

**THE ROLE OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN ERADICATING UNEMPLOYMENT
:A CASE STUDY OF THE “EMPLOYED PROJECT” IN AWACH SUB COUNTY,
GULU**

GIFTY ISABELLA ABALO

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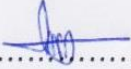


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DECLARATION

As per the university values of integrity and diligence, I have not received any unauthorized assistance while working on this paper. I declare that the work is authentically mine and to the best of my knowledge, it contains no traces of plagiarism or any other unethical practices. The only work used that has already been published by other persons has been purely for reference purposes.

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Date.....13th / May / 2025.....

ISABELLA ABALO GIFTY

APPROVAL

This research has been submitted for examination with my approval as the University candidate supervisor

SUPERVISOR

Solomon Mwije

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Solomon Mwije', written in a cursive style.

Date: 30/04/2025

DEDICATION

I dedicate my work to my parents.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

To the Lord Jesus I give all the glory. A Special thanks to my parents who have been there for me since day one. I love them so Much!

My supervisor Mr Solomon deserves special thanks for his guidance, insights, ideas, and the encouragement throughout this research.

I also express my sincere gratitude to the parents who were very supportive and cooperative to me by availing the necessary information needed for the study.

I also acknowledge and appreciate my friends with whom we toiled up to this final level, for their never ceasing encouragement through this course and the research process.

May the good Lord reward you richly.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

This chapter presented the background of the study, problem statement, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study and the conceptual framework.

1.1 Background

According to the International Labour Organization, the global youth unemployment rate, which was around 14% in 2022, is alarmingly higher compared with an overall unemployment rate hovering at about 5.5% (International Labour Organization, 2022). This shows how severely unemployment affects young people aged between 15 and 24 years. However, this situation tends to be worse in developing countries that lack adequate economic opportunities as well as social safety nets. It is also important to understand the causes of this alarming trend in order to address such a multidimensional problem. In Europe, the pattern of youth unemployment is strikingly different across countries. Some southern European countries, like Greece and Spain, have consistently registered the highest rates of youth unemployment, at times reaching above 30% in the past few years alone (Eurostat, 2021). It is these consequences that, in the case of the 2008 financial crisis, lasted for almost ten years without decent jobs on offer to young individuals. In contrast, countries like Germany and the Netherlands have a vocational education system which effectively bridges the gap between education and the labour market, and are therefore rewarded with youth unemployment rates below 10% (OECD, 2020).

Asia has a very complicated map of youth unemployment, reflecting widely divergent economic conditions and different stages of development. The unemployment rate among youth in countries such as India is around 23% (World Bank, 2020); it is driven by rapid population growth unbalanced by an education system which often fails to provide the young with the skills called for by the labor market. On the other hand, a country like Japan has to address a paradoxical issue: while the rate of unemployment among its youth is relatively low, an aging workforce automatically prevents young people entering the job market from finding work. (Asian Development Bank, 2021). Then come complexities in the Middle East-the turbulent waters of political instability have imposed adverse conditions for youth employment in countries belonging to it. Youth unemployment changed around especially in the context of

COVID in North America. During the worst situation of COVID-19 in America, the unemployment rate among younger residents also reached 25.4% and since then the factor has become a part of broader discussions on economic recovery, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). The prevalence of precarious work, gig economies, and informal employment underlines the precarious nature of youth job prospects. Moreover, automation is on the verge of taking over more routine jobs that generally employ younger workers, a factor that requires strategic educational reforms to prepare the youth for the rapidly transforming job market.

The youth unemployment rate in Uganda is so high. According to the UBOS (2020), Uganda has one of the youngest populations globally, with about 78% of Ugandans being below the age of 30 years. However, unemployment rates among the youth remain rampant; about 83% of the youth are said to be unemployed. This unemployment crisis is exacerbated by a range of factors including lack of skills, inadequate educational opportunities, and limited access to financial resources (Bantebya et al. 2017). In Awach sub-county specifically, historical factors such as the aftermath of the Lord's Resistance Army conflict, which displaced populations and disrupted education and the economy, have left lasting scars that hinder youth empowerment and economic engagement (Kisaka et al., 2019). This has led many youths either to subsistence farming activities or migration into urban centers in search of better opportunities. This increases instability and is economically straining in both the urban and rural settings.

Awach Sub County lies in the heart of Gulu District and boasts a population where a significant percentage comprises youth (Uganda National Youth Policy, 2020). Once badly affected by civil strife, the region in recent times has seen efforts for the reconstruction of economies and strengthening of community potentials. The scars of the previous conflicts still persist, reflecting themselves in very high unemployment rates, especially among the youth. Contextually, youth unemployment in Awach relates to other socio-economic challenges of inadequate infrastructure, insufficient access to finance, and too few vocational training institutes. Further, cultural attitudes sometimes discourage youth from pursuing entrepreneurship; many of them strive for white-collar jobs, which are often not readily available (Karuhanga, 2021). The strategies should thus be oriented to meet these specific local conditions, while at the same time embedding the national policy on development.

The unemployment rate among the youths in Uganda is particularly high, where estimates indicate that between 13% and 21% of the youth are out of work (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2021), as earlier stated above. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that the population grows at a rate higher than job creation. In a country where about 77% of the population is below the age of 30, young Ugandans too often find themselves ill-equipped for the labour market because there is a gap between what education produces and what employers require. In Uganda, the government's response to youth unemployment has included youth empowerment initiatives such as the introduction of the National Youth Policy, which aims to create platforms for youth engagement in economic activities (Republic of Uganda, 2021). However, the success of these policies hinges on effective implementation, adequate funding, and the establishment of robust feedback mechanisms that engage young people in the decision-making processes that affect their livelihoods.

The global phenomenon of unemployment poses significant challenges, especially within various demographic segments, notably the youth. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the global youth unemployment rate was estimated at 14.0% in 2021, nearly three times the adult rate (International Labour Organization, 2021). This pressing issue transcends continents, affecting Europe, Asia, North America, Africa, and notably East Africa, with Uganda exemplifying the distinctive struggles and potential solutions. Youth empowerment emerges as a central strategy in combating unemployment, creating pathways for economic stability and sustainable development. Youth empowerment refers to the process of equipping young people with the skills, knowledge, and confidence necessary to participate actively in society (Espinoza and Mendez, 2016). This concept manifests through various avenues - education, vocational training, entrepreneurship development, access to financial resources, and the fostering of a supportive policy framework. Youth Empowerment encompasses not just economic independence but also social and political engagement. The World Bank emphasizes that young people who are empowered contribute more effectively to societal development, which in turn can help reduce unemployment (World Bank, 2018). The strategy acknowledges that young people are not just victims of unemployment, but rather potential agents of change capable of driving innovation and development in their communities.

Youth empowerment has emerged as a significant area of focus in discussions around poverty alleviation and sustainable development, particularly in regions facing high unemployment rates. In Uganda, young people constitute a substantial portion of the population, yet they confront considerable hurdles in securing meaningful employment. Uganda's history is marred by socio-political turmoil and economic instability, particularly during the 20th century, with significant milestones including the Idi Amin dictatorship (1971-1979) and subsequent civil conflicts. These events left indelible scars on the socio-economic fabric of the nation. In Gulu, long-term internal conflict, particularly the Lord's Resistance Army insurgency, created a prevailing atmosphere of uncertainty and fear that devastated the local economy and education systems (Mugisha and Kamukama, 2018). Post-conflict recovery efforts led to the re-establishment of governance structures, but challenges remain, particularly regarding youth unemployment. By formal estimates, youth aged 15-30 years account for over 60% of the unemployed population in Uganda (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Factors contributing to this situation include inadequate education, lack of vocational training opportunities, and socio-economic barriers, all exacerbated by a rapidly growing population. Youth empowerment is defined as the process through which young individuals gain the tools, skills, and opportunities to make informed decisions about their lives and futures. It encompasses several dimensions, including economic, social, political, and educational empowerment (UNESCO, 2014). In the context of unemployment, it mostly refers to equipping young people with job skills, facilitating their entry into the labour market, and fostering entrepreneurship. Empowerment initiatives also aim to promote critical life skills, leadership capabilities, and proactive attitudes among youth, enabling them to navigate challenges and take control of their economic destinies (Hart, 2019). This multi-faceted view underlines that youth empowerment goes beyond mere employment; it encompasses fostering resilience, creativity, and the ability to innovate. In Uganda, youth empowerment is not just a governmental responsibility; it requires a collaborative approach involving various stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society, and international organisations.

Employed, an abbreviation for Enhanced Meaningful Opportunities, Participation and Livelihoods of youth for Effective Development, started in 2020 under the Caritas Catholic Diocese and it operates in two districts namely Gulu district in Sub-Counties of Unyama, Paicho and Awach and Kitgum district in Omiya Anyima, Mucwini and Labongo Sub-Counties. It has

a total target number of 1,200 direct youth beneficiaries and 6,000 indirect. This project equips the youth with basic economic skills to enhance employment and business opportunities through enrolling them in technical and vocational schools where they acquire skills in hair dressing, tailoring, carpentry, poultry farming, piggery, mechanics and so many other self-employment skills. Caritas Gulu Archdiocese also employs peer educators in the communities who provide soft skills for example business skill, life skills and financial literacy skills to the youth. Its criteria selection focuses on Youth between the age of 18-35 with a Project scope from only the agreed Sub-Counties and vulnerable persons such as single mothers, orphans, persons with disabilities, child-headed families and persons living with HIV. Awach Sub-county is in Gulu district in the Northern region of Uganda and it is nearby Gulu city. It shares boundaries with Pader district in the east, Kitgum district in the north, Amuru district in the west, Omoro district in the south. Awach Sub-county is located 45kms from Gulu city, its headquarters is situated in Awach town council, it has a total area of 310Km² with 4 parishes and 34 villages. The people live in clustered settlement, they are skilled farmers who participate in subsistence farming and commercial farming which helps them to provide basic needs for themselves and their families. They have a friendly relationship with each other since they live close enough to each other and have formed small groups in the villages for example savings groups, business partnerships and so on. It is a bowl-hole community, stream water, NWSC piped water, rainwater, murrum, passable, not busy roads, with a commercial centre that is the point of most commercial activities, though they take part in agriculture, for instance cash crop farming, food crop farming, animal rearing of goats and cows, poultry farming. Awach Sub-county is at a plain landscape; therefore, the community has no barriers such as valleys, hills, or valleys separating them from each other, and there are no thick forests or large water bodies. The community has primary schools, secondary schools as well as tertiary institutes, electricity, fuel at retail level, boda boda transport is the most commonly used type of transport used in the community and they have a health center iv.

1.2 Problem Statement

Unemployment remains a challenge in Northern Uganda, particularly among the youth in Awach subcounty of Gulu-Uganda. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2021, the youth unemployment rate in Northern Uganda is about 16.8%, which is higher compared to the

national average. Besides the economic challenges, this age group faces social problems associated with poverty, criminality, and mental health (Kibera and Kasule, 2020). Despite numerous interventions aimed at addressing unemployment, including government initiatives and NGO-led programs, the impact on the youth population has been minimal. Empowerment programs such as the employed which are designed to equip young people with skills, resources, and confidence, have not been adequately integrated into the broader unemployment reduction strategies (Friedrich et al., 2022). This may answer the question as to why unemployment rates are unchanged among young people in this region-the targeted initiatives that focus on youth empowerment remain insufficient. In addition, although recent evidence indicates that youth empowerment increases job opportunities, little prior research has investigated the underlying linkages of how empowerment affects the pathway to employability and entrepreneurship within Northern Uganda (Nabunya et al., 2021). Consequently, this study will critically explore the role of youth empowerment in ensuring a reduction in unemployment among the people of Northern Uganda through addressing the gaps in the initiation and implementation of empowerment programs. Notably, the study ascertains the relationship between empowerment initiatives and employment outcomes to proffer evidence-based recommendations to policymakers and relevant stakeholders on how best to empower the youth for effective unemployment reduction in the region.

1.3 General objective of the study

The main objective of this study was to assess the role of youth empowerment in eradicating unemployment.

1.4 Objectives of the study

- i. To explore the contributions of youth empowerment initiative towards youth employment in Awach Sub County.
- ii. To examine the barriers that limit effective youth empowerment in Awach Sub County

1.5 Research Questions.

- i. What are the contributions of youth empowerment initiative towards youth employment in Awach Sub County?
- ii. What are the barriers that limit effective youth empowerment Awach Sub County?

1.6 Justification of the study

This is also supported by the fact that youth make a significant proportion of the population; therefore, their economic inclusion translates into a form of national development. Thus, against this background, the research study on the role of youth empowerment in eradicating unemployment, with a case study of the "Employed Project" in Awach Sub County, Gulu, has been of the essence. This research will analyze how the "Employed Project" and other similar, targeted empowerment programs are helping reduce unemployment through equipping youth with skills, job creation, and instilling entrepreneurial mindsets. By analyzing this case, the research aims to provide important lessons that can be drawn from experiences of youth empowerment initiatives to address unemployment, which can inform policy development and scaling up such initiatives in other regions.

1.7 Scope of the study

1.7.1 Subject scope

The subject scope of this study focused on youth empowerment initiatives and their role in addressing unemployment among the youth in Awach Sub County. It will identify the effectiveness of the "Employed Project" as well as the other programs devised for the youths to augment their skills and entrepreneurship, leading to finding jobs. Additionally, the barriers that exist within these kinds of initiatives—a lack of proper resources, the inability to utilize educational facilities, or indeed a lack of infrastructure—these need to be identified along with strategies for improved empowerment leading toward better employment prospects for these youths.

1.7.2 Geographical scope

This study was conducted in Awach Sub County, Gulu District, located in Northern Uganda. Awach Sub County has been chosen as the geographical focus because it is home to a significant number of youth facing high unemployment rates, which aligns with the objectives of the study. The area offers a unique context to evaluate the impact of local empowerment initiatives and to identify regional challenges that could influence the effectiveness of such programs.

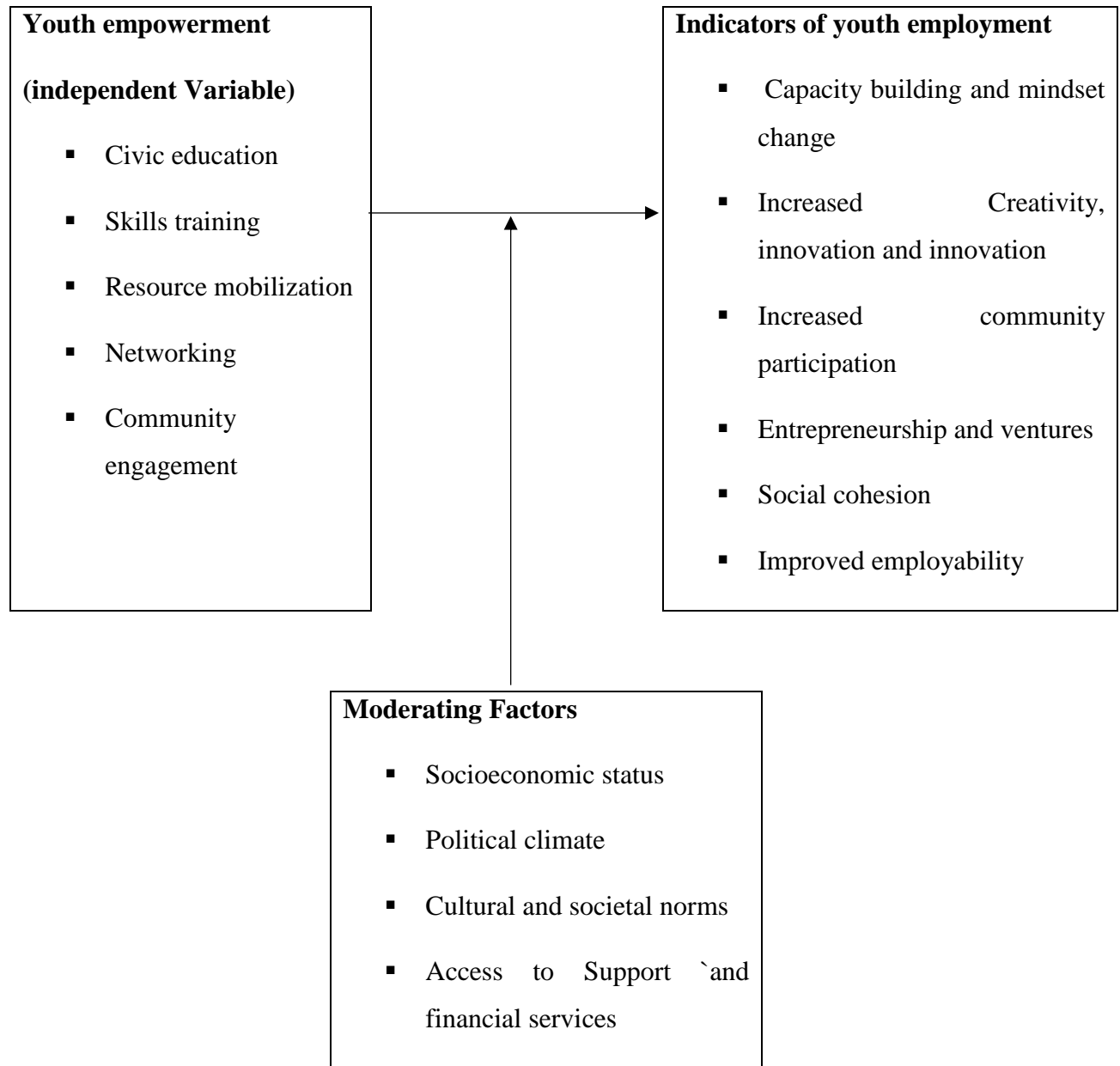
1.7.3 Time scope

This research covered a period of 5 years, starting from 2019 to 2024. In this respect, the study will have ample opportunity to assess current efforts and achievements of the "Employed Project" and other related youth empowerment initiatives. The study can give a comprehensive understanding of how these programs have evolved, their immediate impacts, and the barriers that have emerged during this period by examining data from the last five years.

1.8 Significance of the study

This study has many areas of significance. It will help local and national policymakers refine their strategies for empowering the youth to fight unemployment. It may also inform NGOs and community-based organizations in designing culturally sensitive, yet economically feasible, program interventions. Ultimately, through the academic discourse it provides on youth empowerment and unemployment, it addresses key questions related to sustainable development in Uganda.

1.9 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Source: Edward Bbaale (2023)

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter looks into accessible relevant literature on the role of youth empowerment in eradicating unemployment, a case study of the “employed project” in Awach sub county, Gulu as well as analyzing the gaps therein, to guide and inform these study variables. The reviewed literature begins by defining key concepts, followed by specific aspects of the literature relevant to each of the above outlined study objectives.

2.1 Theoretical review

This study will draw its focus from two prominent social work theories, the empowerment theory and the Social Learning Theory. By examining these theoretical approaches, we can gain deeper insights into how youth empowerment can be optimally harnessed to combat unemployment. The Empowerment Theory asserts that individuals can gain control over their lives and improve their socio-economic conditions by acquiring skills, knowledge, and self-efficacy. In social work, the principle of empowerment concerns the act of creating and enabling opportunities for people and their communities to take the right decisions and effect change accordingly in their lives. According to Rappaport (1987), it forms the basis of how the concept can be used to explain unemployed youth empowerment initiatives. Such an approach is manifestly inculcated in the context of the "Employed Project" through training, mentorship, and the creation of opportunities toward increasing employability among youths. It is designed to empower the participants not only with job opportunities but also by instilling confidence, resilience, and a sense of agency. Indeed, a study done by Tandon and Mishra (2021) showed that the empowerment of youth through skill development is significantly related to an increase in employment rates among the participants. One of the basic assumptions of the Empowerment Theory is that capacity building is essential in achieving success. In youth unemployment programs, providing skills and knowledge to the youth enables them to be more self-sufficient and ready for employment (González et al., 2020). The theory also assumes participation and a sense of agency. Empowerment requires people to be actively involved in their processes of development. The "Employed Project" provides an opportunity for participants to own their

journey of learning, thus promoting agency. This is supported by the meta-analysis done by McMahon et al. (2020), which found that young people from empowerment programs had higher levels of employment satisfaction and personal efficacy, and lastly, the theory emphasizes the need for social support within the communities. Empowerment is facilitated by the existence of social support systems. This project incorporates peer mentoring, where participants are mentored by individuals who have extensive experience in tackling challenges with the support of their peers. The role of social networks regarding job acquisition has been long documented. For instance, Granovetter (2001) surmises that informal social networks play an important part in job search efforts, precisely what this project is engendering via community service.

This case study highlights the key mechanisms through which the project operates and illustrates how theoretical assumptions work in practice. The "Employed Project" embodies the ideas of the Empowerment Theory in that it centers on capacity building through training programs that would equip the youth with relevant market skills. For instance, one of the major components included in this project involves workshops in digital literacy, an essential skill being firmly demanded by the modern labor market. In this way, the project empowers not only professional improvement but also further confidence in dealing with the contemporary labor market. Moreover, the project instills a great sense of participation among the youths because they are encouraged to share their insights and contribute to the design of training modules. This participatory approach aligns with the notion of agency posited by the Empowerment Theory. Thus, participants feel valued and engaged, leading to higher levels of empowerment and job readiness.

2.2 The contributions of youth empowerment initiative towards youth employment

Youth empowerment refers to the process of giving young people the skills, confidence, and opportunities necessary to take control of their lives. These programs typically encompass a range of activities: vocational training, mentorship, life skills education, and entrepreneurial support (Mann and Williams, 2020). However, the ILO defines youth unemployment as the percentage of the labor force between 15 to 24 years that is not employed but is actively seeking work. Indeed, youth unemployment is essentially linked to empowerment because such a notion underpins the latter, equipping young people with the right tools in order to navigate the labor market. According to the World Bank (2018), empowerment of youth can potentially reduce

unemployment rates through the adoption of innovation, enhancement of productivity, and promotion of entrepreneurship among the youth. Youth empowerment programs are organized initiatives aimed at improving the socio-economic status of young people. Most of the programs focus on the development of critical skills, access to resources, and the instillation of self-efficacy attitudes among the youth. The United Nations, 2020, defines youth empowerment as a process where young people are involved in decision-making on matters that concern their lives and contribute to their individual and collective growth. Effective YEPs educate participants on their rights, build personal skills, and create pathways toward jobs and entrepreneurship. YEPs' common pedagogical framework includes vocational training, mentoring opportunities, and access to finance—a trifecta that puts youth on the pathway from unemployment to productive employment. Kassim and Illias 2020. For example, the Youth Business International program provides business support services, training, and mentorship for young entrepreneurs, showing how specialized programs can make entry into the labor market easier. In Africa, initiatives like the African Union's Youth Development Agenda seek to involve youth in national development processes. One such initiative is the "Enhancing Youth Employability Program" that has been implemented in countries like Nigeria and Kenya, which focus on the development of skills through training and workshops. According to a study conducted by the International Labour Organization, ILO, 2021, participants in this program saw an increase in employment rates by 40% within six months of completion, thus showing a direct relationship between improved skills and finding jobs.

Many countries have established their own YEPs to address the growing issue of youth unemployment. In the United States, a widely recognized program is called "YouthBuild" targeting less privileged youth. YouthBuild involves participants in building projects and provides education, job training, and assistance in earning their high school diplomas or GEDs. According to a report by YouthBuild USA, 2019, 70% of participants get employed within a few months after program completion, reflecting effectiveness in skill-based training along with real-world experience. In Asia, the "Skills for Employment Investment Program (SEIP) in Bangladesh is another illustrative example. This program has a focus on providing vocational training and support for entrepreneurship among youth. According to the World Bank, 2020, SEIP has so far trained over 1.2 million youngsters, out of which 70% of the trainees have gotten jobs within a year from the end of their training. This means that not only has unemployment

rates gone down but the program has also empowered youth to become masters of their economic destiny.

Europe has successfully handled the issue of unemployment among the youths through policies like the Youth Guarantee headed by the European Union. Through this initiative, it ensures that all young individuals get a quality offer for a job, further education, or an apprenticeship within four months after being unemployed. European Commission, 2019, demonstrated how countries that resulted in implementing the Youth Guarantee policy saw their unemployment rates among the youths decline by as high as 18% in countries like Spain and Italy. It also showed that systematic government support is a potential approach to overcoming unemployment among young people. In Latin America, ProJoven of Peru has done remarkably well in ensuring that unemployment rates for the youth improve. It equips unemployed youths with various skills and a stipend. A study by the Inter-American Development Bank (2019) found out that participants realized a 30% increase in income within a year of completion of the program. This increase not only alleviates poverty but also supports economic growth in the region. In India, the National Skill Development Mission plans to skill 400 million youth by 2022. The initiatives range from agriculture to information technology, thus being versatile to capture the different needs of the youths. Evaluation of the program indicated that the participants had a significant improvement in employability, with a reported increase of 40% in wage earnings for those completing the training (McKinsey Global Institute, 2018). These examples are evidence of what YEPs can achieve when they are well-organized.

2.3 The barriers that limit effective youth empowerment

The youth empowerment programs are meant to give young individuals the various resources, capacities, and opportunities required for treading through the complexities of the job market. They may take the form of vocational training programs, mentorship programs, or educational training for employment enhancement. The United Nations defines youth empowerment as a process through which young people gain the skills and confidence to participate actively in decision-making processes affecting their lives (United Nations, 2022). However, various barriers impede the successful implementation of these programs, limiting their capacity to achieve meaningful outcomes. A significant barrier to youth empowerment programs is economic inequality. Most of the time, young people from poor families do not get access to

proper education or even vocational training. Youth unemployment remains highest in economically deprived regions of all countries, according to the report of the ILO (2021). This economic disparity stifles the growth of skills useful for work, perpetuating vicious cycles of poverty and unemployment. Consequently, economic inequality reduces youth opportunities for both near-term and lifelong career development, as presented. Another important obstacle to the effective running of youth empowerment programs is a lack of financial resources. According to Smith and Jones (2022), a lack of sufficient funding results in limited scope and reach of programs intended to empower youth with necessary skills. Further, most organizations are not able to run long-term projects due to unstable financial support. Williams, 2023. Programs without substantial funding cannot effectively meet the needs of the youth, leading to gaps in skills training and employment opportunities.

Not only the above, but the socio-economic status and accessibility of these empowerment programs also form a huge hindrance and barrier. Socioeconomic status forms a very significant role in how the circle of empowerment programs works. Youngsters from low-income backgrounds have to face barriers to transportation, access to technology, and family responsibilities. As Martinez (2021) has pointed out, these obstacles set the environment where participation in the initiative for empowerment is difficult to manage. Moreover, the fear of financial instability can deter youth from engaging in programs that require a time commitment without immediate job prospects (Johnson, 2023). In terms of limited accessibility, many youth empowerment initiatives are concentrated in urban areas, leaving rural youth at a disadvantage. This geographical imbalance leads to inequality in resource and opportunity access (Clark and Patel, 2022). Youth in remote regions may not be aware of the programs available or face logistics that make it difficult for them to attend (Davis, 2023). In turn, this reduces the general impact of youth empowerment programs and perpetuates unemployment in these areas. Cultural perceptions and stigmatization of unemployment also have a significant impact on the involvement of youth in empowerment programs. According to Thompson (2020), feelings of shame and embarrassment may make many young people unwilling to seek help or participate in programs that could better their unemployment status. This is a potential cultural barrier that can generate a cycle of disengagement from efforts to address the unemployment problem (Kim, 2021).

Ineffective policy frameworks also contribute to the barriers faced by youth empowerment programs. National policies often lack coherence and prioritisation of youth-related strategies, leading to fragmented efforts that fail to address the unique challenges faced by young job seekers. A report by the European Commission highlights that the absence of comprehensive youth employment strategies has allowed unemployment rates to remain high among young people (European Commission, 2022). Without clear policy direction, initiatives aimed at youth empowerment are likely to remain uncoordinated and ineffective, limiting their potential impact on unemployment. In addition to that, another significant barrier manifested in youth empowerment programs is societal stigma and discrimination. Young individuals, especially those belonging to marginalized groups, often face biases that undermine their employability. Research has shown that employers may discriminate against young job seekers based on age, ethnicity, or socio-economic background (Smith, 2022). This discrimination not only discourages young people from pursuing opportunities offered by empowerment programs but also reduces their chances of securing employment upon completion of these programs. Consequently, societal attitudes towards youth and marginalised groups must change to foster inclusivity within the workforce.

In additional socio-cultural barriers is the lack of awareness surrounding available youth empowerment programs. Many young individuals, particularly in rural areas or low-income settings, remain unaware of the initiatives designed to assist them, leading to disengagement from such opportunities. A survey by YouGov (2022) revealed that a significant percentage of young people did not know about the available employment programs, highlighting the need for improved outreach and communication strategies. By not effectively utilising existing resources and support mechanisms, young individuals remain disconnected from pathways leading to employment. Stakeholder participation is also another facet to look at, the lack of coordination among various stakeholders involved in youth empowerment also presents a significant challenge. Government agencies, non-profit organizations, and educational institutions often operate in silos, leading to duplicated efforts and wasted resources. According to research by the International Youth Foundation, collaboration among stakeholders is vital in addressing the multifaceted challenges of youth unemployment, yet many existing programs fail to leverage this collaboration effectively (International Youth Foundation, 2021). Without a coordinated strategy by the programs, it may well have limited success and leave many youths unguided to find

employment. The other obstacles are psychological barriers and barriers of low self-esteem, Motivation: Youth unemployment does not depend only on barriers outside but is also considerably dependent on psychological factors. Feelings of inadequacy and helplessness will eventually make many young people desist from looking for any form of employment. Mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression, exist among the young jobless population; these are likely to lessen motivation to participate in an empowerment program according to the Mental Health Foundation, 2021. This psychological barrier complicates the effort of the youth empowerment program, making it an imperative to support mental health in conjunction with imparting resilience skills among the participants.

2.5 Conclusion of the literature

Unemployment poses one of the greatest challenges to modern civilization, threatening economic stability, social cohesiveness, and personal welfare. An upsurge of various empowerment programs around the world has tried to equip individuals with skills, resources, and confidence in finding sustainable employment. The impediments toward youth empowerment programs are complex and deeply ingrained in societal, structural, and institutional contexts. Included in these are formidable barriers to the empowerment of young people, which include economic inequality, limited access to education, poor policy frameworks, and psychological challenges. With a holistic approach, eradicating unemployment among the youth calls for their being empowered in every respect. That includes reinforcing resource allocations toward programs for youth, fostering stakeholder coordination, addressing issues of discrimination, and promoting mental health. It thus allows society to tear down those barriers ultimately, enabling its youth to thrive and become active contributors to the economy and to secure a better future.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlined the various approaches utilized in the study to examine the role of youth empowerment in eradicating unemployment, focusing specifically on the "Employed Project" in Awach Sub-county, Gulu. The methodology included the research design, study population, sample size determination, sampling techniques, methods of data collection and instruments, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations.

3.2 Research design

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional design using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This approach allowed for the exploration of the unique attributes of youth empowerment and its impact on unemployment. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The qualitative aspect facilitated a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and motivations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), while quantitative techniques were used for sample size determination and demographic analysis.

3.3 Study area

The research took place in Awach Sub County, Gulu District, an area marked by high youth unemployment rates despite its significant agricultural potential and entrepreneurial opportunities. Awach Sub County was selected because it was home to the "Employed Project," which aimed to empower youth through skills training, access to capital, and mentorship programs. The socio-economic challenges in this region, coupled with the focus of the project on youth empowerment, created a unique context for analyzing the effectiveness of such interventions in reducing unemployment. The study aimed to provide insights that could inform similar programs in other regions facing analogous challenges.

3.4 Data sources

The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources to gather comprehensive insights into youth empowerment and unemployment.

3.5 Study population

The target population for the study was 100 young individuals aged 18 to 35 years who had actively participated in the "Employed Project." This population also encompassed project facilitators (trainers and coordinators) and local government representatives involved in youth empowerment initiatives in the area. This diverse group contributed various perspectives regarding the implementation and impact of the project on youth unemployment.

3.6 Sample size

The sample size for the study consisted of approximately 80 participants, including youth participants, project facilitators, and local government representatives. The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table was utilized for sample size determination, ensuring sufficient representation of the target population.

Table 3.1: Population and sample size breakdown

Respondents	Population	Sample size	Sampling method
Youth Participants	80	70	Simple Random Sampling
Project Facilitators	10	5	Purposive Sampling
Local Government Representatives	10	5	Purposive Sampling
Total	100	80	

3.7 Sampling techniques and procedures

The research employed a combination of purposive and random sampling methods. Purposive sampling was used to identify key informants for the study, including project facilitators, local government representatives, and community leaders, based on their experience and involvement

in youth empowerment. For youth participants, a simple random sampling method was employed to ensure that all individuals had an equal chance of being included in the study.

3.8 Data collection methods

Primary data was collected through questionnaires and informant interview guides with youth participants, project facilitators, and local government representatives. These interviews yielded firsthand information regarding participants' experiences, opinions, and insights about the “Employed Project” and its effects on youth unemployment.

Secondary data was gathered from existing literature, including reports, articles, and scholarly materials related to youth empowerment, unemployment, and project implementation. This secondary data provided contextual background that enhanced the analysis.

3.9 Data collection instruments

3.9.1 Questionnaires

Primary data collection for youth participants involved structured questionnaires, consisting of both open and closed-ended questions. The open-ended questions encouraged detailed responses, while closed-ended questions facilitated quantitative data collection. This approach contributed to a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences and views (Katamba et al., 2014).

3.9.2 Interviews

Informant interviews were also used to collect qualitative data from the key informants. This approach helped gather the best insights from the key informants.

3.10 Quality control

To ensure the quality control of the research, several measures were undertaken. Data collection tools, such as questionnaires and interview guides, were pretested to assess their reliability and validity. Any ambiguities or inconsistencies identified during the pretesting phase were addressed before the main data collection. The research team underwent thorough training to ensure consistency in administering tools and recording responses. Data was cross-checked for accuracy and completeness during and after collection, and triangulation was used to compare findings from different sources for consistency. Additionally, ethical considerations such as

obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and ensuring objectivity were adhered to throughout the research process to enhance credibility and trustworthiness.

3.11 Ethical considerations

The following ethical considerations were observed during the research:

Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose and their role in it. Consent was obtained prior to participation, and individuals could withdraw at any time without facing negative consequences because participation was voluntary.

All participant data was treated with strict confidentiality. Personal identifiers were removed, and data was securely stored to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

The research respected local cultural norms and values, ensuring that researchers interacting with participants were culturally sensitive.

The research proposal was submitted for ethical review to an appropriate board before data collection began to ensure compliance with ethical standards.

3.12 Data analysis

Data analysis involved both qualitative and quantitative techniques.

Quantitative data analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, summarized demographic information and key findings from the questionnaires.

Qualitative data analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to identify and analyze patterns or themes within the interview data, facilitating a deeper exploration of participants' perceptions and experiences related to youth empowerment and unemployment.

3.13 Limitations of the study

The study encountered several limitations.

The use of purposive sampling may have introduced biases in selecting key informants, potentially affecting the diversity of perspectives.

The reliance on self-reported data from interviews may have led to subjectivity and bias in findings, as participants might have provided socially desirable responses.

Due to limited time and resources, the scope and sample size of the study were restricted, affecting the generalizability of the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed presentation and interpretation of the findings from the study on the role of youth empowerment in combating unemployment in Awach Sub County, Gulu. The analysis is organized around the study's specific objectives, which include assessing the demographic characteristics of respondents, evaluating the contributions of youth empowerment initiatives, and identifying the significant barriers that hinder the effectiveness of these initiatives. A comprehensive discussion of the findings is essential to understand the youth empowerment landscape in the region and its impact on employment opportunities.

4.1 Response rate

The study achieved a complete response rate of 100%, with all 80 distributed questionnaires returned by respondents, indicating strong engagement within the target population. This high level of participation suggests that the data collected reflects the perspectives and experiences of the youth in Awach Sub County, thereby enhancing the reliability and representativeness of the findings. Such engagement is crucial for any study aiming to influence policy and program development in youth empowerment and employment.

4.2 Biographic characteristics

The demographic analysis reveals that the majority of respondents were female, with 68.75% identifying as such, while 31.25% identified as male. This gender distribution indicates a significant representation of females in the study, which may reflect broader trends in the youth population of Awach Sub County. The findings emphasize the importance of conducting gender-specific analyses in youth empowerment programs, as the challenges and experiences faced by male and female youths can differ substantially. Furthermore, in terms of age distribution, 56.25% of respondents fell within the 25-30 age group, followed by 31.25% in the 31-40 age range. This suggests that the study was effectively focused on young adults within the core youth demographic, as defined by the 18-35 age range. The absence of respondents older than 50 years reinforces the study's focus on the active working-age youth, who are most likely to benefit from

employment initiatives. Additionally, regarding educational attainment, 62.5% of respondents possessed a Bachelor's degree, while 25% had a Diploma and 12.5% held a Master's degree. This educational profile indicates that most youths in Awach Sub County have attained at least a tertiary level of education, providing them with a solid foundation for understanding and engaging in empowerment initiatives aimed at improving their employment prospects.

4.3 Contributions of youth empowerment initiatives

Respondents expressed a strong belief in the positive impact of youth empowerment initiatives, particularly in providing employment opportunities and enhancing employability through skills training. The mean scores for various statements regarding these contributions were all above 4.0, with the highest mean of 4.5 attributed to the statement about employment opportunities. This indicates a consensus among respondents that these initiatives are crucial in addressing unemployment. Skills training programs were notably highlighted as essential for equipping youth with necessary technical skills, aligning with existing literature that underscores the importance of skill development in bridging the gap between education and employment. Furthermore, entrepreneurship programs that encourage young people to start their own businesses were identified as significant contributors to local economic growth. These findings reflect a broader understanding that youth empowerment not only enhances individual employability but also fosters a culture of innovation and self-reliance within the community.

4.4 Barriers limiting effective youth empowerment.

Despite the positive contributions of youth empowerment initiatives, the study also identified several barriers that impede their effectiveness. The most significant barrier highlighted was limited funding, with a mean score of 4.6, suggesting that financial constraints severely limit the scope and reach of empowerment programs. Additionally, the lack of access to mentorship was noted, with a mean score of 4.5, indicating that many young entrepreneurs struggle without guidance from experienced individuals who can help navigate the challenges of business ownership. Bureaucratic challenges also emerged as a notable barrier, with slow implementation processes hindering the impact of these initiatives. Cultural and social norms that discourage entrepreneurship, particularly among young women, were also identified as obstacles. Addressing these barriers is critical for enhancing the effectiveness of youth empowerment

programs in reducing unemployment and fostering sustainable economic development in Awach Sub County.

The key informants from both the project staff and government officials offered valuable insights into how the “Employed Project” has positively impacted youth employment in Awach Sub County. Many respondents highlighted that the project has created direct employment opportunities through vocational training, startup capital support, and mentorship. It has enabled a number of young people to become self-employed in trades such as tailoring, carpentry, and agriculture. These efforts have not only helped reduce the local unemployment rate but also contributed to increased productivity and community development.

The strategies implemented by the project were described as both practical and youth-centered. Informants pointed out that the project placed a strong emphasis on skills development, providing hands-on training and business incubation. The use of peer mentorship, savings groups, and access to micro-loans were also cited as critical empowerment tools. Additionally, the project fostered a spirit of innovation and self-reliance by encouraging youth to identify community needs and create businesses that address those needs. This approach not only promoted self-employment but also nurtured leadership and entrepreneurial mindsets among the youth.

Despite the progress, several challenges were noted by the informants. Key among them were limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient follow-up mechanisms to ensure the sustainability of youth-led ventures. Bureaucratic delays and lack of coordination among stakeholders were also mentioned as barriers. Some respondents emphasized that cultural attitudes towards white-collar jobs still discourage youth from embracing vocational skills, thereby affecting participation levels in such empowerment projects.

On the aspect of government involvement, informants appreciated the collaborative efforts between the local government and the “Employed Project.” Local leaders provided policy support, mobilized community participation, and helped secure funding from development partners. However, some felt that the government’s role could be more proactive, especially in offering tax incentives, expanding access to credit, and scaling up successful models to other

sub-counties. They advocated for integrated planning between government bodies and NGOs to ensure sustainability and wider reach.

Finally, the informants shared compelling success stories, including youth who have grown their businesses and now employ others, creating a ripple effect in their communities. These stories highlight best practices such as continuous mentorship, community involvement, and tailored training programs. The consensus was that such models could be replicated in other regions if well-funded and strategically implemented. Overall, the responses indicate that youth empowerment initiatives like the “Employed Project” hold significant promise in addressing the unemployment challenge when approached holistically.

4.5 Summary of Findings.

The study's findings underscore the pivotal role of youth empowerment initiatives in improving employability and promoting entrepreneurship among young people in Awach Sub County. While these initiatives have made significant contributions to reducing unemployment, substantial barriers such as limited funding, lack of mentorship, and cultural norms must be addressed to maximize their effectiveness. The insights gathered from the interviews with project staff and government officials further emphasize the necessity of collaborative efforts among stakeholders to overcome these challenges and enhance the impact of youth empowerment initiatives in the region. By addressing both the potential and the barriers inherent in these efforts, it is possible to create a more enabling environment for youth empowerment and contribute meaningfully to economic growth and poverty alleviation in Awach Sub County.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of the key findings from the study on the role of youth empowerment in eradicating unemployment in Awach Sub County, Gulu. The discussion correlates the findings with the specific research objectives outlined in the study, offering a summary of outcomes followed by conclusions and actionable recommendations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of youth empowerment initiatives in the region.

5.2 Discussion of the key findings

5.2.1 The role of youth empowerment initiatives

The study underscores the transformative potential of youth empowerment initiatives in addressing unemployment in Awach Sub County. A significant portion of the respondents expressed agreement that initiatives such as skills training, financial literacy programs, and entrepreneurship support are fundamental in enhancing employability. This aligns with existing literature, including the findings from the International Labour Organization (ILO), which emphasize that youth empowerment can potentially reduce unemployment rates through innovation and entrepreneurship (ILO, 2021).

Skills training programs were identified as particularly beneficial, equipping youth with the necessary technical skills for various industries. This resonates with the Empowerment Theory, which asserts that acquiring skills and knowledge leads to improved socio-economic conditions (Rappaport, 1987). Furthermore, entrepreneurship programs have proven effective in encouraging youths to start and sustain their businesses. This not only empowers them individually but also contributes to local economic development, as noted in studies highlighting the importance of entrepreneurship in job creation (World Bank, 2018).

The findings support the notion that youth empowerment is a key driver of economic growth, particularly in rural areas where job opportunities may be limited. Empowering youth through

skill development and entrepreneurship significantly reduces dependency on traditional wage employment, offering alternative livelihoods.

5.2.2 Barriers to effective youth empowerment

Despite the positive contributions of youth empowerment initiatives, the study identified several barriers that impede their effectiveness. The most significant barrier was limited funding, which is consistent with the findings of Smith and Jones (2022), who noted that insufficient financial resources restrict the reach and scope of empowerment programs. Without substantial funding, these programs cannot effectively meet the needs of the youth, leading to gaps in skills training and employment opportunities.

Additionally, the lack of mentorship emerged as a critical barrier. Many young entrepreneurs struggle due to the absence of experienced mentors to guide them through the challenges of business ownership. This reinforces the findings of McMahon et al. (2020), which highlight the importance of mentorship in the success of startups.

Bureaucratic challenges, including slow implementation processes and regulatory hurdles, also hinder the effectiveness of these initiatives. Cultural perceptions that discourage entrepreneurship, especially among young women, were noted as obstacles. Such findings echo Thompson (2020), who pointed out that societal attitudes can significantly impact youth engagement in empowerment programs.

5.3 Summary of findings

The study reveals several key insights:

Youth empowerment initiatives are central to improving employability and fostering entrepreneurship, significantly contributing to reducing unemployment.

Barriers such as limited funding, lack of mentorship, bureaucratic hurdles, and cultural norms hinder the success of youth empowerment initiatives.

The insights gathered from key informants emphasize the necessity of collaborative efforts among stakeholders to overcome these challenges and enhance the impact of youth empowerment initiatives in the region.

5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the study highlights that youth empowerment initiatives in Awach Sub County have played a pivotal role in addressing unemployment. These initiatives have provided skills training and entrepreneurship opportunities, enabling young people to enter the job market and start their businesses. However, critical systemic barriers, particularly in terms of funding, mentorship, and cultural perceptions, limit the effectiveness of these initiatives. The high level of interest and engagement from the youth signals a strong desire for empowerment and economic participation.

5.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

Enhance funding for youth programs. It is crucial to increase financial investments in youth empowerment initiatives. Public-private partnerships could be particularly effective in scaling up initiatives and ensuring sustainable growth.

Establish mentorship networks. Create structured mentorship programs that connect experienced entrepreneurs and professionals with young people. Mentors can provide guidance on navigating the business world and avoiding common pitfalls.

Promote awareness campaigns. Launch public awareness campaigns to shift societal perceptions about entrepreneurship, particularly focusing on successful young entrepreneurs as role models.

Tailor programs to gender needs. Programs should address the specific barriers faced by young women, ensuring equal participation for both young men and women to enhance the impact of empowerment initiatives.

Monitor and evaluate programs. Regular monitoring and evaluation of youth empowerment programs are necessary to assess their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. Continuous feedback from participants should be incorporated.

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APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE

UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

I am Isabella Abalo Gift a student of Uganda Christian University conducting a research study on the Role of Youth Empowerment in Eradicating Unemployment, A Case Study of the ‘Employed Project’ in Awach Sub County, Gulu” as a requirement for the award of a Bachelor’s degree of social work and social administration. I am kindly requesting you to assist me in this study by answering the following questions. I assure you that your information will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

SECTION A: Demographic Data

Please tick (✓) in the appropriate box as the most agreed answer to the following statements.

1. Gender of the respondent.

Male Female

2. Age group of the respondent.

25-30 years 31-40 years 41-50 years Above 50 years

3. Education level of the respondent.

Diploma level Bachelor’s level Masters Level

Others specify.....

SECTION B

Rate your degree of agreement on the role of youth empowerment in eradicating unemployment using a scale of 5=Strongly agree, 4=Agree, 3=Not sure, 2=Disagree and 1=strongly disagree.

A	The contributions of youth empowerment initiatives towards youth employment	5	4	3	2	1
1	Youth empowerment initiatives have provided employment opportunities for young people in Awach Sub County					
2	Skills training programs have enhanced youth employability in Awach Sub County					
3	Entrepreneurship programs have enabled youth to start and sustain their own businesses.					
4	Youth empowerment initiatives have improved financial literacy among young people.					
5	Access to startup capital through youth programs has increased self-employment.					
6	Youth empowerment has fostered innovation and creativity in business ventures.					
B	Barriers that limit effective youth empowerment in Awach Sub County					
7	Limited funding hinders the effectiveness of youth empowerment programs					
8	Lack of access to mentorship and business guidance affects youth employment					
9	Bureaucratic challenges make it difficult for youth to access empowerment programs.					
10	Inadequate technical and vocational training opportunities limit youth employment					
11	Social and cultural norms discourage youth from engaging in self-employment initiatives					
12	Poor infrastructure and limited market access hinder youth entrepreneurial success.					

Thank you

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR KEY INFORMANTS (PROJECT STAFF & GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS)

Title: THE ROLE OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN ERADICATING UNEMPLOYMENT: A CASE STUDY OF THE “EMPLOYED PROJECT” IN AWACH SUB COUNTY, GULU

Respondent category. Project Staff / Government Officials

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. The purpose of this discussion is to understand the role of youth empowerment initiatives in addressing unemployment in Awach Sub County. Your insights will be valuable in identifying contributions, challenges, and possible improvements. The information provided will be kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes.

Interview questions:

1. How has the “Employed Project” contributed to youth employment in Awach Sub County?
2. What strategies have been implemented by the project to enhance youth empowerment and self-employment?
3. What are the key challenges limiting the effectiveness of youth empowerment initiatives in Awach Sub County?
4. How has the local government supported or partnered with the “Employed Project” in addressing youth unemployment?
5. What policies or additional interventions do you think should be introduced to improve youth empowerment and employment outcomes?
6. From your experience, what are the success stories or best practices that can be learned from the “Employed Project” to scale up youth empowerment programs in other areas?

Thank you for your time and valuable insights. Your responses will help in understanding how youth empowerment can effectively contribute to reducing unemployment in Awach Sub County.