

**Reducing Unemployment: Voices from unemployed youth graduates in Namibia**

**A science education for youth working group “top-up” funding project.**

**By: Elina Amadhila**

## **Introduction**

Youth are the potential and future of every country and governments with a long-term vision for welfare and development in their countries, are concerned with the best ways to integrate the young people into the labour force (Görlich, Stepanok & Al-Hussami, 2013). Namibia's population is youthful (15-34) with approximately 37% of the population aged younger than 15 years and more than half (58%) below 25 years but the 2016 Labour Force Survey indicates that the overall youth unemployment rate was estimated to be 46.1% (Keulder, 2021). This figure is nearly 3 times as many as the global average of 17.2 percent reported by the ILO (2016). Namibia, a country whose population is dominated by the youth should be enjoying increased benefit from their contribution to economic growth, however due to lack of employment opportunities, this is not the case. The high rate of unemployment amongst the youth is made up of graduates who join the labour market every year and are not accommodated for. As such it hinders development and growth, and leads to low standard of living, high income inequality and even higher poverty rates (Karuuombe, 2023).

Unemployment has become a pressing issue for Namibia and hence the country has been working towards reducing unemployment to justifiable levels. Unemployment increased from 2014 when the rate of unemployment was 27.9 percent to 33.4 percent in 2018 (NSA, 2018) much higher than youth unemployment (46.1%). An individual is typically considered unemployed when he or she has not worked for a specific period but would like to and is, hence, actively searching for work (Görlich, Stepanok & Al-Hussami, 2013). The purpose of this study was to explore views from unemployed youth graduates on how they perceive the issue of unemployment could be solved. Three key questions were asked as follows:

1. What are the causes of youth unemployment in Namibia?
2. Do you perceive there are efforts made by the government to solve youth unemployment in Namibia
3. How do you think the youth unemployment problem could be solved in Namibia

## **Literature Review**

As much as the youth face a lower opportunity cost for resigning, are less likely to have dependents that they need to support that they turn to higher education as a more natural and viable option for them than for adults, youth also face higher barriers to entry into the labour

market due to their lack of experience (Görlich, Stepanok & Al-Hussami, 2013) hence the high rate of unemployment. In a more recent study by Asif, Pasha, Mumtaz and Sabir (2023), they found that one of the main causes of youth unemployment is a lack of government investment in the economy, which has resulted in a lack of job creation opportunities (Asif, Pasha, Mumtaz, & Sabir, 2023). Skill mismatch and structural macroeconomic factors such as government capital expenditure, real exchange rate, interest rate and trade openness are also identified as other factors that cause youth unemployment suggesting that youth unemployment is structural in nature (Olubusoye, Salisu & Olofin, 2023). For the unemployed graduates in Ethiopia, Ambachew (2021) found that the lack of entrepreneurship skills in addition to low education quality, huge rural urban migration, mismatch of skill with the labour market and higher population growth were among the main causes of tertiary graduate unemployment. Sole for African Chils (2023) noted that many graduates in Africa face challenges in navigating the job market due to a lack of job search skills and limited social networks.

To reduce the unemployment rate, the government and other stakeholders need to focus on providing better education and employment opportunities for young people. Furthermore, the government should also focus on creating a more conducive environment for businesses and investments so that new jobs can be created. Additionally, the government should invest in education and training, create more jobs in the informal sector, and increase access to finance and economic development projects (Asif et al. 2023). As part of efforts to reduce youth unemployment, Olubusoye et al. (2023) opine that lesser labour laws and regulations reduce youth unemployment because of fewer regulations to prevent wage from falling downwards. However, the results show that the increased flexibility cause youth unemployment to increase in the long run. Sole for African Child (2024) suggested practical solutions to reduce unemployment in Africa. These are industrialisation, investments in education, entrepreneurship, employer training, opportunities, and private sector-led growth. These are explained to include: 1) Industrialisation includes promotion of cottage industries and supporting value-add initiatives will create jobs and help the youths to be gainfully employed. 2) Investment in education includes career guidance, entrepreneurship training, internships and developing uniquely human skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and empathy. 3) entrepreneurship should promote entrepreneurship and innovation among graduates. 4) Employer training whereby employers are trained to help them better understand the needs of their workforce and the market trends as well as by 4) providing opportunities for internships and work placements, employers can offer valuable professional experience to

graduates as a way to offer opportunities to graduates. Lastly, 5) governments must create an enabling environment that supports private sector investment, fosters innovation, and promotes the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Unemployment as a social issue affects not only the unemployed but also family members of those directly affected and society at large (NSA, 2018) as most youth and their families have hopes of leading better lives after graduation and these hopes are cut when the youth do not secure employment (Ambachew, 2021).

Studies such as that by Shiyukifeni (2005) and Amakali (2018) have already explored this topic on youth unemployment in Namibia but have looked at youth including the unskilled and the consequences of youth unemployment on national security respectively. Other studies such as the one by Tafirenyika and Akanbi have generally examined sources of unemployment without focusing on specific groups. The contribution of these studies is recognised but they have not formulated targeted solutions for different categories of youth. The employment requirements or needs of the skilled (graduates) are different from the unskilled (non-graduates). The focus on unemployed graduates therefore fills the gap in the literature on by attempting to formulate targeted solutions for unemployed graduates.

## **Methodology**

Given the main question asked on the causes and how the youth believe the unemployment rate could be reduced, the study employed a qualitative methodological approach. In terms of the research design, Bengsston (2015) states that “how/why” questions can be better answered when a case study research design is employed and when coupled with Qualitative methodology helps contribute to an understanding of the human condition in different contexts and of a perceived situation (Bengsston 2015).

## **Population, Sampling strategy and sample size**

The target population was unemployed graduates in Namibia. The study employed non-probability sampling methods, specifically purposive sampling (using judgement to select cases) in terms of youth who are graduates but unemployed and snowball sampling i.e. requesting participants to suggest other graduates in the same age category (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016). To apply snowball sampling the researcher with 3 research assistants first contacted one unemployed graduate known to them who provided details of other unemployed graduates and these further provided more names of other graduates. The researcher conducted

semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews include a short-list of ‘guiding’ questions that are supplemented by follow-up and probing questions that are dependent on the interviewee’s responses (DeJonkcheere & Vaughn, 2019). Each interview lasted for about 45 minutes.

### **Data analysis**

Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA) was used to analyse the data. The approach is phenomenological in that it involves detailed examination of the participant's lifeworld; it attempts to explore personal experience and is concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This means, (1) I listened to the lived experiences of the youth, and (2) making sense of/interpreting their narratives. The youth responded to the main question, “Tell me your perception on what can be done to reduce the youth unemployment rate in Namibia?” As per the IPA, it is important to consider the smallest details of the data while still seeing the larger, holistic picture (Smith et al. 2009 cited in Lourens & Swartz, 2016). Each interview was analysed separately. The researcher read each line carefully, in the search for underlying meanings and patterns between lines. In this way, themes within one interview were identified, whereafter I rewrote the story of everyone. Hereafter, the researcher searched for themes across the cases so that readers could hear the joined voices of participants (Smith 2011 cited in Lourens & Swartz, 2016). Each interview’s transcribed pages consisted of 5-6 typed pages.

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical issues were explained during the interview, particularly participants’ right to withdraw from the study at any time. Thereafter they were requested to orally provide their consent on an audio recording. All interviews were audio recorded and, after transcription, these recordings were destroyed. To protect the identity of each participant, no names were used in this paper.

## Results and Discussion

Data collection stretched over 2 months from 20 participants. Participants were between the ages of 18-34 although the majority (60%) fell into the category of 23-27 years of age. As mentioned in the methodology section, the target was youth with undergraduate qualifications. The qualifications obtained by participants ranged from Laws, Pre and lower primary education, Hospitality and Tourism, Education, Bachelor in Business Management, Dental Surgery, Artisan and Bachelor of Business Management, Bachelor of Architecture, B.tech in Civil Engineering, Bachelor and Honours in Regional and Rural Studies, Bachelor Marketing Management, Bachelors of communication, Bachelor of Economics, Bachelors in Public Management, and an honours Degree in Digital Communication Technology. The oldest graduate graduated in 2014 with a degree in hospitality and tourism followed by a graduate in 2016 who graduated with a degree in Artisan and later went on to study a Bachelor of Business Management. The most recent graduates graduated in 2023 (4 in total) with three having qualifications in Law and one in lower and primary education. This shows that there are some graduates who have been unemployed for longer than 5 years.

Most participants (80%) moved from regions they were born to Khomas Region specifically Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia for job opportunities. The following quotes illustrates:

*No, I'm currently based in Khomas. Reason being I just want to be closer to places such as printing shops, police stations etc to be able to apply for jobs without struggling with finding cabs and working long distance to get to the above-mentioned places. (Participant 5).*

*I moved to Windhoek when I was in grade 11 in high school and since stayed here through university. Now I am just here in Windhoek because of the jobs opportunities that I am getting here, in IT, it will be very hard to get a job in my Region Omusati (Participant 20).*

*I am based in Okahandja at the moment. I moved from Erongo because most of the opportunities are in Windhoek however the livelihood of Windhoek is too expensive so I decided to stay in a town that is affordable but close to Windhoek (Participant 1).*

Three (3) participants moved from Oshikoto region, three (3) from Omusati, three (3) from Ohangwena, one (1) from Kavango West, Two (2) from Erongo two (2) from Oshana and One

(1) from Omaheke region. The rest either remained in their regions or were born in Khomas and reside there to date. (see Figure 1 for regions).

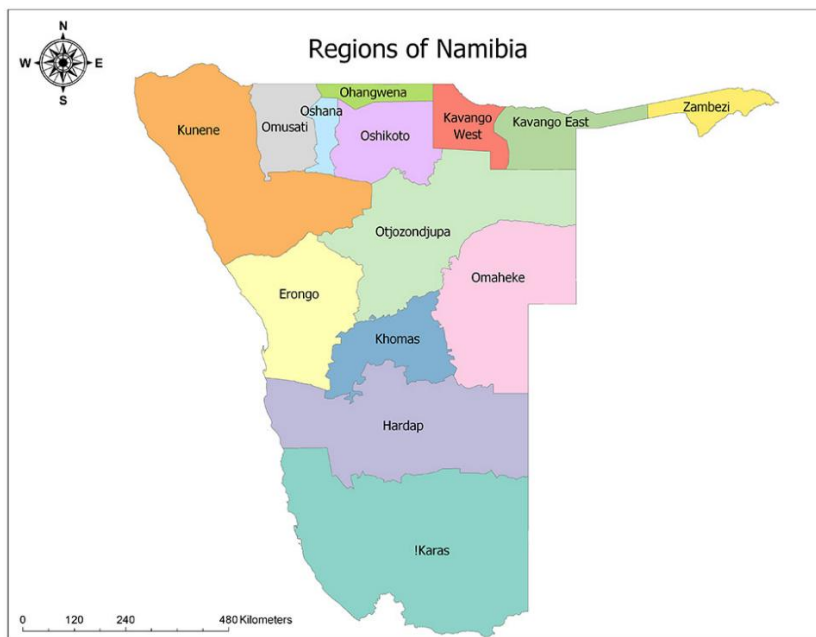


Figure 1: Map of Namibia with regions

Source: Mappr (2024)

Most of the regions where the participants interviewed in this study moved from are considered as rural regions as compared to Khomas. Mueller (n.d.) argues that this is a pertinent concern in terms of the quality of jobs and employment opportunities in rural areas and whether they can lift rural workers, farmers, business owners and their families out of poverty.

Four main themes emerged from the analysis namely reasons for unemployment, efforts made to reduce unemployment, suggestions to reduce unemployment and possibilities of achieving Vision 2030.

### **Reasons for unemployment**

Participants pointed out many reasons for the high unemployment rate ranging from employment of relatives and friends, qualifications falling short of industry needs, rules on retirement age and few job opportunities. These are in line with Yilma's (2016) findings who found that the main factors that contribute to unemployment of young graduates are skill mismatch, unavailability of early retirement scheme, inadequate practical skills, lack of entrepreneurship skills and to some extent the attitudes of graduates.

*Corruption, I think we now live in a world where people only care about themselves and their loved ones which is heart-breaking for example if one works at a certain school/place and there is a post there they would rather give that post to his or her child whether they have passed the interview or not than giving it to someone who has qualified and has met all the requirements (Participant 4).*

*The institutions have courses that the markets do not need. There are too many graduates that are pumped out into a market that doesn't need them. So, it's simple, the education system is failing us. From primary schools, kids are not well informed to university, that's why they don't know what courses are on demand and which are not (participant 11).*

*I think it has to do with planning. Because if you look at the retirement age that the government has put up with 55 as early retirements which is optional, people don't go on retirement. I think it should be mandatory because if you look at our small population, we can't accommodate each other so we have to wait for people to die, get promoted or get fired to get opportunities. People must be forced to retire to make room for people on the ground (Participant 14).*

Boheim, 2014; Banks et al., 2008 cited in Yilma (2016) found no evidence that reducing the retirement age leads to creating jobs for younger workers. Those who oppose increasing the retirement age argue that keeping older workers leads to lower opportunity for employment of young graduates. Yilma (2016) opined that encouraging aged public service employees to take early retirement might help to increase the chance of young graduates getting jobs. However, there must be supporting mechanisms such as entrepreneurial training before older workers leave their jobs.

*One reason why I think youth unemployment is so high is because there are more people graduating but fewer jobs. The reason why there are few jobs is because a lot of people are pursuing to get a degree to find a job and none of them are going to entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is the one thing that can provide job but few people go into entrepreneurship (Participant 17).*

Zwane, Radebe and Mlambo (2021) agree with participants in this paper that entrepreneurship is key to reducing youth unemployment but only if laws and regulations are implemented that will create a favourable environment for businesses to operate, encourage youth participation in entrepreneurship activities and allow businesses to grow.



### **Lack of efforts to reduce unemployment.**

Many youths did not necessarily feel that much is being done to reduce the unemployment rate among the youth. The reasons for these feelings are emanating from a change in curriculum at high school and introducing new and higher progression requirements to university, poor implementation of policies and increasing rates in unemployment and subsequently crime.

*No, I see no effort being made. All I see is a country trying to make things hard for the youth. Why change the curriculums to set a lot of children for failure? Many learners are failing because even teachers are forced to teach things they don't understand. This is a lost generation, a sad generation (Participant 5).*

*I think from a policy perspective yes, they are making efforts, but practically no, the implementation of these policies is very poor (Participant 9).*

*I don't think there are efforts done because unemployment is going high year after year it has been the same thing I don't see any changes. Unemployed people are still roaming around; crimes are still increasing in the country so I don't think the government is doing anything to overcome this issue (Participant 15).*

From the quotes above, many graduates feel there are no efforts being made and the future looks bleak. The increasing rate of youth unemployment is a contributing factor to these perceptions especially that some of the participants have been unemployed for periods longer than 5 years. However, there were a few participants who felt that there are some efforts being made by introducing rules that force foreign institutions to train and recruit local young people. Some efforts mentioned include calls to recruit young people in civil servant positions like in the police force and the Defence force. For example, in 2023 the Namibian Police revealed a nationwide recruitment drive for 1 000 cadet constables that attracted 42 967 applications and this recruitment drive was to recruit those strictly between the ages of 18-35 to reduce the unemployment rate in this age category (Mbathera, 2023).

*To say no efforts are made will be unfair. Yes! The government is making effort. We just don't have the industry for all unemployed graduates. The reason why I am saying it does is because every year the government releases Police and NDF positions and*

*through that a lot of youth is employed. And the government released positions every month and through that at least one or two people are employed (Participant 11).*

*Just look at the foreign investments that are coming, at least the condition for a foreign companies need to recruit and teach the local people how to do the job. And they are having strict VISA policies now so it hard to this foreign companies to bring in their people to do the job that are Namibian can do. The policies are in place; they just need to be executed. So they are making an effort, it is a slow effort but the efforts are there (Participant 11).*

### **Opinions to reduce youth unemployment.**

Internship opportunities, investment into sports, giving jobs by merit and not favour and investing in land by providing access to land were mainly seen by the youth as ways to reduce the unemployment rate. These are evidence in the quotes below:

*Fairness in recruitment is important. Sometimes one has travelled miles to go for an interview and writing knowing that they have aced it and later just to hear that the principal's niece got the post. Lead with love, there is already so much negativity in the world show people love, tell them they matter. Ask for idea just because you're in high places it doesn't mean you know it all there is always room for improvement. (Participant 5).*

Like Hatibu and Hafidh (2021), the presence of open access application, fair judgment, absence of corruption lead to increased equal employment opportunities which lead to a decrease in workplace conflict; encourage instead of demoralize people to apply for employment opportunities and increase the working morale.

*I think that there are no internship opportunities to allow the experience required by the employees, this is why a lot of us are left with no work experience and cannot get hired anywhere. Internship programs should be a must from your first year in tertiary institutions (participant 3).*

*They should provide courses for Namibians with the Namibian job market in mind. Thorough studies need to be done and a lot of courses should be made dormant, because we know we don't have the industries for these courses, but we are producing graduates, so they can go work where? Now we are here working as tellers, receptionist or just starting small businesses just to survive but you are a graduate in Artisan, these things*

*can play with your mind and its time wasting. Also, there are many institutions coming up that are not regulated. I remember when only Namibia Institute of Mining Technology (NIIMT) used to provide artisans, it will be very hard for you to find an artisan at home or unemployed for a long time, the same as teachers and nurses but now there are just too many institutions that are dumping out these graduates to the streets even the unregulated ones. Stronger regulations need to be put in place (Participant 11).*

The experience of the Artisan graduate is explained by Henanzo and Jimeno (2017) that youth unemployment needs to be addressed with a specific approach for two reasons. One reason is that youth unemployment during the early stage of the working career (and especially long-term youth unemployment) has a persistent negative effect on future labour outcomes. In the case of short-term youth unemployment, jumping from temporary-to-temporary jobs and young people not being able to capitalise on their human capital nor accumulate substantial working experience, the effect could be as large as for long-term unemployment. Thus, the so-called ‘scarring’ effects of unemployment could be especially large for this population group. The second reason is that depreciation of human capital takes place at particularly higher rates during the initial stages of the working career, and, again, this happens both for long-term unemployed youth and for young workers with very high transition rates among temporary jobs.

*Invest in industries that we rarely invest in, for example agriculture, we have good land, like in Kavango region if only the government can invest more into these lands, we will be able to produce our own products and in turn employing a lot of people within that region. They can also invest in sports, and all other sectors that I feel are neglected just to create employment in those sectors, not just thinking of creating jobs within ministries because not all of us will get jobs in ministries (Participant 17).*

Karakara, Efobi, Beecroft, Olokoyo and Osabuohien (2021) caution that the effect of land acquisitions on employment is strongly influenced by the type of land tenure system in place. In particular, in the context of weak land tenure systems, large-scale land acquisitions can lead to the transformation of a resource from an open access/communal property regime. The shift from communal to private property will lead to the displacement of smallholders, which could overall lower the standard of living and job opportunities. To curb youth unemployment and create decent jobs, large scale land investment recipient countries could promote better

bargaining power for the host communities to negotiate better employment. With regards investments in sports, governments can develop sport policies and situate community hubs across cities to bridge the unemployment gap, where young people could come and improve their sports skills and become professional athletes (Olubiyi, 2021). Sport policies need to be complemented with renovation of old facilities to ensure that the youth can use these facilities to the best of the abilities.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this report was to answer three main questions as follows:

1. What are the causes of youth unemployment in Namibia?,
2. Do you perceive there are efforts made by the government to solve youth unemployment in Namibia
3. How do you think the youth unemployment problem could be solved in Namibia

From the evidence provided by participants in this paper, the causes of graduate youth unemployment in Namibia are increased retirement age, skills mismatch, and corruptive recruitment practices. Many of the participants believe that there are no efforts being made by the government to reduce graduate youth unemployment and this could be attributed to the situation they find themselves in. Some of them have been unemployed for more than years and have therefore lost hope in finding employment or obtaining any form of assistance from government. The unemployment youth therefore suggest that initiatives such investment in land, sport activities and infrastructure, fairness in recruitment or a lack of corruption as well as provision of internship opportunities could be solutions to the graduates' youth unemployment problem in Namibia.

## **References**

Amakali, S.R.N. (2018). The implications of youth unemployment for national security in Namibia in the 21st century: The case of Khomas region. The University of Namibia. Unpublished masters thesis.

Asif, M., Pasha, M. A., Mumtaz, A., & Sabir, B. (2023). Causes of Youth Unemployment in Pakistan. *Inverge Journal of Social Sciences*, 2(1), 41–50. Retrieved from <https://invergejournals.com/index.php/ijss/article/view/21>

Görlich, Dennis; Stepanok, Ignat; Al-Hussami, Fares (2013) : Youth unemployment in Europe and the world: Causes, consequences and solutions, Kiel Policy Brief, No. 59, Kiel Institute for the World Economy (IfW), Kiel

Hatibu, S.H. & Hafidh, H.A. (2021). Equal Opportunity factors for youth unemployment in EA countries data and policy analysis. *Management Studies and Economic Systems (MSES)*. 6(1/2). 29-45.

ILO (2016). Global Employment trend

Karakara, A., Efobi, U., Beecroft, I., Olokoyo, F., & Osabuohien, E. (2021). Youth Employment and Large-scale Agricultural Land Investments in Africa: Mixed Methods Insights from Nigeria. *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement*, 46(4), 175–199.

Keulder, C. (2021). Youth participation in National Agenda through mass media. Namibia Media Trust. [https://www.nmt.africa/uploads/61bc8412e002a/YouthParticipationinNationalAgendaThroughMassMedia\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.nmt.africa/uploads/61bc8412e002a/YouthParticipationinNationalAgendaThroughMassMedia_FINAL.pdf)

Mbathera, E. (2023). Nearly 43 000 applications for 1 000 police posts. <https://www.namibian.com.na/nearly-43-000-applications-for-1-000-police-posts/>

Mueller, B. (n.d). Rural youth employment in sub-Saharan Africa: Moving away from urban myths and towards structural policy solutions. International Labour Organization. [https://webapps.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_790112.pdf](https://webapps.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_790112.pdf)

Namibia Statistics Agency (2019). Namibia Labour Force Survey report 2018. Windhoek, Namibia

National Planning Commission, (2020). The Root Causes of Unemployment and Possible Policy Interventions.

Olubiyi, T. (2021). Tackling youth unemployment though sports. <https://thenationonlineng.net/tackling-youth-unemployment-though-sports/>

Olubusoye, O.E., Salisu, A.A. & Olofin, S.O. Youth unemployment in Nigeria: nature, causes and solutions. *Qual Quant* 57, 1125–1157 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-022-01388-8>

Shiyukifeni, A. T. N., (2005). Youth unemployment in Namibia. The University of Namibia and the Institute of Social Studies (ISS). Unpublished Masters thesis.

Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2003). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 51–80). Sage Publications, Inc.

Smith, J.A.; Flowers, P.; Larkin, M. *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*. London, UK: Sage Publications; 2009.

Sole for African Child (2024). Unemployed Graduates In Africa: The Real Problem and TOP 5 Possible Solutions. <https://www.soleforafricanchild.org/unemployed-graduates-in-africa/>

Tafirenyika, S. & Akanbi, A.O. (2016). Sources of unemployment in Namibia: an application of the structural VAR approach. *International Journal of Sustainable Economy*. 8(2):125-143.

Zwane, H.C., Radebe, T.N. & Mlambo, V.H. (2021). Is Youth Entrepreneurship Key to Addressing Youth Unemployment? Interrogating South Africa's Youth Unemployment Dilemma. *J Soc Sci*, 69(1-3): 18-25