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**Paralyzed Changemakers:
An Ethnographic Study of Youth
Unemployment from Bududa,
Uganda and Petra, Jordan**

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Introduction

Youth are a very impactful group to a country's social, political and economical spheres. They wield immense social and political influence and potency, and can be an asset in developing a country's economy. Youth are portrayed as agents of change and as the best hope for the future prosperity of a county (Sukarieh et al., 2008). At the same time, however, they are also seen as a threat to the status quo. They are depicted as ticking time bombs, social dynamite, the instigators of violent conflicts, insurrection and instability (Sukarieh et al., 2008; Baah-Boateng, 2016). When their needs are addressed they hold a vault of human capacity that can help boost economic development (Africa Renewal, 2013), but when their needs are not met they are a source of political instability, radicalization, violent conflict, and increased migration (Baah-Boateng, 2016). A World Bank Survey (2011) stated that 40% of people who join rebel movements joined due to the lack of jobs (Africa Renewal, 2013).

As a recent and relevant example, Bobi Wine, a 39 year old Ugandan opposition leader, risked his life in the 2021 presidential elections to fight against a 35 year regime. Yoweri Museveni, the President of Uganda, has been in power since 1986 and even changed the Ugandan constitution to enable him to stay in power despite his age. A musician and activist, Bobi Wine connected to the youth and people of Uganda through music to denounce the "out of touch" regime. Bobi Wine, who rallied behind the

phrase “People Power”, is currently under house arrest and is violently surveilled by the Uganda military and police. Bobi Wine’s plight in a rigged election portrays governments’ fears surrounding the power of youth. They are seen as both global society’s worst nightmare and the best hope for our future (Sukarieh et al., 2008).

By 2075 Africa is projected to contain one-third of the world’s working age population (World Bank, 2023). By 2050, Africa will comprise 40% of the school-age population in low and middle income countries (World Bank, 2023). The African youth population is only expected to grow. By 2030, Africa’s population will be composed of youth under 25; youth in Africa will make up 42% of global youth (Vision of Humanity, 2023). The youth bulge is prevalent in the Middle East and African regions. Youth under 30 comprise 55% of the population in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (OECD, 2024). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries’ youth population makes up only 36% of its population (OECD, 2024).

This demographic trend is incredibly important; youth have the power to destabilize countries, especially when they have limited opportunities. Youth, however, have the ability to boost a country’s economic growth when their potential is tapped into and they are provided with opportunities. Without opportunities, youth in low- and middle-low income countries

depend on high- and middle-high income countries for financial support. Successful integration of youth into social, economic and public spheres is vital for expansive development and societal unity.

The goal of this paper is to analyze qualitative research through a world-systems framework to examine unemployment trends and underlying factors in Uganda and Jordan. A grasp of macro-level theories concerning inequality and neoliberal developmental paradigms is essential to comprehend the obstacles confronting youth in these nations. Furthermore, I will incorporate insights from Bourdieu to enhance my analysis to understand how global structures are felt on the micro level through the youth experience. Understanding how larger structural dynamics play out on the micro level is central to my analysis. I will utilize Bourdieu's concept of structure and agency and World Systems Theory to illustrate how these macro policies play out on the societal level and to illustrate why these patterns are emerging. I will introduce the problem of youth unemployment through a world-systems context before going into my findings section. To conclude, I will examine different youth empowerment strategies enacted by two agencies I worked with while conducting my research.

Research Methods

This ethnographic research study was conducted with the intent of seeing the issues youth face in their communities and in their education and

occupational endeavors. Based on the literature outlined above, as well as existing research on youth unemployment, this is an exploratory and qualitative study, focusing on understanding youth perceptions of unemployment. This includes the causes, effects, responses, and experiences of youth unemployment.

The research was split into two projects, one in Jordan and the other in Uganda. I spent roughly a month in each location collecting data. In Jordan I conducted 25 interviews (11 men and 14 women) in Petra, Jordan between June 6th to July 4th 2023. A translator was used in 8 interviews.

Interviewees included archeologists, shop and restaurant owners, and community members between the ages of 18 and 33. I conducted 25 (15 men and 10 women) interviews in the Bududa district of Uganda between July 4th and August 5th 2023. A translator was used in 15 interviews.

Interviewees included youth aged 18 to 33, youth in school, youth who dropped out, unemployed youth, underemployed youth, workers, and community members. Interviews generally took place in interviewees' place of work or in the town centers. All interviews were recorded and lasted anywhere between 20 minutes to an hour and a half long.

Jordan's national language is Arabic. As a very well educated country, many participants could speak English fluently. However some could not, that is why I employed a translator to accompany me on interviews to encourage

participants to share complex answers and their experience. Conducting interviews in Arabic allows interviews to feel more comfortable and think more deeply about their answers.

Uganda's national language is English. Though many community members speak English, many do not. I employed a translator to accompany me on interviews and to help design and edit interview questions for subjects to understand them best. Conducting interviews in the local language, Ligisu, encourages participants to feel more comfortable talking about their views and experiences and provide fuller answers. Initial interview subjects were identified with help from the translator, Dezzi Zaale. The male translator and his family have lived in the Bududa District for several generations. Initial contacts allowed for networking with other youth members in the community.

In both locations, I worked with a translator to administer informed consent and to interview subjects that are not fluent in English. Before audio recording the interview, my translator and I reviewed the consent form with the subject to get their approval before proceeding with the interview. The interviews asked about the observable and perceived benefits and risks of youth unemployment, and its effect on the community. Effort was made to keep consistent interview questions in both locations. However adjustments were made based on the social and cultural contexts.

Through conducting interviews, I was able to ensure a diverse range of responses; helping to broaden my understanding of the structures and factors related to youth unemployment (Weiss 2004). Through interviews I gained insight into the experience, causes, and effects of youth unemployment on youth and the community. Through snowball, convenience, and quota sampling I was able to facilitate wide-ranging discussions about youth unemployment. Interviews focused on understanding the elements of youth unemployment in the community and youth perceptions. The interviews were anonymous and no identifying information was collected.

Otter.ai was used to transcribe the interviews. The transcripts Otter.ai provided were manually combed through to correct any errors and to make sure transcripts were accurate. These transcriptions were imported into an electronic database, and coded systematically using the qualitative software Nvivo. I wrote memos during fieldwork in Petra and Bududa and during transcriptions to keep track of themes and ideas that were coming up (Saldana 2009; Strauss and Corbin 1990). The memo and coding process helped to highlight key themes and quotes that provided crucial information about perceptions of youth unemployment in the area. The quotes were categorized based on the sets of codes and themes they represented. From

this organized list, specific quotes were selected for their ability to illuminate the research objectives.

Through my qualitative research analysis I intend to raise the voices of youth in Jordan and Uganda to help advocate for their interests and to create equitable change. I hope my research findings and paper can help to inform potential avenues for empowerment and sustainable development in both regions.

Literature Review

World Systems Theory and Neoliberalism

The World Bank cites a 40% reduction in global poverty from 1981 to 2012 (CNN, 2019). But, when closely analyzing the data, it becomes apparent that while some populations have improved their standing (based on GDP), such as China, poverty has in fact increased for many populations, including in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. Specifically, in 1981 China accounted for 43% of the world's extreme poor population, while Southeast Asia accounted for 29% and Africa 11% (CNN, 2019). Trends show China dropping as the other two regions increase. By 2010 China only accounted for 13% of the world's extremely poor (CNN, 2019). Meanwhile, extreme poverty has almost doubled in Southeast Asia at 42% and tripled in Sub-Saharan Africa at 34% (CNN, 2019). While there has been a decrease in global poverty overall, there has been substantial increases in certain

regions of the world. GDP is used as a measurement of development; this model does not reflect the quality of life of people in the country. GDP often reflects the growth of elites, more often than not, at the expense of the rest of the majority. While statements that convey that global poverty is decreasing are often used to justify capitalist approaches to development, in reality, these development schemes benefit elite groups at the expense of others.

Capitalist approaches and neoliberal development policies are rooted in conventional approaches to development, such as modernization theory. Modernization theory states there is only one path for development and countries in the global North have reached the pinnacle of development and modernization as a society (So, 1989). This theory argues that underdevelopment is a reflection or product of the country's internal characteristics, rather than a problem stemming from historical events. This theory underpins the neoliberal global development practices and policies that are implemented across the world, as well as institutions like the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, which promote approaches like trade liberalization and privatization. While modernization theorists would argue that policies like trade liberalization and privatization help countries grow economically, world-systems thinking takes a more critical view to interrogate who really benefits from neoliberal policies and agendas.

World Systems Theory (WST) states that our current global system was shaped by past colonialist and capitalist extraction, domination, and expansion, and that these patterns are still relevant and explain why some countries have remained poor, despite decades of capitalist intervention (Wallerstein, 2004). Capitalism shapes our social, economic, and political relations globally-what happens in one part of the world affects the entire system, and that economic growth in some areas is made possible by continued exploitation in others (McMichael, 2022).

World-systems thinking divides countries into three main categories-the periphery, the semi-periphery and the core. Core nations, most developed nations, specialize in high-value services and information technologies whereas periphery nations, the least developed, specialize mostly in agriculture and might have some small manufacturing (Smith, 2012). Core-like products are inherently more profitable than peripheral-like products, and thus through international trade the core countries continue to benefit economically. The semi-periphery is categorized by countries which are middle developed nations (So, 1989). These countries specialize in a mix of production types, including manufacturing, services, and agriculture. These countries are unique in that they are still exploited by core nations but are able to exploit nations in the periphery (Wallerstein, 2004).

The core uses their power to focus on highly profitable industries and to enact trade laws and patents to protect them. These industries thus become dominated by quasi-monopolies, and this further allows for the garnering of high profits. Whereas the peripheral-like production processes, such as agriculture, mining, and small-scale manufacturers, face heavy competition and therefore are less profitable. Thus, trade between the core and periphery is inherently unequal and will always economically disadvantage the periphery (Wallerstein, 2004; So, 1989). This axial division of labor holds the world economy together, but also creates and reproduces international inequalities (Smith, 2012). Compounding economic inequalities, these unequal trade relations also enable core countries to externalize their social and environmental costs to countries in the periphery.

Indeed, the division of labor facilitated by these models allows affluent nations to exploit "cheap" resources in peripheral countries, leveraging their dominance to ensure that economies and markets in the global south remain "open" to foreign companies and investors. Core countries wield significant influence over major development agencies like the World Bank, IMF, and WTO, skewing representation in favor of their interests. Within these institutions, the voting power is disproportionately skewed towards the global North, amplifying the influence of core countries over decision-making processes and further marginalizing the voices and interests of

countries in the global South. Institutions like the World Bank, IMF and WTO advocate for neoliberal agendas, advocating for policies such as market liberalization, free trade, and reductions in public and social services. This benefits core countries at the expense of peripheral countries. Consequently, this perpetuates a cycle of limited formal employment opportunities, deepening the economic challenges faced by youth in nations like Uganda and Jordan.

In short, world-systems thinking emphasizes that colonialism set up the current international division of labor, where some countries are able to specialize in and protect core-like production processes, and other countries are relegated to producing peripheral-like products. This structure has persisted today, institutionalizing the division of labor and the resulting imbalance of power. The impact of this explains why periphery nations have remained poor despite adopting neoliberal development policies for decades, such as free trade, welcoming free trade, foreign direct investment, and increased capital flows (McMichael, 2022). From a world-systems perspective, we need a system other than capitalism to address and reduce international inequalities. The current pro-capitalist and pro-technology model of development is not an environmentally sustainable development model. It does not recognize the inherent inequality of our international trade system and doesn't take into account colonialism and historical structural inequalities that have led to underdevelopment. Policy

implications of WST would focus on a redistribution of global wealth, a different division of labor, and restructuring international institutions that give core nations an upper hand. WST would like to see the emergence of populist movements in nations in the periphery. WST would also stress the importance of the environment in policy making. The dependent nature of countries in the periphery are disproportionately affected by externalized environmental costs. Our capitalist system is not suited for sustainability, we need a new sustainable and equitable system to take the place of capitalism (Wallerstein, 2004).

World Systems Theory offers profound insights into the structural dynamics of our global order, tracing its origins to colonialist and capitalist ventures of extraction and expansion. Through its delineation of core-periphery-semi-periphery dynamics and emphasis on unequal trade relations, WST illuminates the interconnectedness and disparities inherent in the world-system (Smith, 2012). Crucially, WST advocates for a departure from the capitalist status quo, advocating for a more egalitarian and sustainable global order, challenging the power of elites. Its policy implications call for a redistribution of wealth, restructuring of international institutions, and fostering populist movements in peripheral nations (Smith, 2012). Despite criticisms regarding its abstraction and neglect of national developmental histories, WST remains a vital lens through which to examine and address the multifaceted challenges of our world.

Before we delve into the intricacies of Bourdieu's concepts of structure and agency, it's essential to recognize their relevance within the broader context of global systems and development paradigms. WST and neoliberalism have profoundly influenced how nations engage in development strategies and shape the lives of individuals within their societies. WST unveils the enduring legacies of colonialism and capitalism, illustrating how global economic relations perpetuate inequalities between core, semi-periphery, and periphery nations. Neoliberal policies, underpinned by modernization theory, have often advanced the interests of the elite while exacerbating disparities within and among countries. The impact of these systemic forces is potent, especially among marginalized groups like youth, whose aspirations and opportunities are shaped by broader structural dynamics.

Bourdieu's concepts of structure and agency shed light on the realities of youth unemployment and the structural inequalities inherent in our world system. Bourdieu's framework of habitus and agency provides a nuanced lens through which to understand how individuals navigate these structures and exert their will within predetermined confines.

Bourdieu and Habitus

In examining Bourdieu's concepts within the context of youth unemployment, we uncover how the interplay between structure and

agency manifests in their lived experiences. Despite the rhetoric of empowerment and autonomy, youth often find themselves constrained by systemic barriers, reflecting the enduring legacy of global economic hierarchies. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for framing strategies to address youth unemployment and empower individuals to enact meaningful change within their societies.

Bourdieu's framework of habitus and agency provides a nuanced lens through which to understand how individuals navigate these structures and exert their will within predetermined confines. Habitus, ingrained by social conditions, molds individuals' perceptions and behaviors, influencing their responses to the opportunities and constraints imposed by their environments. Habitus refers to one's dispositions that are shaped by their social conditions, influencing behaviors and perceptions subconsciously. A person's habitus is the product of the individual's cognitive and motivational structures. They are guided toward already realized ends.

Habitus is a product of history and produces the individual and collective practices enduring in the present. Habitus governs practices within the constraints and limits that are set by the conditions of Habitus' production. Habitus is shared by those in similar social conditions; social classes are identifiable by their shared habitus. Habitus pre-adapts individuals to their environment and reinforces their dispositions. These habitual dispositions

are reinforced by the individual's social environment. Habitus produces individual and collective practices. Bourdieu states, "The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment produces habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (Bourdieu, 1977, pg 72). Habitus acts as a guiding force in individuals' lives, shaping their behaviors, aspirations, and perceptions of the future within the context of their social conditions.

Some Sociologists, like Anthony Giddens, view agency as an individual's autonomy to act against and potentially transform social and cultural structures and institutions (Giddens, 1984). Others, as Bourdieu does, view agency as the individual's actions and choices that are governed by their habitus and occur within its structure. Individuals enact their agency, which is shaped by their habitus (shaping the individual's aspirations and motivations), within a structured structure.

An individual's responses to their social world are defined in relation to a system of "objective potentialities" (Bourdieu, 1977, pg 78). This socially structured situation, in which the agent's interests are defined, influences not only the individual's motivations and interests, but also, generates what is possible, impossible, and probable. An individual's practices are governed by the habitus, which defines what is reasonable or illogical. The individual is engendered by aspirations and practices that are compatible with the

structures in their social world. These structures create the structure that defines the individual's possibilities. It is within this set system of objective potentialities that the individual can enact their agency (Bourdieu, 1977).

Bourdieu's concept of the Habitus transcends understandings of autonomy, agency, and freedom. Bourdieu challenges both determinism and absolute freedom. He suggests that our freedom is conditioned by the habitus and the conditions of our environment. Individuals enact their agency and make choices within a predetermined or guided structure. Without a structure of which to make choices there would be no agency to enact. Agency can only exist within structure.

Bourdieu uses his work to explain the tastes of elites. I, however, will utilize his concepts to understand how working people envision agency. Individuals enact agency within a structure, utilizing other structures to accomplish their goal. Rather than more agency in the Giddens sense, I believe that individuals want more structure in which to enact their agency. Having more agency in the Giddens sense without the proper structures in which to enact that agency will leave them without opportunities to enact their agency. This craving for more structure is manifested in their aspiration for the government to build more industry and create more opportunities for youth.

Youths experience exemplifies the inequalities inherent in our world system and depicts its impact on individuals. Youth unemployment is a result of the current world system and of neoliberal development policies. I will next look more specifically at youth unemployment and the structures in which youth operate.

The Problem of Unemployment

The term "youth" lacks a universal definition and has been variably defined across contexts due to its ambiguous nature. The United Nations defines youth as those aged between 15 and 24.

This example highlights how various organizations draw distinctions within the category of youth. For example, the World Bank (2024) defines youth between 15 to 24 and calls those between 25 to 29 as young adults, while anyone over the age of 25 is considered an adult. I consider individuals within the age range of 18 to 33 to share common challenges, limitations, and prospects, thereby defining them as youth within this demographic.

Unemployment is often defined as when a person does not obtain a job even though they are able to work and actively seek it (Marelli et al., 2013).

Underemployment refers to the situation in which a person is employed but is overqualified or overeducated for the job (Rahman et.al, 2021). Another category of unemployment explains those who are neither in employment or education or training (NEET). Youth unemployment refers to youth who

have recently invested in human capital, such as a university education or vocational training, where their unemployment status erodes these investments and increases the risks of labor market exclusion which results in NEET status (Marelli et. al., 2013). The negative economic growth prospects of unemployment cause a permanent loss of human capital (Marelli et. al., 2013). The proportion of those who are in NEET is estimated to be highest in emerging economies (Yeung et.al, 2020). However, defining NEET can be problematic as it includes heterogeneous groups, such as women doing domestic and caregiving work, youth who are unemployed, youth unable to work because of illness or disability, those voluntarily in NEET, and youth who have been discouraged from finding employment. NEET is an extremely vulnerable group. Their prolonged exclusion from the labor market risks their future employment prospects and their value to their society (Yeung et.al, 2020).

As mentioned previously, youth are represented in two ways that are paradoxical. The World Bank and the "New Global Youth Empowerment Project" show the different ways youth can be represented, typically by institutions (Sukarieh et.al, 2008). In one light, they are agents of change, leaders, activists, and participants. They are a country's biggest asset. In this light they are seen as the best hope for development and a prosperous future. On the other hand, they are portrayed much more negatively. This depiction carries implicit themes of aggression and reveals apprehension

towards youth. They are feared for their power and seen as ticking time bombs with pent-up anger. They are the drivers of political instability and insurrections as well as violent conflict. They are social dynamite containing boiling-over frustrations (Sukarieh et.al, 2008). These two paradoxical depictions of youth illustrate one thing—their power. For example when youth are not integrated into the labor market, tension erupts among generations, genders, and social classes (Sukarieh et.al, 2008). This can result in social unrest which was seen in countries with high youth unemployment rates (data from 2018), like Greece (39.5%), Spain (34.3%), Egypt (32.6%), and France (17.9%) (Yeung et.al, 2020). Youth are incredibly important; they have the ability to enact great change when they channel their energies. This is seen as a great threat but also the largest hope for the future.

When youth are feeling dejected they can perpetuate a cycle of conflicts and economic collapse. The Arab Spring, the Great Recession, and the ongoing effects of the Syrian Civil War have created a new wave of protests and turmoil in the region (Kumar, 2020). This occurred before the COVID-19 Pandemic devastated the economy. Youth played a central role in the Arab Spring uprisings (Kumar, 2020). Their grievances were with the government that left them with few economic and job prospects. The manipulation by elites and crony capitalism in the private sector has

created a large bag of monopolistic firms and small firms that employ few and have not resulted in a sizable number of job creation (Kumar, 2020).

World leaders do not take the issue of youth unemployment and the needs of youth seriously. Some jobs have been created but have not been adequate enough to fill the large need of youth jobs. From 2000 to 2008, Africa generated 73 million job opportunities, yet only 16 million, constituting 21.9%, were secured by young individuals (Baah-Boateng, 2016). Currently foreign direct investment in Africa is focused on natural resources, mining and minerals; these sectors are known to produce very few jobs (Africa Renewal, 2013; Baah-Boateng, 2016). As attention is placed elsewhere, the issue of youth unemployment ripens.

Youth in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean regions ranked the highest (38%) in terms of propensity to move abroad (ILO, 2016). Youth's desires to migrate increase the poorer the country (ILO, 2016). Youth move abroad for many reasons, including: high unemployment rates, lack of job opportunities, humanitarian reasons, natural disasters, geopolitical tensions, armed conflicts, and persecution of minorities. More than 52% of youth (aged 15-29) who left their home country live in developed countries (ILO, 2016).

Jordan's migration flows are very unique. There is labor mobility both to and from Jordan (Mryyan, 2016). It can be a safe haven for Arab citizens affected by conflict; immigration to Jordan is a key factor contributing to the population growth of the labor supply. In less than fifty years, Jordan's population increased by more than four times as a result of growing political instability in the region over the last sixty years (Mryyan, 2016). Due to the connections between Jordan and its surrounding Arab neighbors, it is very easy for foreign workers to immigrate to Jordan. Additionally, highly skilled and educated Jordanian workers chose to work in countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia). Jordan experiences significant brain drain. This reflects Jordan's complex and unstable labor supply.

The Syrian Civil War put pressure on Jordan with an influx of refugees stressing Jordan's infrastructure and resources. The refugee crisis put a downward pressure on wages, increased child labor, and had large displacement effects—especially for lower skilled jobs and migrants (ILO, 2019). In 2016, Jordan facilitated access to the labor market for Syrian refugees. The Jordan Compact reduced barriers to legal employment of refugees (ILO, 2019). High tension between refugees and host workers as a result of job scarcity is a huge concern for future conflict.

In Uganda, rural to city migration is prominent among youth. Youth search for non-existent city jobs, finding rural work unattractive as they associate agriculture with a low income (Baah-Boateng, 2016). As mentioned earlier, a paradox exists between the economic growth of countries post neo-liberal reforms and the quality of life of the country's people. There is persistent youth unemployment in Uganda, despite the high economic growth exhibited after implementation of neo-liberal reforms (Asiimwe, 2023). Uganda's neoliberal and informal structures have preserved youth unemployment despite economic growth.

Ugandan youth with a post-secondary education have the highest probability of unemployment (Egessa et.al, 2021). This is explained, but not limited to, by poor quality education, inadequate job-matching skills and low job availability (Egessa et.al, 2021). There is a gap between the curriculum and the demands of the labor market and between practice and theory (Klein, 2013). There is a wide gap between the labor supply and demand. Ugandan universities send around 400,000 youth to the labor market yearly to fill 9,000 available positions (Klein, 2013). This makes unemployment particularly higher the more educated the youth and leads large numbers of youth to enter the informal sector (Klein, 2013; Egessa et.al, 2021). Job opportunities that require higher education qualifications are fleetingly rare.

The high rates of youth unemployment significantly contribute to their involvement in the informal economy. Often operating on the periphery of formal markets, young individuals find themselves engaged in casual and unregulated labor, forming a distinct cultural parallel to formal market practices (McMichael, 2022). Despite their pivotal role in economic activity, national accounting often segregates the formal economy from the informal sector (McMichael, 2022), perpetuating the marginalization of informal activities within development policy. This oversight fails to recognize the essential function that youth participation in the informal economy plays in sustaining and fostering broader economic growth.

Globally, there is a large skills mismatch among youth and the jobs available. The issue of skills mismatch and education's relation to employment cumulate in high unemployment rates (Rahman et.al., 2021). The large problem is that there are so many university graduates who struggle to find employment. Education is not linked to the employment sector. The decoupling of education from employment causes disequilibrium in the supply and demand for educated manpower in the labor market. This leads to gaps that widen and persist (Rahman et.al., 2021). Higher education and universities' curricula do not educate on technical and employable skills. There is an increased need in the labor market for skills. Globally there is a need for more people skilled in different trades and sectors. The excess supply of workforce in the labor market leaves those with a higher education degree struggling. There are many positions that

could be filled by lower qualifications. Youth underemployment is the direct result of underdeveloped skills, which is a consequence of the lack of effective education policy (Rahman et.al., 2021). Formal education needs to connect with technical training, labor market entry, and the demands of the workplace. The mismatch between the skills and needs of the labor market severely affects employability and opportunities. This indicates the need for reform in higher education and more job creation.

The effects of youth unemployment can be severe, both in the youths' experience and its economic implications. Unemployment hampers growth and development prospects in the long run since it causes a permanent loss of human capital. The behavior of the labor market affects a country's economic development, political stability, demographics, and social integration (Yeung et.al., 2020). Entering the labor market is critical in an individual's transition to adulthood. It has many long-term socio-economic consequences on the individual's life trajectory. Transitioning successfully into the labor market is critical for youth to gain a sense of self, social identity, and economic autonomy (Yeung et.al., 2020). Unemployment drastically affects youth mentally and emotionally as well as affecting the overall country's political structure, economic development, and health issues (Hussainat et.al., 2013).

Youth disconnection in the early ages of 16-24 can have lasting negative effects on future labor-market success (Loprest et.al., 2019) These early adult years are vital in building human capital and are a stage of life where youth make career decisions and build connections (Loprest et.al., 2019). Youth behavior reflects the institutions, environment, and culture where they grew up. Disconnection from school and work correlates with other issues like increased criminal activity, increased drug use, and overall lower levels of educational attainment (Loprest et.al., 2019). Youth disconnection can be linked to depression, criminal activity, and substance abuse. Disconnection from work and school is more common among less educated youth (Loprest et.al., 2019). Secure jobs that sustain labor market participation enable youth to move through other stages of adulthood. In order to develop sustainably, youth transitions to the labor market need to work seamlessly.

Research Background

Jordan and Uganda are used as case studies in this paper to examine the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa regions. Due to their high rates of unemployment and substantial youth populations, which contribute to the phenomenon of the youth bulge, Jordan and Uganda provide excellent case studies in examining the youth experience of unemployment. Both Jordan and Uganda share youth demographics and high unemployment rates. Yet they differ in their economies and ethnicities. By contrasting these two

countries we can effectively analyze the experiences of youth in diverse socio-economic contexts.

The World Bank categorizes Jordan as a lower-middle-income country and Uganda as a low-income country (2022), placing both nations within the lower strata of the global political-economic hierarchy. This hierarchical positioning underscores the prevalence of power imbalances and perpetuated global inequalities, which are manifested in tangible realities in these countries, such as high unemployment rates. The limited capacity of less-developed countries to effect changes in their economies or industries, as discussed previously, is a result of overarching structures and systems at play. Thus, the constraints on opportunities for youth in these countries are not attributable to government shortcomings but rather to the broader world-system imposing these imbalances.

Amidst the reported economic growth in both Jordan and Uganda over recent decades, these nations grapple with significant development challenges, compounded by the unequal distribution of growth and persistent issues stemming from their peripheral status within the global economic framework. While Jordan and Uganda have distinct contexts and levels of economic development, their shared struggles in navigating high rates of youth unemployment underscore broader systemic issues at play. The rate of youth unemployment in Jordan is 41.91%, while the MENA

regional average is 25% (World Bank, 2022). In Uganda they are 4.61% compared to a Sub-Saharan regional average of 11% (World Bank, 2022). However, the problem of unemployment is likely worse than national statistics suggest, as underemployment and the informal sectors are not reported in rates of unemployment and, therefore, mask the reality of low rates of youth unemployment (Baah-Boateng, 2016). For example, other surveys show that 2 in 5 (38.8%) youth in Uganda have been looking for work for longer than one year (ILO, 2017). The underutilization of youth labor in Uganda was 67.9% in 2015, this constitutes 48.9% of the youth population in irregular employment (ILO, 2017).

Uganda has the second youngest population in the world (Citypopulation, 2020). About 73% of its population is below the age of 35. In the next twenty-five years, this population is projected to double. Uganda has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in Sub-Saharan Africa. Uganda's population is 47,250,000 and has a male to female ratio of 49.5% : 50.5% (Worlddata, 2024). 8.8 million Ugandans aged 15 to 24 are neither in employment or education or training. Uganda has GDP per capita USD 964.4 billion and a GDP annual growth of 4.6% (World Bank, 2022). 38.5% of people aged 10 to 19 live in the two poorest wealth quintiles and 19.6% live in households with the head of household having no education (UNFPA, 2024). Uganda has an annual population growth of 3% (UNFPA, 2024).

In Jordan, 63% of its population is under 30 years old. Every year 100,00 youth start looking for work. Of youth aged 15-30 32% are unemployed (UNICEF). Jordan has the third lowest female labor force participation globally. People aged 12-30 make up more than a third of the Jordanian population (OECD, 2024). Less than three-quarters of young men acquired a job lasting longer than six months (UNICEF). Jordan is ranked 9th highest for youth unemployment rate globally, for groups aged 15 to 24 at 39.42% (Statistica, 2023).

In 2017, Jordan was the only country to move down and be reclassified from an upper-middle-income to lower-middle-income country by the World Bank. This change was caused by three key factors: the increase (+8.6%) in Jordan's population (UNDP, 2022), low inflation, and a slowdown in GDP growth.

Petra is a city in Jordan and is home to an archeological site that brings tourists all over the world. As an UNESCO World Heritage Site, Petra's economy is largely based on tourism. Research was conducted in the archeological site of Petra and in the nearest town, Wadi Musa which is in the Ma'an Governorate in southern Jordan. This area is Jordan's main tourist attraction.

The Bududa district is located in the eastern region of Uganda and has a population of 271,000 with 74% of the population residing in rural areas (Citypopulation, 2020). Bududa is primarily a rural area and is one of the poorest districts in Uganda. The main economic activity is agriculture, including subsistence and local crops, as well as coffee for international markets. This district is situated on the southwestern slopes of Mount Elgon. Bududa is prone to landslides, which frequently displaces community members. I focused on Bududa because of its contrasting economic and environmental characteristics compared to Petra.

I will now transition to my research findings to illustrate the experience of youth unemployment in Bududa, Uganda, and Petra, Jordan. By diving into the nuances of youth unemployment and the role of socio-economic structures, I aim to illustrate the lived realities and aspirations of youth in Bududa and Petra. A comparative analysis enables an understanding of the macro and micro intersecting factors that shape the youth experience.

Findings:

Informality of Work

Across both locations, many of the interviews revealed that numerous youth get trapped in unemployment due to the informality of work. This sector is created by a lack of available jobs, few formal employment contracts, and a high prevalence of short term work, which leaves youth easily exploited.

High competition and lack of formal job opportunities lead people to take advantage of the plethora of youth and their willingness to work.

The Ugandan “Hustle Culture”

There is high competition and a lack of available jobs for youth which pushes them to get creative and build their own industries. In Uganda, hustle culture particularly thrives, where the government encourages youth to be entrepreneurs. Paul explained hustle culture, “I was hustling around. Trying to know, I know as being a youth, you try. But nothing I was getting.” The government encourages youth to create industry through entrepreneurship rather than investing in building industries themselves. A Ugandan youth explained this struggle,

“Most of [the] youth, they are just around trying to hustle, trying to look what they [can] do, but there is no support. For sure they need [and] they want to go to school [but there is] no support, nothing. They can go and take time, maybe do something and they get something [money]. They are just rotating around, nothing they are getting. And they really are just on the street, they need support, but nothing.”

Hustle culture is different between the villages and cities of Uganda, as well as between men and women. In the villages and for males, hustle culture can be characterized by taking on whatever work can be found, such as subsistence farming, selling, unloading trucks, raising cattle, sowing,

carrying water, construction, washing clothes, or working as Boda Boda drivers (motorcycle taxi). Hustle culture for male youth in the cities can be characterized by construction work or bartending work, but mainly creating their own retail businesses and selling.

In Bududa, there is a traditional view of gender roles and a gendered division of labor. Women mostly work in domestic work and have fewer options to engage in hustle culture. For women in Uganda informal work is manifested most commonly through unregulated employment as a housemaid, both in the cities and rural areas. Women also engage in other informal mechanisms to secure capital, namely transactional sex or through participation in the sexual economy. One man explained how women engage in the informal economy,

“Really those women are doing using themselves to make money, using their bodies and their bodies to make money because they don't have jobs. They're getting married, when they're still young because there's nowhere to get [money]. Schools' very hard to go, no support (...)They really mess up with schools and they go for marriage. And they really also want to go to work and others are going abroad. Others are going to work for like a maid but they don't have jobs.”

While women can utilize their bodies to make money, they are placed in a very difficult position. Transactional sex is frowned upon, yet many women

still have to resort to this tactic, it is becoming more commonplace. Women and maids are often mistreated and exploited. For example, it is common for an employer to withhold pay or to sexually assault their maids. The corruption and unequal situation in which women are placed in the gendered division of labor leave them vulnerable to sexual exploitation and violence. Many women conveyed that they were told in order to attain a job, or keep a job they already held, they need to engage in sexual relations with their boss. Many women have “boyfriends” who provide them with things. Women who engage with multiple “boyfriends” receive money and resources that help them, but this also leaves them vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases, like HIV/AIDS, or unwanted pregnancy. One participant explained why their friend working as a maid left her employer,

“Because maids don't have contracts, and a lot of people here don't sign contracts, usually informal work. So it depends on the person. If people are good, they will pay you. If people are not good, they may refuse to pay. Or they can sometimes [have] one other challenge that usually the maids have is they might come and end up not even doing a month because the conditions you know are really bad. And then what the people do is say ‘oh, if you leave before the end of the month, I won't pay you’ and so they end up just leaving, you know without being paid.”

Due to the high population of youth, they are seen by employers as disposable and replaceable. The lack of contracts fails to hold employers

accountable. The increase in informal jobs due to the lack of available formal jobs leads to increased exploitation and abuse of youth, especially maids. Destiny, explained the difficulties she faced working as a maid for 10 years,

“Okay, as the first house. I think I was not paid well. I was not paid. Because the money I was getting was just petty money, like the money for buying. Not buying something much. You can't even save, it was just 20,000 [5.26 USD] by that time. So it was not that much until I shifted to another house where it is now in Kampala where I got 80,000 [21.04 USD]. Yes, it was a very big improvement from where I was before. So there and then again moved to another house. Still in Kampala, but they used to stay in Mbale. Yeah. But they shifted to Kampala. Okay. So then they gave me 120,000 [31.57 USD]. Yeah. Which was an achievement.”

Destiny continued,

“Well, the first house was very okay with me. Why? Because they treat me as a child, a child. And then to the second house. It was okay. At first. Yeah. And then in the end, I think I was after two years. The man wanted to rape me. So I had to run from there, I had to run away.”

Destiny ran away and began working as a maid in Mbale. She was paid well at this house because the mother worked as a UN worker away from home.

Destiny worked there for two years; but, in the end the mother died and her relatives were suspicious of Destiny, so she was let go.

Destiny's story, having to move to different homes and the difficulties she faced as a maid being easily exploited and taken advantage of, is characteristic of what many women face when seeking money through the informal economy. The gendered division of labor leaves women with few options and opportunities of employment if they are uneducated. Women are constrained and have limited opportunities for formal employment. Engaging in informal labor, like domestic work, leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

The gendered division of labor perpetuates a cycle of economic marginalization for women and reinforces traditional gender roles where women are limited to working in low-pay jobs. Women who are more educated are not exempt from exploitation. Educated women who seek white collar jobs can experience sexual exploitation. While sexual exploitation is common throughout Uganda, the corrupt nature of the informal economy further exacerbates gender differences and sexual coercion. The lack of regulation and accountability in the informal economy exacerbates gender disparities and amplifies risks that perpetuate systemic inequalities.

Overall, the interviews revealed that many youth are forced to make ends meet by any means possible; this often involves engaging in unregulated and casual labor in the informal economy. With a surplus of youth compared to available jobs, youth ultimately are pushed to get creative and hustle. They are encouraged to “do it yourself” and create their own businesses. The cultural norms and perception in Uganda is that unemployment is not society’s fault but the fault of the individual. This perception points to problems within the system that are perceived as problems of the individual. Youth try to work within the structure and utilize their agency to find an income, coming up with their own business.

While attending university in Uganda youth need to support themselves, so hustle culture dominates. Even when youth are trying to pursue paths towards more education and training they may need to take breaks from school in order to support themselves. John, a 34 year old male, explored entrepreneurship while attending university for Business and Entrepreneurship. John had saved money growing up and used his capital to start a small business selling clothes from China at a stall in the entrance of malls. While working he looked around and questioned whether this was the right investment. He faced high levels of competition from youth who had been working for years at their stalls. John faced issues many other young entrepreneurs face in a saturated job market. John emphasized the struggle of attending higher education while also trying to make ends meet. John

referred to other jobs he took on while attending university and the difficulties associated with attaining a degree,

“The first year we used to do classes after lunch. So I remember I worked at my sister's mobile money. But it became hectic because by midday, you're supposed to be moving for classes. So the government has then created this system to transition young, young high school kids, and help them to transition into college kids where maybe they can have some bit of work, you know. So we, as a country, has generated a group of youth who don't know how to work. Not because we don't want work, just because we have never been taught how to work.”

John's experience is reflective of what many participants expressed in their interviews. Students have to take on multiple responsibilities while attending university. Youth struggle with supporting themselves throughout their studies and also face pressures of sending remittances home. John commented on the difficulties of working while attending higher education,

“Those three years, where years of begging, we become just mature beggars, where by the education system, kids study almost the whole day. (...) For you to become better in class, the best student, I can tell you were the ones who are busy in the library, and we're not having any income, you know, because they just wanted to pass and [have] real world experience. And

remember, our lecturer said, you know, the ones who are here, the best students who become teachers like us here. And the ones who are not, the best students may become the rich people, because they'll go out there, they will have no option, their papers won't stand for them. And they will have to find a way to survive. You know. And I remember one of our best students in that class is now [a] lecturer at the same school.”

What John says illustrates the out of date nature of universities. Students who devote themselves to studying will be worse off than those who spend little time in the library and a lot of time on the street hustling. This is the opposite of what is heralded as the method or path to success and social mobility. John does not see the value in his university degree beyond the connections he made while he was there. John said,

“You know, for me, I didn't, I've never picked my transcript. I remember just getting my testimony. And I used it to try and get jobs.”

John illustrates the mismatch between the education system and the skill requirements of the labor market. He found his higher education did not prepare him for future jobs. His story emphasizes the need for educational reform. Studying and attending classes no longer prepares youth for the jobs they will face. Skills have become much more employable. Universities

need to offer more practical experience and focus less on theoretical knowledge.

The strong structural barriers youth face in pursuing higher education and in the subsequent job search reinforces the higher structures at work in youths' lives. Despite aspirations for higher education and social mobility, youth run into systemic barriers, like financing their education and a mismatch between what is learnt in the education system and the skills demanded by the labor market. These structural barriers exacerbate the difficulties of finding a job.

Jordanian Contracts, or Lack Thereof

As in Uganda, in Jordan, informal work is also characterized by the lack of contracts. Even when contracts are used, they are all short-term contracts lasting only a couple of months. Once time is up, youth are again left unemployed. It is incredibly difficult to maintain a steady income. In Petra the main economy is tourism. Many youth will go to Petra to work in tourism either selling or giving camel or donkey rides to tourists when they cannot find formal work.

Many Jordanians pursue a university education. Despite their qualifications, they still struggle to find work. This confines them to employment in fields in which they are overqualified. For example, one participant explained

that, "She has a cousin who studied engineering and he didn't find any work in it so instead he just goes down to Petra." This participant's cousin struggled to find work in engineering and subsequently was confined to work in tourism in Petra. Despite pursuing a degree, youth run into structural problems that inhibit them from pursuing work in their area of expertise.

Beyond work in tourism, there is archeological work. This is typically conducted through projects, mostly led by foreigners. The lack of long term contracts provides no security for young workers. When there are contracts they typically last up to three months. These projects provide employment in the short term but youth are quickly left searching for a job once again at the end of the project. Ahmed talked about the problem with a lack of long term contracts and employment,

"I think it's not [a] good feeling because like, you know, in any second, you [can] go home. At least you should have work. This is the basic as a human you should have work, healthcare, and education. You don't have work, so it's difficult. I think it's not only a problem here, but all over Jordan."

Ahmed depicts the difficulties many unemployed youth face, not just in Petra but throughout Jordan. Mental health challenges and feelings of inadequacy grow among unemployed youth and hurt their future development. Leaving many idle youth jobless decreases their ability to

expand their skills and knowledge, thereby decreasing the country's human capital.

Bududa, Uganda has a strong gendered division of labor. In Petra, Jordan gender divisions among labor are less pronounced and severe. However the idea that men work in higher paying fields, like engineering, prevails. For example, archeology is a lower paying field and is dominated by women.

Interviews from both Jordan and Uganda shed light on the plight of youth, stemming from navigating the informal economy. Due to short-term work arrangements and a lack of formal employment opportunities, youth are left vulnerable to exploitation. The informal sector leaves youth without economic and job security.

Uganda has fierce competition for limited job opportunities and thus a culture of hustling prevails. Paul's story captures the essence of this struggle, from navigating the informal economy and supporting oneself through higher education. Youth pursue and create their own opportunities in the informal sector through entrepreneurship. Due to a high turnover rate and competition, youth are forced to hustle.

Similarly in Jordan, informal work prevails. The absence of formal agreements and prevalence of short term contracts, if there are contracts at

all, indicate the insecurity youth face in employment. Many Jordanians, like university educated Ugandans, end up working in fields or jobs in which they are overqualified. The precarious nature of employment opportunities for youth in Jordan, and in Uganda, illustrates the challenges of finding secure and stable employment in the informal sector.

Jordan and Uganda are in dependent positions in the world system. As previously mentioned, core countries exploit countries in the periphery through unequal economic exchange. This limits countries in the periphery to work in raw materials and supplying low skilled labor-like domestic work in Uganda. Semi-periphery countries, like Jordan, have characteristics of both the core and periphery. Their situation is more complex in the world-system, holding a mix of moderately developed industry alongside elements of dependency, they face challenges of exploitation from the core and competition with other emerging economies. Since core countries dominate high economic activities and wealth they leave semi-peripheral and peripheral countries with limited access to resources and development opportunities. Neoliberal development policies prioritize free market principles and minimal government intervention. This inturn promotes the expansion of informal economic activities in order for individuals to cope with economic challenges of unemployment, poverty, and limited access to formal employment. Reliance on the informal economy in peripheral and semi-peripheral countries and their dependency in the world-system

reinforces the structural inequalities at play. This also makes it difficult for these countries to establish robust industries that can provide plentiful jobs. Dependency on the informal economy perpetuates systemic inequalities and makes the establishment of industries, which would offer stable jobs to youth, difficult to institute. With a lack of structures in which youth can navigate and enact their agency to access and build upon opportunities, youth are left to work in the insecure informal economy. Reliance on the informal economy indicates a failure of development policies to address structural inequalities and the promotion of sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

Higher Education and Tertiary Education - Skills Development

The current system asserts that if youth attain a degree from a higher education institution they will be able to secure a job with high pay—this is no longer the reality. Higher education graduates in Jordan and Uganda are struggling to find jobs. This is very apparent in Jordan, where most of the population is educated, and in Uganda, where it is more uncommon to have attained a degree from a higher education institution.

Jordanian Higher Education

Many graduates struggle to find jobs after graduation in Jordan. In response, they continue their education and look for a masters degree. They feel that since they now have a higher degree they will be able to find a job. This common misperception leaves a lot of youth unemployed and in an endless cycle of education and certificates. One participant, Nawaf, faced this struggle,

“Ya, actually when I graduate[d] from my bachelor degree I couldn't find any job at that time. So I decide[d] to not search anymore and concentrate more in my master degree. So after I finish my masters degree here I then complete[d] other master degree in Europe. When I came back from Europe I was... ahh you came back from Europe and I had a degree from Europe and maybe I will find a job. And I was surprised that there was nothing to do. So I write my other thesis, I start working after that.”

Nawaf got two masters, one in Europe and one in Jordan, and was still struggling to find employment. As Nawaf's story indicates, the promise of higher education for job employment is no longer a reality. This was a prevalent theme among many Jordanian participants.

A university degree is not enough to get a job, youth need to have experience and training. This was commonly understood and recited among

the Jordanian youth. Most job posts require five years of experience, and because the labor market is so saturated, any employer can find people with years of experience. This leaves youth without a place to start and whereby they become stuck in a cycle of attaining more education. They are forced to complete training and other courses to continue to develop their skills and education. In an effort to combat the idleness of unemployment and to continue to develop themselves, youth engage in classes and training.

Due to the high degree of competition and surplus of candidates for job postings, many youth cannot find work in what they studied and need to go far outside their training and expertise, sacrificing their education, for “any job”. One participant said,

“But if you study engineer[ing], and in Jordan there’s a lot. A lot of engineering. Then they are working at [a] restaurant, yeah, because like there is no work. A lot of people [are] studying business, a lot of people [are] studying different things. It’s difficult to work on the same thing you studied, really difficult unless you have *Wasta*¹.”

Continuing to look for a job based on what one studied is too limiting and often impossible to find. This further renders the degree youth acquired at university useless. Many end up in a different profession than what they

¹“Wasta is an Arabic concept that describes the use of close friends and family members, rather than formal means, to resolve conflicts and gain access to resources” (Baranik et al., 2023).

studied for—unless they have connections. Despite attainment of a degree, youth encounter larger structural forces that limit their employment opportunities. The world-system provides an uneven distribution of power, with core countries wielding control. This affects those outside the core through limitations in economic attainment and prospects. It is not the fault of the individual but the fault of the global system that limits opportunities for individuals residing in countries outside of the core. These global structures are structuring structures in the peripheral and semi-peripheral countries.

Ugandan Skill Building

As previously mentioned, youth who pursued higher education struggle to find a job after graduation. This forces them to seek work in areas they are overqualified for or outside of their field. One example is a young woman I interviewed in Uganda who could not find a job with her degree. She decided to open a small business selling clothes, her first job. Due to the high level of competition among other youth working on entrepreneurial DIY businesses, she had to abandon this business endeavor². This one example is emblematic of a common thread—that one cannot find a job with their degree. For example, a participant said,

“Look at it, calculate the actual numbers of people every year that graduate and don't get jobs, it's quite high. So it doesn't

² DIY will be discussed more in subsequent sections.

necessarily mean that you'll be employed if you get a certificate from university.”

The labor market is oversaturated with job applicants, particularly for positions requiring degrees, due to the large number of graduates. Youth cite the lack of practical work at university and how it does not prepare them for a future job. One participant from Uganda said,

“So at campus, people don't get skills, they just get knowledge like, not even that knowledge enough to help you to do something on your own, just memorizing questions and answers to pass (...) you find it very hard to put what you studied into work.”

Schoolwork does not necessarily prepare youth for a job. Another said, “And it's it just stops on paper. We don't do practical work, they don't tell you maybe develop a project.” Theoretical education is great but it needs to be applicable to the demands of the job market. The lack of experiential learning leads to idle work that students feel is not practical. One participant said,

“So they don't give you an opportunity to train in what you're studying. So you just do the paperwork, you do the papers and mark papers and mark and then you come out this way to get the experience.”

The lack of hands-on experience and progression of globalization has produced a mismatch between jobs and skills. The educational curriculum is not practical or experiential rather it is theoretical-solely utilizing pen and paper. Another participant expressed the stress they felt at the lack of preparation higher education provided them with,

“We are loaded with loads of information, but it's more theory, it's not practical. And then in the outside world, it feels like you need more practical. Yeah, because they need people who can do things, not people who know things. And yet at school, we are always given these loads of information, which when they tell you to do something then you can't do it.”

Many people in Uganda said they would advise someone to go to vocational training, what is known as “Tertiary school”, instead of getting a degree in higher education. Many youth that I interviewed said that being trained in a skill is more employable than a university degree. This different educational path focuses more on employable skills. These institutions' attendees used to be seen as failures, those who were not smart enough to attend university. This perception is changing, as many Ugandans recognize the importance of skills. Those from tertiary institutions are more likely to get a job than university graduates. When asked if it is better to go to a university or a tertiary school, this interviewee responded a tertiary institution,

“Because I have seen a number of people complaining about having these degrees, masters, from the universities, and then

they're not employed. And I've seen very many places and departments calling for skills. So I think if you go to a tertiary school, it would be more...it would expand your chances of getting a job if you had a skill."

The comparison is that in university youth just sit and write but tertiary schools provide practical knowledge that is applicable to jobs demanded by the labor market. Skills are more marketable than a piece of paper (diploma). When explaining what a university education is like, this participant said,

"It is more business oriented than skill based. And it's it just stops on paper. We don't do practical work, they don't tell you maybe develop a project. (...) So they don't give you an opportunity to train in what you want you're studying. So you just do the paper work, you do the papers and mark papers and mark and then you come out this way to get the experience. (...) So when you come out this way, is when you find it very hard to put what you studied into work."

The hands off model of higher education needs to change in order to cater to the changing jobs of the present and future. The hands-on approach of tertiary education is much more useful for youth. It provides them with a skill to seek employment and also provides them the ability to be self-employed. Skill attainment is more accessible, than higher education, to those in rural areas.

In Jordan and Uganda, neoliberal development has promoted an emphasis on higher education. As a result, there are many university graduates entering the job market each year. The education system, however, fails to provide a practical education, focusing instead on theoretical knowledge. This in turn fails to provide youth with the skills required by the labor market. Consequently, the oversaturation of the labor market exacerbates this issue; as a result, youth often find themselves working in areas outside of their studies and in which they are overqualified. The mismatch between skills and labor market demands perpetuates unemployment and underemployment of youth in these two countries.

Global economic forces shape local realities of youth in countries in the periphery and semi-periphery, including educational systems and the labor market. Core and international structures are structuring the labor and educational structures in the periphery and semi-periphery. Through this, certain jobs and skills are demanded by different regions. Global economic dynamics and hierarchy perpetuate inequalities and limit the opportunities of those in the periphery and semi-periphery.

Social Networking for Employment

High competition and limited job opportunities make navigating the labor market daunting. In the face of a lack of reliable formal employment

structures, other informal structures emerge. In Jordan, the concept of *Wasta*, or kinship ties, shapes employment opportunities. Similarly, in Uganda, reliance on personal networks is vital in the absence of formal employment structures. More often than not social networks are the deciding factor in a youth's prospects for employment.

In Uganda career advice is found through friends. Many friends teach each other trades and skills to help each other out. Due to generational differences in the experiences of youth now compared to their parents, youth need to utilize their social networks to seek guidance and advice on what path to take or job to pursue. Through the utilization of friends and family, youth can find and secure job openings. For more highly regarded jobs, like governmental work, youth need to know someone already working there to be able to acquire a job in government. One participant said,

“So for anyone to get a job for you to be in that position, you must at least have a person you know but if you don't know anybody, then you don't stand any high chances of getting that job.”

Summing up the issue, tied to high competition and a lack of available jobs, another participant stated kindly, “You have to create friendship first before you get the job actually, this Uganda.” With the current rates of youth unemployment, it is very difficult to find and secure a job without inside

help from friends and family. Connections and skills are what will help youth escape unemployment.

Many have to pay to get a job; women face sexual harassment to acquire employment, bribery is very apparent, and corruption is rampant. Since the current formal systems available to youth to find a job does not help them, youth are forced to utilize other networks and means to find employment. Youths have to make use of their friend and family connections, in many instances this is the only way to find work (Baranik et al., 2023). In Jordan this is referred to by a term, *wasta*, which refers to kinship ties. It is common practice in Jordan to use *wasta* to find work and it is respected as a social mechanism (Baranik et al., 2023).

When asked why it was so hard to find work one Jordanian participant put it very succinctly, "Because of *wasta*, if you have *wasta* you work, if you don't have *wasta* you sit." The determinants of employment and all of one's opportunities in Jordan come down to *wasta*. In order to find work, youth need to utilize their kinship ties to find job openings. This creates the employment system. Those with *wasta* are much better situated than those with less *wasta*. Some youth tried to find work on their own through more formal structures but found the only solution to employment was to use *wasta*. The formal mechanisms do not help youth find work, instead they have to use *wasta*.

The youth experience in Jordan and Uganda is very similar. Characterized by high competition and sparse employment opportunities, youth utilize their social networks to navigate the difficulties imposed on them. This reality is a result of the systemic inequalities created by the world-system in order for the core to perpetuate and consolidate their wealth and power. Both countries see personal connections as the driving force for job attainment. Despite differences in terminology, the plight of youth in both countries indicates the resilience of youth acting within the constraining bounds of structures in the world-system.

Jordan and Uganda face similar patterns of social networks trumping formal structures in attaining a job. The larger global structures at play create a mirage of the ability of formal structures to provide jobs. Youth find that larger structures are operating within these formal structures, the larger structure being *wasta* or social networks. They then utilize their social networks and *wasta* as a structure to find work; these are the true structures at play and which creates a mirage of formal structures effectivity in accessing employment opportunities. The reliance on personal networks indicates a response to the limitations of formal structures. These limitations are a result of the hierarchical global system and its influence over capitalism and global markets.

Idle Guidance - The Case of Uganda

When youth are unemployed they are idle, wasting their potential. Ugandan youth can hustle to find ways to make a small amount of money but are often left with a lot of time to loiter and be idle. Many youth hang out in the village and town centers loitering, waiting around for an opportunity to make money. Most Jordanian youth are in high school; but, in Uganda youth face less strict cultural rules surrounding mal-behaviors. Christine, described this,

“But most of them that don't have, like, don't have a job or something that they earn from, they just loitering around those that don't have anything to do.”

When James, a 29 year old male, was asked how youth unemployment affects the community, he said,

“When the youths are not employed, they kind of find refuge in, in very dangerous activities, let's say drugs. Now these groups in dangerous activities, stealing and all that stuff. So the moment they're not employed, the idle mind is usually a place of the Devil's place of work so kind of Yeah, so it's not really easy to be unemployed, and you end up doing very silly things.”

James goes on to explain how hard this can be for unemployed youth,

“That is the challenge, they end up just being idle, waking up going to the garden, back home, and sitting for the whole eight

hours, doing nothing. (...) Then the rest of the day to see what they're up to go for drinking.”

When youth are unemployed they have ample time to get into dangerous activities. This can be very detrimental for mental health. Another youth said,

“If you don't have a job, you might fail to provide necessities for yourself. It brings a lot of stress because you think a lot are also being idle, having nothing to do, which can maybe attract you to doing certain practices.”

Youth often have the responsibility of providing for their parents and younger siblings. When they are unable to provide help they face emotional strain and difficulties. Idleness leads to mal-behaviors that further hurt youths' opportunities. For example, a 22 year old male said,

“The idleness can lead to peer groups, but peer groups smoking of marijuana, drinking of alcohol, gambling as one other thing, and then also spending a lot of time in the bars.”

The potential of youth is wasted when they are left idle and begin to fall into these behaviors and activities. Many unemployed youth become alcoholics and fall into a vicious cycle of addiction. Sylvia, a 30 year old women said,

“There comes, since people are not working, they don't have money, they don't have any source of income. So this will maybe sometimes for some people to steal, there is a lot of like crime,

because people are idle. They will engage in a lot of crime. They will also result to drug abuse, because they are idle.”

Alcohol and drug abuse are consequences of the idleness that results from unemployment. Prevailing societal structures, like limited economic opportunities and social marginalization, contribute to the development of a habitus, characterized by alcohol and drug abuse, as a coping mechanism for the idleness experienced during periods of unemployment.

Many issues youth face in their experience of education and jobs is due to a lack of guidance and mentors. Many youth I spoke with mentioned the lack of knowledge about the future challenges youth face as a place for improvement. One youth said,

“Maybe just sensitizing the youth about job opportunities and maybe teaching them telling them on ways of which they can be able to get jobs. And also telling them the challenges that are there if you don't get a job and you don't work, you know, that would make a lot of difference in a community”

Many participants who attended higher education institutions chose their course of study based on recommendations from friends who had already enrolled in the same course. Sylvia did not know which course to choose at university. She ended up choosing economics because a friend had recommended it. Sylvia said, “I was like, Well, I don't see my parents

guiding me on what to do, maybe I can follow my friends.” Speaking about what causes unemployment, this youth said,

“There are not people who can guide people on what courses to do, which can maybe lead to unemployment because you don't know which course is marketable enough for you. So you can be in position to get a job.”

The lack of guidance from parents and elders pushes youth to rely on each other in regards to education and career. Youth utilize their social networks for advice. Due to the fast pace change of the job market, youth seek guidance from friends and peers because their parents and elders have not faced similar challenges.

Limited job opportunities and societal expectations create structural constraints that shape and influence the choices and behaviors of youth. Engaging in these behaviors does not indicate a personal attribute but a consequence of broader structural conditions. These behaviors are used as a means by youth to cope with their situations. Limited economic opportunities and social marginalization contribute to the formation of habitus where idleness and substance abuse are normalized responses to unemployment. Utilizing a Bourdieu framework we are able to examine the larger structures at play enabling their experience. We can analyze the structural constraints to better understand the complex situation of youth unemployment and the strategies youth utilize to cope with their situations.

Movement and Migration

Another strategy youth enact to help navigate the circumstances of their situation is through looking to migrate to seek employment opportunities. (ILO, 2016). Workforce migration is a big characteristic of the contemporary globalized world. Due to a lack of domestic opportunities, youth take part in the global workforce. The migration of youth from the Global South to the Global North is apparent here. Those in Uganda, a country in the periphery, try to find work in middle-income or semi-periphery countries. While those in the semi-periphery look to find work in high income countries. Ugandan youth try to find work in the Arab world. Jordanians look for employment in the Global North and surrounding countries. Jordan is also a destination for many youth in Arab and African countries.

Jordanian employers are highly dependent on foreign workers—especially in the agricultural and service sectors (Mryyan, 2016). This pushes Jordanians to seek work in the private and public sectors. Since Jordanians, male and female, are highly educated they see a large loss of human capital due to low labor participation (Mryyan, 2016).

Jordan has many migrant workers who work for a set period of time before returning to their home country. Azim, a 24 year old Yemeni man, works

everyday at a restaurant in the heart of Wadi Musa. He stands on the steps of the restaurant with a bright smile and encourages people to come inside. He has been in Jordan for almost two years. He explained to me on the terrace of the restaurant where he works, from 11am to 12pm everyday with no holidays, that his English abilities are what helped him come to Jordan. Azim was able to find work at two restaurants in Wadi Musa and doesn't think it's hard to find a job in Jordan if youth work hard and apply themselves. This belief is common among migrants to Jordan. However when speaking with Jordanian youth it becomes apparent that migrants work jobs Jordanians feel overqualified for. Youth have a strong desire to leave their struggling home country's economy to seek an income in a country with a stronger currency. Many Jordanians I interviewed expressed interest in migrating to Western countries and larger economies in the Middle East like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. This underlines the desire youth have to work and enact their agency within realized structures.

In Uganda many migrate to the Middle East, neighboring Kenya, or even to Kampala, the capital city. Those in the villages feel there are more job opportunities in the cities. However when speaking to youth from the cities, or who moved there and came back, they say this is not the truth. Since so many youths have this perception, competition in cities is very high and

formal employment is next to impossible to find. Many have to start a DIY business. One participant noted,

“Because very many people are in Kampala. So the jobs kind of become very few. And those very few who get the jobs they just don’t want to give it away. So that leaves the biggest population unemployed. So it is overcrowded in Kampala. I think people should really try to go and start things somewhere else, some foreign place.”

It is common for those who migrate outside Uganda to go to Kenya where there is a lot of industry. This is more attractive for men who migrate, as they can work in industries or as shambas. The majority of those who find opportunities to work abroad are women. They work as housemaids, in Kenya and Arab countries, working for two years then returning home. When asked if many people leave Bududa to find work, Mary added,

“In fact, the new wave that has been on for the past three years, is the labor export like exportation, whereby people move from Uganda in particular to go to Arab countries.”

This is often one of few choices women have for jobs, leaving their families and country in order to make money. The global workforce is continuously made up of many migrant workers. This encourages youth to seek work elsewhere. When there are no opportunities at home, in both Jordan and Uganda, youth look to move abroad to countries that are less constrained in

the world-system and thereby youth can access more structures in which to enact their agency.

Role of the Government in Job Creation

In Jordan as well as Uganda, a government job is most desired and public sector jobs are highly distinguished in the community. For example Sima, a Jordanian participant, explained,

“For the Jordanian community, most of them are searching for a governmental job. And it is almost impossible that the government could provide all the people here an opportunity to work. So this is also one of our problems here in Jordan.”

A government job provides stability and a job in the formal economy. However they are almost impossible to attain. Youths need to know someone in order to get a job; there is a lot of corruption associated with employment in this sector. Participants in both countries expressed frustration with the lack of openings in the public sector. Many older people are holding on to their jobs, changing the retirement age, and putting off retirement due to a lack of social and governmental support. This hurts youths’ opportunities to fill these roles. Explaining the tradeoffs between the private and public sectors, a Jordanian youth stated,

“So in general it’s sort of a trade off because in the private sector you have a higher salary but you work for a shorter time

it's more uncertain. But in the government you can stay in the job for a long time just in general.”

A government job provides stability and security in a market where most jobs are insecure and volatile.

In response youth try to develop themselves through more training, experience, certificates, and courses. Self development is the only mechanism that can help them get a job beyond wasta and their own network. Building skills, either through tertiary education or friends, will also lead to better employment prospects. A Jordanian youth stated,

“You must be patient. Also you should work on yourself, have course, have language, this one can help you get a job. Just don't waste your time. If you don't have a job, take [a] course if you want to get more opportunity to have a job.”

This participant demonstrates the never ending cycle of experience and certificate building to boost your resume and become a more competitive job applicant. Unemployment can lead to depression and feelings of inadequacy; remaining active in your pursuits is a way to combat the mal-behaviors that come with idleness and unemployment (Loprest et al., 2019).

A topic that came up often throughout the course of the interviews was the government's role in the issue of youth unemployment. Do people feel the government is focused on this? Could they be doing more? Are they

helping? Participants in both countries cited that the government needs to invest more in industries and institutions—hoping they will open more jobs. Another suggested the government create more training institutions. When asked if they feel their government is addressing youth unemployment, this Ugandan youth said,

“Of course, reports come up. There's a lot of unemployment. Very many graduates but no jobs. But you know, programs keep coming. But you don't see meaning in them. You know, they set up programs, they set up projects, but you don't see them working towards their goals. They don't get to the objective. So it's like they're speaking about it, they know about it, but there's nothing being done yet about it. So I don't think this government or maybe the leaders have done a lot. Instead, they're just using it as, as a mechanism to better themselves. How? Through earning more votes. Yeah, they have someone to say if you do this, I'll cut this down. And then you give them the votes. And then when they go, it's all about them. They don't get back to do anything. Yeah, so they're not doing much they're not actually they're not doing anything.”

This participant is frustrated with the government's lip service to youth and wants to see action by their government to support youth unemployment. Another Ugandan suggested the government should open up more small

scale industries in the villages. Citing the tokenization of youth issues in government, Julius said,

“They keep on showing that they've put up these things to help the youth. But they're not doing it in the right way. They're not talking to the youth at a personal level. What do you want?

They're doing it just to make sure that they're seen that they're doing something for the youth.”

Industry, business, and employable institutions are all located in the cities. This perpetuates the belief that there are jobs in cities. However, due to high population and competition this is no longer the reality. The saturated job market pushes unemployed youth in cities to create their own businesses. Many call on their governments to bring in more industries and businesses to create more jobs. The government and public sector is still the largest option for employment, but they only take small numbers of people. Youth either have to bribe or know someone to get a job in the government.

The Ugandan government takes their role of providing employable industries and institutions for their citizens and pushes it onto the youth by encouraging DIY entrepreneurship. It is up to youth to create their own opportunities and income. Many take part in small retail businesses to support themselves. These businesses have a very fast turn over rate and face a saturated market. One man I spoke to, Ryan, couldn't find work after

graduating from university. He decided to use his business and management degree to be an entrepreneur and created a small retail business. He started selling clothes from China at a stall outside of a mall. He faced high competition from youth who had not attended university, who had already been doing this type of business for a long time. He likened this business to a dog race, that only those at the top benefit from. Those doing the business only make a small amount that they have to survive on. That business failed so he began to work for his brother's video library. Many businesses like this one often collapse. Youth have to create small side businesses to survive. Ryan feels that there are more educated people now but there is no market for them to apply their education. A young woman explained that after graduating university she,

“On several occasions, I tried to look for a job with my degree, my paper, but I wasn't successful. So what I did was I opened up a small business, selling secondhand clothes in Kampala.”

She could not find a job with her degree so began her own business endeavor that did not require a degree. These small businesses and shops are extremely common for youth. She is overqualified for this type of work.

Another participant explained,

“Most of them [youth] they try self-employment, that's why they decide to do. Because if you cannot get a job, you have to set up something on your own and survive. That's how we live.”

This is characteristic of many university graduates, seeking capital through endeavors below their qualifications and that are most accessible. This type of business is promoted by the government.

Ugandans enact their agency by starting their own businesses.

However the structural constraints within the labor market coupled with inadequate market infrastructure, hinders youths' abilities to achieve economically. There are broader structural inequalities at play perpetuating economic marginalization and inhibiting social mobility.

While Ugandans are embracing entrepreneurship culture, in absence of formal employment opportunities, Jordanians focus on enhancing their skills and qualifications. This illustrates the different approaches youth take in different socio-economic contexts to address youth unemployment. Jordanians use existing structures to build skills, while Ugandans cope with a culture of entrepreneurship and self-starting behavior.

Youth followed through on the government's encouragement of creating their own businesses. Still facing challenges, youth want the government to bring more job opportunities and to develop a labor market more geared to the utilization of educated graduates. This would help combat youth

unemployment and migration. The lack of jobs in the public sector indicates the constraints of institutions in providing opportunities for youth.

Government initiatives to combat youth unemployment fail to address the structural constraints that impede youth from realizing their full potential. Instead, governments address the symptoms of the problem rather than the root of the problem.

A Structural Mirage - The Case of Jordan

Due to the dependent position of Jordan in the world-system, the biggest employer in the country appears to be the government. But in reality this is not the case. The Diwan Chadma is the Jordanian Civil Service Bureau job waitlist. Youth get on the list as soon as they can; but are often left waiting for years. One Jordanian said,

“There’s lots of work in the government but you just stay on the list for a long time. You could be number 3 and you would just stay at number 3 until you die.”

The list is ignored and jobs are given to those with *wasta* and who may not be qualified. Another Jordanian youth explained that they have been on the list for 14 years, looking for governmental work in tourism or archaeology. This system leaves people waiting for years on end, just sitting, as others with more *wasta* jump the line.

The lack of jobs is exacerbated by a high number of applicants. In order to circumvent this, youth rely on the kinship structure of *wasta* to find work. Jordanians have mixed feelings towards *wasta*. When explaining this system to me, Ali said,

“*Wasta* works like this...there are times when you can't do anything without *wasta*. You call and give your name and you want some work and you know you can go ahead of other people or somebody else goes ahead of you because they have *wasta*.”

Another youth, Salma said,

“Everything is *wasta*...But it's not good. It's not good that like when somebody was waiting that another person can jump in front of them and take the opportunity. That's not good.”

This seems unfair but others also cite it as being helpful, as the way to attain something. People are quite divided on *wasta*, supporting it when it would be beneficial to them but against it otherwise. When asked how *wasta* affects employment, Farah said,

“If you have good *wasta*, you will have good work good position good thing...They are not taking qualified people but if you have good *wasta* you will be qualified somehow. So it's sad.”

These mixed feelings towards *wasta* were felt across participants. Feelings might be attributed to the amount of *wasta* the participant has, for example one youth explained its importance, “Everything comes down to *wasta*. All the opportunities and everything like that comes down to *wasta*.” Another

said, "If you have wasta you work, if you don't have wasta you sit." Another youth who sums up the way this structure is cemented into Jordanian life said, "It all comes down to wasta, the whole country is like this but it's normal. No way around this."

The Diwan Chadma is circumvented through wasta. Zaid explained his sister's situation with wasta, "She's been on the list 15 years, is number one [on the list] in this city. And we have few numbers here in Petra. But wasta, it's not easy." Wasta affects the Diwan Chadma; a system appears to be operating one way, but it is instead operating through a different system—wasta.

When I asked what the government could do to provide more jobs or what changes they would want to see, without hesitation Sarah said, "First get rid of the wasta." She then proceeded, stating that there needs to be more companies, institutions, and associations. When asked who should open these job opportunities—companies, government, or people—Sarah focused her response on the government's role in opening more work opportunities.

Global economic principles and local social practices shape the dynamics of the labor market. Wasta, a form of cultural capital, provides advantages in seeking employment opportunities at the expense of meritocratic principles.

The ambivalence of Jordanian youth towards wasta illustrates the tension

felt by youth navigating between formal structure and informal structures. Wasta is a form of agency for individuals in navigating the structures of the job market, but it also perpetuates a system of inequality and exclusion. This offers insight into how structural constraints and an individual agency interact to shape the experiences of youth seeking employment.

Due to the dependent position Jordan has been put in, as a lower-middle income country, the ability of the government to improve its citizens quality of life is tied up in larger global structures. Jordan's economic position in the global economy affects its internal situation, including the labor market. This can be seen on the ground through the mechanisms youth utilize through their experience of unemployment. The structure and mechanisms youth are instructed to utilize will not actually lead to a job or what it had promised. Wasta is used by youth as a mechanism to navigate through the structural constraints of the labor market.

When youth use the Diwan Chadma structure they quickly find that using the *rules* of the Diwan Chadma will not secure them a job. This structure is embedded within a larger structure of wasta. When youth complain that wasta hinders their ability to get a job, they are complaining about the mirage of structures. Formal employment appears to operate one way but in reality is operating within a larger structure. Wasta has come up as the true mechanism for employment. Youth are calling for more structures in which

to find a job. Utilizing their agency within the current structure is not enough for youth to secure employment because the structure they are told to use hides in a larger structure of wasta. Wasta is the structuring structure that structures structures.

Youth Empowerment Strategies

Through my ethnographic research I worked with two organizations focused on youth. These organizations address the issues youth in their community face and work to empower them. In the following section, I will highlight the methods of empowerment used by each organization to address the unique set of challenges youth in both communities face. Each organization works to empower youth by creating more structures in which youth can enact agency.

Pathways Development Initiative - Uganda

In Bududa, Uganda, Pathways Development Initiative (PDI) utilizes collective action and community-driven change to impact youth facing extreme poverty. PDI does this by working with youth of all ages and creating opportunities for them. PDI has a preparatory school that teaches students aged three to six before they enter primary school. PDI also has a sports and afterschool program for older students.

PDI works to create more routines for youth. Routine is very important in fostering productive behaviors in students and youth. Youth are not allowed to participate in the sports program if they have not also participated at the Resource Center. The Resource Center provides youth with English language teaching and extracurriculars, like art and music. The Sports Program works to fight against the idleness of youth, which can lead to harmful behaviors. They instead engage in soccer and socialization. This sports community provides mentorship for youth. They look up to their coaches as role models and see what older youth in the program have done. This community creates a space where youth can help guide and learn from one another while additionally providing educational classes and resources. John, a member of PDI said,

“One of the biggest challenges that I think that youth face, who are in communities which don't have organized programs. It's very hard to deal with there, if they don't have a routine. Because an education system gives you a routine. Right? You get it? It's like the world is made up of systems. So if you're in a community that doesn't have systems, you struggle. So I think one thing that I've learned [is] if we as a community can create routines, different routines, that would bring so much from this, these young people, and then just trying to work together. At the end of the day, they will help each other. You can't do everything, but youth learn from each other. That's why you

have peer groups. You get it? Sometimes it's not about me, who is giving the advice. Sometimes it's just the person next to them. And if you're in position to have the person next to them, telling them the right thing, then you might have a very changing community. Because the ones they learn from others will learn from them. And that's how they change. So I think that's for me, something I've really, really learned from the youth.”

Creating a space for youth to come together and share in their experiences and advice provides a supportive community that fosters growth and learning. A soccer coach for PDI explained his role as a mentor,

“I usually give them one thing that I've always, I always had was always short of. Attitude. I always tell them to always have a very good attitude towards anything that comes up. Whether it is school. Here to learn. I'm at training, I'm here to learn. Giving attitude is always my main advice.”

PDI also has a Second Chance program where they sponsor youth to get an education at a tertiary school. One youth said,

“Second Chance program is a good one because it gives opportunity to other people in the community to study and to achieve their dreams.”

The financial support and opportunities PDI is able to provide for a few youth can be life changing. PDI fills in the absences of structure, stemming

from the inability of the Ugandan government to improve the quality of life for its youth, in the community central to youth through providing classes and programming at the Resource Center and with soccer practices and matches. A PDI worker explained,

“That's why the PDI we do things we're not supposed to be. if everything was being done, PDI wouldn't be there. Can you imagine a whole district with a population of kids working from the age of 15 and below? Who don't have organized sports? And you know, the importance of just sports, you know, the recreation. There's no recreation in the district.”

PDI brings the youth community together and creates opportunities and more structure. With a strong vision towards the future, PDI empowers youth by providing structure and opportunities.

The absence of structure for youth is a result of the country's dependent position in the world-system. This dependency originates from a historical legacy of colonization and exploitation. This has left Uganda with limited economic autonomy, as it relies on external actors for investment, trade, and development assistance. Its heavy reliance on primary commodities leave it susceptible to the volatility of the world market and hinders the development of diversifying and building more sustainable industries. Nations in the core and multinational corporations' relationship to Uganda create an asymmetrical relation of power that perpetuates Uganda's

economic exploitation and favors corporations' interests. The benefits and wealth generated from this relationship is accumulated outside of the country and therefore does not flow back into Uganda and benefit Ugandans.

These structural inequalities inherent in the global economic system play out in the experience of youth. A lack of infrastructure and systems to create more jobs and to support youth culminate in a perpetuated cycle of underdevelopment that affects Ugandan youths' opportunities and prospects of social mobility. Ugandan youth are stuck in a cycle of poverty and marginalization due to inadequate support structures and opportunities that are a result of Uganda's position in the world-system.

Sela for Training and Protection of Heritage - Jordan

Youth in Jordan reported frustration with short term work and a lack of opportunities to gain the experience required in order to secure employment. Sela, a non-profit in Wadi Musa Jordan, is working to create these training opportunities and experiences for local youth. Sela was founded in 2015 with the vision of engaging Jordanians in the protection of their cultural heritage through conservation and documentation efforts. Their grassroots engagement approach focuses on training Jordanian youth in this field.

Sela is working to create a job market for archaeology. The current market for archaeology are all connected to foreign led projects and are seasonal. A mission of Sela is for more Jordanian led projects with Jordanians working on them. Hoping to formalize the Jordanian archaeological industry, Sela imagines conservation with long term contracts. Tina, a founder of Sela said,

“So for example with the new project that we have now in Petra, this is the first time that we sign six month contract with renewal indefinite. Which means that people will be engaged in conservation with long term contracts. So we hope this becomes [a] model for other projects. But this is what we aim[ed] at when we were starting the company. So hopefully this will be also in other sites in Jordan.”

The main issue of employment in the field of archaeology is that there are only seasonal jobs with excavation or a governmental job which are limited in number. Archeological work is largely informal. Sela is the first private contractor of archaeology in Jordan. Sela actually provides formal contracts and has worked to provide contracts with foreign universities, guaranteeing more security for Jordanian workers. Tina said,

“So I think this is definitely helping, the fact that there is a formal system. To create some opportunities for Jordanians. And we have been gaining a reputation in the field and this is

helping our trainees get jobs because they know that usually our trainees can guarantee a certain level of quality in work.”

Sela recognizes an absence of a system of qualifications for workers in the field. They are working to change the law and to address this. Tina stated,

“Our hope is that once there is a qualifications system, that the DOA [Department of Archeology] will be actually requiring every foreign excavation that they should have qualified staff which will open job opportunities for both graduates from university but also all the technicians that are usually hired along a flat rate base as workers.”

This will guarantee more opportunities for Jordanians rather than foreigners. It will also ensure each worker is trained and equipped to work on a project. Sela is focused on creating a private sector for archaeology in Jordan. Tina explained,

“We are looking at transforming the sector into a commercial sector because the government is under finance for archaeological missions. So we actually think that [the] private sector could bring in quite a lot of money. So if there was a better coordination, the resources could be used much better than they are now.”

Sela gives youth the opportunity to train and gain a certification that guarantees their qualifications. Having something to show potential employers their qualifications helps youth stand out amongst the high

number of applicants. Sela trains youth and follows up with them to see if they are able to find employment following their training. Sela has a 75% success rate for trainees finding a job upon completion of the program. Many of Sela's past trainees are now staff at Sela.

Jordan's unemployed youth population is very high; Sela is working to give more security to workers in archeology and provide training and experience for youth to ensure they are qualified for work in archaeology and provide them with the ability to differentiate themselves among high rates of applicants. Sela is providing more structure for youth to find avenues of employment outside of wasta. Since wasta is the structuring structure that structures structures in Jordan, Sela works to provide reliable formal structures.

Youth in Jordan's challenges in finding employment, provide insight into the effect broader global structures have within the country's labor market. This is a symptom of Jordan's position in the world-system. Sela arose in response to these structural constraints felt by Jordanian youth. It challenges the prevailing structures imposed by the world-system through its goals to provide more employment opportunities for local youth. The historic dominance of foreign-led archeological projects in Jordan illustrate the inequalities and unequal distribution of opportunities and resources inherent in our world-system. Sela challenges this through its goal of

engaging more Jordanians in the protection of their cultural heritage rather than foreign involvement. Sela aims to provide stable and secure employment opportunities for local youth. Sela is navigating the existing structures hoping to build more structures and opportunities for Jordanian youth to utilize to enact their agency.

Sela challenges historically entrenched power dynamics that have favored the interests of foreigners over Jordan's autonomy. Providing more reliable formal structures for employment and advancement, Sela offers alternatives to informal networks that dominate the labor market. Sela illustrates how grass-roots initiatives can disrupt existing power structures and foster alternative and inclusive structures in the face of external systemic challenges.

These two organizations focus on empowering youth through different mechanisms that are currently missing in their communities. There are many ways to empower youth, such as offering education, skills development, mentorship, role models, and spaces to promote health and well-being. This equips youth with the resources, support, and opportunities necessary for their personal development, realization of potential, acquisition of skills, and ability to make positive contributions to their community.

Investing and implementing youth development and empowerment programs and initiatives will help provide more structures in which youth can enact their agency. This is vital in helping to foster the next generation of leaders and changemakers who can help solve our world's problems and shape the future.

Conclusion

Global capitalism promotes autonomy through the individualization of livelihoods and economic attainment. In reality, youth are acting as sole agents in a system that's built to ensure their failure. The myth, that one's achievements will be enough to get a job, prevails in these societies. They are taught to believe they have all of the vehicles necessary to achieve economic and social autonomy. This is a myth for a reason: it is not the reality.

Youth are told if they attain higher education they will be able to get a secure job. They are taught that good grades and a diploma will be their ticket to success. So they seek a university education and focus on their schoolwork in hopes of social mobility and economic attainment. Once they get to this point, they find themselves unable to attain a job. From here they utilize their agency to gain more experience and acquire field training to become more employable. Time and time again they find that the avenues they were implored to pursue did not deliver on its promises. There is no

structure that supports higher educational attainment as a segue to a job. Messages designed for youth circulate around their agency and ability to acquire an education or different training experiences. In Uganda they are told to use their agency to be entrepreneurs. This path for youth has a high turnover rate and is predominantly unsuccessful in garnering capital.

Ugandan youth face a lack of social and governmental support. They are told to rely on their agency and act to create their own opportunities. However, by acting within the current structure there are very few avenues for sustainable growth. They feel they have fewer options than if there were more structure, rules, and opportunities to follow. Ugandans are seen as being entrepreneurs and industry creators, but these small businesses are destined to fail within the current structure. The lack of social and governmental support is felt through a lack of structures which renders youth powerless in changing their economic and social positions. They are calling on the government to provide more opportunities, more structures, in which they can enact their agency.

Jordanian youth have followed the structure; they attain higher education and utilize the opportunities and avenues available to them. They have more social support than Ugandan youth; yet, they are still craving more structure from the government in terms of job opportunities. They have a more structured path with programs institutionalized to support their

employment endeavors. These structures operate within a larger structure of wasta. Wasta is the structure that structures structures in Jordan. The Diwan Chadma operates within the bounds of wasta. Youth feel they have a lack of agency to do anything to create more opportunities in the structure in which they are situated. They call upon their governments to create more equitable structures and opportunities for them.

Due to their country's dependent position in the world system, they are unable to develop holistically, directly impacting the country's youth. This is felt through youth unemployment and the feeling of hopelessness to enact agency within the provided structure. Narratives of independence and self-reliance are characteristic of global capitalism. This is what is heralded as the method to acquire a job. Capitalism boasts self betterment and entrepreneurialism as admirable avenues of employment; these will provide freedom and autonomy. But in reality, this is not the way youth can succeed. Youths' individual autonomy can only exist with the structures and cultural expectations of a country.

The current systems, in Uganda and Jordan, assert that employment can be achieved through the provided structures. However this is not possible in actuality, because other, larger structures are at play structuring those structures. These micro level structures are being structured by macro structures. On the macro level, the current system and structures all lead to

poverty. International institutions are set up to perpetuate global poverty. Wealthy nations utilize the global economic power hierarchy to continually impose neoliberal development and economic policies that keep poorer countries down. This exists on the micro level as well. A Jordanian and Ugandan youth can utilize wasta and their social networks to find a job, but they are still a part of global structures.

The system is working as it was designed to work, leading youth down systems that are predetermined in a broader structure that keeps the poor, poor and dependent countries dependent. Global capitalism is designed to make the choices of individual actors ineffective in the broader structure or plane of global capitalism. Capitalism fetishizes individual autonomy as the path to success but this is a mirage as youth are acting as agents in structural systems that set them up to fail.

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