic development of a nation (Mukosa et al., 2020). Thus, creating employment opportunities for youths is an important step for completing their transition to adulthood, self-reliance, attainment of a better life, and breaking the poverty cycle in a society (Akinyetun et al., 2021; Amarasuriya et al., 2009).

Though factors such as poor economic performance of a country, lack of privatization, a high percentage of youth in the population, inadequate training opportunities, skills mismatch, lack of experience, and poor quality of education contribute to youth unemployment in many countries, unemployment in South Sudan is attributed to prevalent corruption, dysfunctional public and private institutions, and a weak labor market (Akashraj & Atem, 2020).

## Methodology

The purpose of my qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies unemployed youths use to generate income for their households. I chose qualitative research methodology because it enables researchers to study phenomena of interest from the participants' viewpoints in their natural settings (Atmowardoyo, 2018). Researchers use the case study design to clearly understand the phenomenon by exploring participants' experiences (Atmowardoyo, 2018). Multiple case study design is more compelling and robust because it involves a collection of data from multiple sources (Yin, 2018). Thus, using a multiple case study design in my research increased the likelihood of capturing a diverse selection of strategies that unemployed youths use to generate income for their households. The population for this study consisted of unemployed youths who are generating income for their households in Juba. I obtained a sample from the unemployed youths population to understand strategies they use to generate income for their households. I collected data via semi-structured face-to-face interviews and direct observations of four South Sudanese unemployed graduates who are generating income for their households. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to conduct open-ended data collection and explore participants experiences, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings about the research topic (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). According to Morgan et al. (2017), direct observation helps in collecting information participants may deem irrelevant or may be unwilling to share. I used member checking to validate my interpretation of the analyzed data. I interpreted interview responses provided by participants, shared interpretations back with the participants to verify my interpretation, and incorporated participants' concerns into the analysis. The use of multiple sources of data allowed me to explain the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives and mitigated my personal biases that would have interfered with the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data (Fusch et al., 2018).

## Key Findings and Discussion

The research question guiding my study was: What strategies do unemployed youths use to generate income for their households? I used AMT as the conceptual lens to conduct the research. I gathered data by interviewing and directly observing four South Sudanese graduates with no formal employment contracts but who are generating income for their households. Thematic analysis revealed the exploitation of available opportunities, including taking on casual work, working for others to get starting capital, and engaging in trade and microbusiness as the three main themes.

**Table 1:** *Exploitation of Available Opportunities, Including Taking on Casual Work*

Theme 1	Textual description (comments from participants)
The exploitation of available opportunities, including taking on casual work, was the strategy used by the four participants to generate income for their households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I may say to any unemployed youths that if you need money, check for available opportunities, including casual work. (P1)</li> <li>• We are in a difficult era of life. But having been in a difficult life, you don't surrender yourself to poverty; you try all possible means to get rid of poverty at that very difficult time; maybe, at a time, things work, maybe you will come back and resort to your white-collar job. (P2)</li> <li>• My statement to youth is to get an available job, work hard day and night to get something for a living because you are energetic young people and the backbone of the family and the nation. (P3)</li> <li>• Another strategy I used was to make sure I looked for other opportunities outside; opportunities were rare to get, but I tried to do everything possible. Anything is possible, even manual and casual jobs bring food to the table. (P4)</li> </ul>

The textual descriptions from Theme 1 show how participants exploited available opportunities, including taking on casual work, to earn income for their families. All participants believed that if graduates who are unemployed change their mindset, which values white-collar jobs over casual work, trade, and microbusiness, and embark on the identification and exploitation of available opportunities, they can create something of economic value to enable them to generate income for their households. This statement concurs with the findings reported by Tajpour et al. (2018) that successful leaders are those who identify and exploit available opportunities for economic gain.

When unemployed youths identify and exploit available opportunities for economic gain, they can be entrepreneurs. Haugh (2021) asserted that recognition and exploitation of opportunities for economic gain is a starting point for entrepreneurship. Tajpour et al. (2018) similarly noted that entrepreneurs recognize and exploit opportunities to create something of economic value. Without the exploitation of available opportunities, there is no entrepreneurship (Othman et al., 2020). Iduser et al. (2022) recommended the importance of entrepreneurial ventures to reduce youth unemployment, promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, end poverty, and reduce inequalities. Youths who are deprived of hope for success and desire to avoid failure to provide food for their households are motivated to identify and exploit available opportunities to create something of economic value, including taking on casual or poorly paying jobs (Werdhiastutie et al., 2020). Giniuniene and Pundziene (2020) similarly opined that managers who identify and exploit available opportunities are entrepreneurs and can create economic value.

**Table 2:** *Working for Others to Get Starting Capital*

Theme 2	Textual description (comments from participants)
Working for others to get starting capital was the strategy used by the four participants to generate income for their households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="711 321 1458 384">• I got the starting capital through agriculture and fishing for other fishermen. (P1)</li> <li data-bbox="711 415 1458 583">• In the first month, I worked with some people because I lacked the capital to buy a net. After working with these people for a while, they started trusting me and lent me SSP 50,000 with 10% interest. I used that SSP 50,000 to buy some nets for myself. (P2)</li> <li data-bbox="711 615 1458 678">• I worked for others to get money to start my business. I got the starting capital from casual work. (P3)</li> <li data-bbox="711 709 1458 978">• I can tell young people and those looking for a job, in general, that they should take up anything possible, be it a casual job or a white-collar job because you need to meet your daily demands at the end of the day. The objective is to have something at the end of the day, so they should accept any kind of work because you should not just be playing dominos, cards, and other games just because you don't have a white-collar job. (P4)</li> </ul>

The textual descriptions from Theme 2 show how participants worked for others to gain starting capital for their microbusinesses. All participants believed that if unemployed graduates change their mindset that focuses on white-collar jobs and accept working for others who are running microbusinesses, including manual work, they can gain the resources they need to start their own microbusiness. This can eventually help them generate income for their households. When youths generate income for their households, they contribute to ending poverty, promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, and reducing inequalities (Iduser et al., 2022). Potential entrepreneurs assemble financial capital from families or loan institutions to purchase supplies and essential equipment to begin operations (Chienwattanasook & Jermittiparsert, 2019). However, it is hard for many young graduates in South Sudan to get the starting capital because their families lack the resources needed, and financial institutions, which are supposed to provide loan opportunities, are bankrupt. Therefore, unemployed graduates in South Sudan have little or no other available options to obtain starting capital than getting jobs in other small businesses. Unemployed youths who need to start a microbusiness have the responsibility to look for any means of earning money to attain their goals and avoid failure at any cost (Werdhiastutie et al., 2020).

**Table 3:** *Engaging in Trade and Microbusiness*

Theme 3	Textual description (comments from participants)
Engaging in trade and microbusiness was the strategy used by the four participants to generate income for their households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="711 317 1458 449">• I sell second-hand goods on the local market at the lowest price to get the money. That is one of the first strategies I've used to generate money, and I fish to catch fish and sell them to the people. (P1)</li> <li data-bbox="711 485 1458 716">• I resort to fishing because, around 2020, that place was full of water, and that water was carrying a lot of fish, these Nile perch, so I just resorted and combined myself with other energetic guys who know how to make netting, so from there, I go every morning to collect some fish, and I sell them to those who are preserving fish through salting method. (P2)</li> <li data-bbox="711 751 1458 814">• I used to buy sorghum, groundnuts, goats, and sheep and sell them to traders. (P3)</li> <li data-bbox="711 850 1458 1010">• What I thought was to initiate a business, something that would sustain the family as I looked for the job, and I realized it was the right thing to do. I initiated an M-pesa (mobile phone-based money transfer service) so that one could be able to earn something at the end of the day. (P4)</li> </ul>

The textual descriptions from Theme 3 show how participants engaged in trade and microbusinesses earned income for their families. All participants believed that if unemployed graduates change their mindsets from focusing on white-collar jobs to accepting an engagement in trade and microbusinesses, they were able to generate income for their households. This can contribute to ending poverty in all its forms, promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, and reducing inequalities. Pavuk (2017) demonstrated that the establishment and development of a microbusiness is a valuable tool in combating unemployment. Therefore, unemployed graduates should invest their family resources in trade and establish microbusinesses to provide them with employment and improve their livelihood and that of their dependents (Pavuk, 2017).

Microbusinesses contribute to the financial and social advancement of a country by creating jobs and generating income for the owners (Singh, 2021). According to Chienwattanasook and Jermstittiparsert (2019), the development of microbusinesses is a driving force in the economic and social development of a nation. Unemployed graduates who have a desire to provide food for their families and improve their livelihoods should engage in trade and microbusinesses to generate income for themselves and their families (Werdhiastutie et al., 2020).

## Recommendations

The recommendations are as follows: unemployed graduates should change their mindset that values white-collar jobs over casual work, trade, and microbusiness; they should embark on the identification and exploitation of available opportunities that can create anything of economic value to enable them to generate income for their households. By changing their mindset, unemployed graduates can identify and exploit available opportunities for economic gain and become entrepreneurs. Additionally, unemployed graduates should save up to start their own microbusinesses, which can eventually help them generate income for their

households. Finally, unemployed graduates should accept any work available to generate income for their households.

My study had some limitations. In particular, given that only four South Sudanese youths took part, the findings cannot be generalized to South Sudan as a whole or more broadly. Thus, further research with larger and more diverse samples is needed to compare the results reported here with those obtained in other countries.

## Conclusion

Youth unemployment remains a global threat to the progress of the United Nations' sustainable development goals (Buheji, 2019). In Sub-Saharan African nations, the unemployment rate is high because the environment is prone to volatility caused by poor governance, chronic conflicts, and corruption (Adelaja & George, 2020; Oluwaleye, 2021). The purpose of my qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies unemployed youths use to generate income for their households.

My findings revealed that exploitation of available opportunities, including taking on casual work, working for others to get starting capital, and engaging in trade and microbusinesses, are the main strategies that unemployed graduates used to generate income for their households. According to the participants, if unemployed youths change their mindsets that value white-collar jobs over casual work, trade, and microbusiness, and embark on the identification and exploitation of available opportunities, they can create something of economic value to enable them to generate income for their households. By changing their mindset, unemployed graduates can identify and exploit available opportunities for economic gain and become entrepreneurs. Moreover, unemployed graduates should save up to start their own microbusinesses, which can eventually help them generate income for their households. Finally, unemployed graduates should accept any work available to generate income for their households.



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