

**YOUTH LIVELIHOOD VULNERABILITY IN THE ERA OF COVID-19:  
THE CASE OF PHOENIX IN THE GREATER DURBAN AREA**

**BY**

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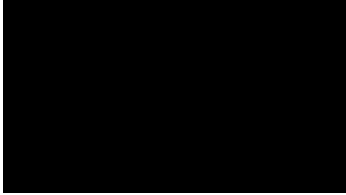
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## DECLARATION

I, Sarojini Govender, declare that this dissertation titled: “Youth Livelihood Vulnerability in the era of COVID-19: The Case of Phoenix in the Greater Durban Area” is my original work in design and execution, and all resources cited have been acknowledged.



Signature

16<sup>th</sup> August 2023

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Date

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## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has created enormous social, economic, and political challenges worldwide. The study assessed the Youth Livelihood Vulnerability in the era of COVID-19: The Case of Phoenix in the Greater Durban Area of KwaZulu-Natal in the Republic of South Africa. This study aimed to investigate the impact on youth livelihood vulnerability, the economy, and particularly the unemployment that the COVID-19 pandemic caused. To interrogate this phenomenon, data employed from oral evidence cutting across different race groups of the area was collated, interpreted and analysed. The findings indicate that the community's ability at the grassroots level to identify the peculiarities of its immediate environs regarding youth livelihood amid the hazards of COVID-19 will be of value to the government. This will help fine-tune the government's strategic effort of tapping grassroots initiatives to address the situation. This study, therefore, recommends full cooperation between the government and all the other stakeholders, including the youth, who should combine this with self-help projects handled individually, in groups or through collaboration with constituted authorities of the community. Areas for further research should include the extent and pattern of cooperation between the government and grassroots communities in South Africa under COVID-19 in response to youth livelihood vulnerability during the era.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Crisis, Labour Market, Livelihood, Lockdown, Unemployment, Youth.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1). Background and outline of the research problem

The existing literature on pandemics demonstrates the occasional recurrence of this phenomenon in the history of countries and regions worldwide (African Monitor, 2020). The most recent to affect the globe is the coronavirus disease 2019, or COVID-19 (Abimbola et al, 2021). This pandemic has brought the entire world into a quandary, affecting it economically, socially, and politically. There has been global tension since the second half of 2019 when the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged the socio-economic system of most countries of the world in addition to the health hazard and unimaginable loss of lives despite concerted efforts at global, national and grassroots levels to devise new environmental health practices and come out ideas and drugs that can minimise the number of those infected by the virus (Joyner, Carter and Senefeld, 2021). As of 2021, the existing data on the number of people who tested positive was such that most countries could hardly cope with managing the pandemic. The 2021 figures from the data base of John Hopkins University indicated that “more than 787,000 people tested positive, and over 178 countries/regions” were affected (Joyner et al., 2021:5). “Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2019, governments all over the world have been confronted with the challenge of finding a lasting solution to this devastating virus, which is a highly infectious respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus (Joyner et al., 2021). The latest update on COVID-19 in South Africa reveals that as of July 15, 2022, the total number of people infected was 3,999,345 while 101,915 lives have been lost in the country since the beg of the pandemic (NICD, 2022). The rapid transmission of COVID-19 has presented a unique challenge of minimising morbidity and reducing the efficacy of preventive measures against some other infections in both developed and developing economies.

The uncontrolled spread of COVID-19 has negatively strained the economy globally, and South Africa has proven not to be immune from these effects. According to WHO (2021), COVID-19 has affected transportation, tourism, trade, and health, among other sectors. International Labour Organisation (2020) posits that countries have applied the "lockdown" policy following the World Health Organization guidelines to prevent the further spread of COVID-19. Most economic activities have been suspended, thereby pressurising future

economic growth of the world countries, including South Africa. As a result of the persistent spread of the pandemic at both national and global levels, the World Bank (2020) projected South Africa's economic growth to shrink by about 2.1 per cent between 2020 and 2022. Banks in South Africa have also studied the projected economic growth to under 5 per cent due to COVID-19 implications for the world's economy (Rasul et al., 2021). The relationship between inflation and economic growth is debatable and forms every nation's most critical macroeconomic discussion.

The relevance of economic wellbeing in the face of the current inflation cannot be under-emphasised. This is due to the link between it and the success of strategic socio-economic policies to sustain human liveability. For instance, White (2010) reported that a combination of both material and immaterial is critical to livelihood experiences. In fact, Clark and Oswald (2002), about Western Cape posed that financial wellbeing was critical to a good life. It was also established that the significance of housing and employment to livelihood could hardly be overemphasized. Both are found to be logically linked to good health and happiness, particularly when structured to generate adequate income to cater to each family and the entire society regarding adequate food and other essential means of livelihood. However, reasons such as unemployment in the face of the pandemic extensively exposed youths to limited positive livelihood. Some studies (Broadbent, 2006; Bryceson, 2003; Ryan, 2006) further reported on the general unemployment challenge among youths, an experience which has limited their ability to achieve their plans.

Consequently, Chamisa (2016) mentioned that the youth bulge led states to formulate policies that address youth development worldwide collectively. This is because youth vulnerability continues to appear across global discussions. For example, Mhlongo (2016) and Van de Byl (2015) argued that there seems to be a global focus on enhancing youth livelihood in South Africa. This was argued along with the need for economic and social emancipation. Govender et al. (2017) argued that youth unemployment had remained relatively high in South Africa. The authors reported that the informal sector, the youths' mainstay of economic survival, has been extensively shocked by the COVID-19 pandemic. Counted et al. (2023) argued that the psycho-social negative externalities from the COVID-19 pandemic continue to limit youth liveability, such that they might remain vulnerable even in the post COVID-19 era. Asserting this thinking, Ware et al. (2021) further explored the social vulnerability of young women in South Africa to the pandemic in response to new trends and complications encountered, which, according to the study, has almost tripled the intensity of such vulnerability. Therefore, this research focused on

critically examining the extent of livelihood vulnerability and economic anxiety that the youths contended with between 2020 and 2022 in the four phases of COVID-19 with key emphasis on its socio-economic effects.

Many issues come to play when the concept of vulnerability is applied to address the social and economic implications of the hazards associated with COVID-19. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines “vulnerability as the presence of factors that place people at risk of becoming food insecure or malnourished, including those factors that affect their general ability to cope under any stressful situations in which they find themselves” (cited in Ngumbela, 2020:97). During the COVID-19, Ngumbela (2020) discussed what is termed ‘vulnerability factors’, employing facts and figures from earlier studies on the theme. Opute (2020) has also explored some practical issues on vulnerability from contemporary perspectives. Ngumbela (2020) and Anderson (2011) defined and explained vulnerability as the probability of jeopardy in the journey of life, mostly unforeseen. This impacts individual and communal resources leading to the loss or waste of resources. Resources in this context can be social, economic, human, and in relation to assets like capital and finance. Vulnerability is of varying degrees, and under certain acute situations, it involves epidemics and pandemics and, therefore, has a hazardous effect on people’s health. Therefore, such situations can lead to the waste of talents and loss of lives, i.e. loss of human resources.

Ngumbela (2020) argues that economic vulnerability is linked to the economic status of the individual and society. This has something to do with sources of wealth or income and the potency and resilience of such sources. Part of this is the monthly income of individuals in the community in question, access to loans when they could be useful as a means of investment, the debt burden of the citizen or community, and the devices put in place for payment of such debts or to service them. This implies that those without access to such benefits are more vulnerable to unforeseen crises and disasters. The absence of basic social amenities and infrastructure plays a role in economic vulnerability. For instance, absence of tap water compels people to drink bad water from rivers or poorly purified resulting in ill health or even epidemics. Lack of reliable energy supply, whether electricity or gas, e.g. frequent load shedding, has adverse effects on business enterprises and sometimes health. In extreme cases, people may resort to cutting down trees to make firewood an alternative source of energy, thus leading to environmental degradation. It must be pointed out that social and economic vulnerability is interwoven in certain areas. Thus, social vulnerability is worse in the absence of any well-defined social net to ensure that no member

of society drops below a certain level of income and standard of living. Yet the creation of such a social net incorporates economic resources, including capital assets and natural resources. Commenting on this interrelationship, Ngumbela (2020:8) explains that “inadequate access to critical and basic socio-economic infrastructure such as communication networks, utilities and supplies and transportation facilities increases people’s exposure to risk” while “lack of awareness of and access to information can increase levels of vulnerability” as this is reflected in the life of certain districts based on “the Census 2011 index of socio-economic underdevelopment, which is based on indicators for education, income and unemployment.”

Also, the concept of ‘environmental vulnerability’ has been fully entrenched in the literature following the rapidly increasing rate of natural disasters like floods, hurricanes, cyclones, cyclic droughts, and the like. Barbat (2010:553) explains that “environmental vulnerability includes the extent of natural resource depletion, state of resource degradation, loss of resilience of the ecological system, loss of biodiversity and exposure to toxic and hazardous pollutants” as well as “deficiencies in service provision such as the absence of electricity or other sources of power which create environmental degradation when people cut down trees for firewood, which in turn leads to an increased exposure to flooding and other hazards.” The hazardous effects sometimes associated with climate change constitute vulnerability to society's affairs in many ways, apart from the harm done to the life of individuals. At the same time, environmental degradation through deforestation, overgrazing and burning of farmland, and over-cropping are among the analytic issues under environmental vulnerability. Clearly the environment impacts cultural institutions, the social system, and economic institutions. The implication of this is that environmental vulnerability is also in different ways interwoven with the others discussed above. Presently the issue of vulnerability emanating from environmental hazards constitutes a significant challenge for policymakers in most countries of the world.

Ngumbela (2020), Mc Entire and Gilmore Crocker (2010), Chagutah (2013), and Reale and Handmer (2011) also discuss the concepts of ‘physical vulnerability’, ‘life cycle vulnerability’ and ‘structural vulnerability.’ They try to distinguish between physical vulnerability and environmental vulnerability by explaining that the former has to do with the nature and structure of the community in which you find yourself. Among the issues involved here is the man-made environment, based on accepted standards for building design, land tenure practices and the relevance of generally accepted land use conventions and related issues like environmental and land planning. Also included is the availability of

relevant social structures and basic facilities for effective emergency services. Chagutah (2013) and Reale and Handmer (2011) explain that land tenure can be a source of vulnerability if its operative mechanism is prone to insecurity, especially when those who acquire land through the process end up losing such land without compensation. According to Ngumbela (2020:11), “the term life cycle vulnerability refers to threats that individuals face in different stages of their life, from infancy through youth, adulthood up to old age”, and based on reports of some public agencies in the country, including the Agricultural Policy Unit, the work states that “in South Africa, the age group of people in households or in communities can make them vulnerable to food insecurity” and that “this group includes people who are over 60 or under 18 years of age.”

### **1.2) Preliminary literature study and reasons for choosing the topic:**

The unemployment problem in South Africa is not a recent challenge as it is established in extant literature (Altman, 1998; Borat & Hodge, 1999; Edwards, 2000; Samkange et al., 2021; Sithole and Buchana, 2021). The Gross employment rate has declined in this country since the mid-1980s due to the numerous components related to the politically sanctioned racial segregation and the government's approaches toward advancement. The ratio in terms of employment does not match the qualifications' credibility; instead, jobs are given to those with networks within the political party in power. Hence, this has been evident in the Zondo commission. Following the International Labour Organisation (ILO) report, more than 40% of young people globally worked in sectors most affected by the pandemic; close to 75% were informally employed (Buccus, 2020); however, Maluleke (2020) reported that the unemployment rate in South Africa is sitting at 32.5%. Relating this to trends and patterns in developing countries, this structure -hardly applies to most of them as they operate on a platform in which the hazards of unemployment vis-à-vis the scarcity of jobs in the public sector merely shift the focus of the masses to self-employment with its concomitant hazard in the informal sector as most of them lack the required fund for business ventures viable enough to ensure a sufficient or regular source of income. Furthermore, the lockdown measures employed in the country to counter the pandemic's spread have severely damaged the economy. Several commentators are of the view that we should expect a subsequent recession whose intensity is as serious and devastating as the 1930s global economic recession of (Buccus, 2020).

The socio-economic effects of the lockdown and associated restrictions have been the subject of intense economic and academic debates worldwide forced, “practically at the same

time, comprehensive restrictions, for example, remaining at home, not unless necessary to go out. Restrictions against congregating were put in place (New Ministry of Health Guidelines, 2020). All educational institutions for kids ages 0–18 was covered until mid-May 2021. Eateries and entertainment venues, shops of all kinds, shopping centres and malls, inns, and numerous other organisations had to close without a moment of delay (Nhamo et al., 2020; Opute et al., 2020; Bozkurt et al., 2020).

The number of labourers engaged in the South African local industries varies from sector to sector. A pre-determined and reduced number of labourers are engaged in what is designated as “non-essential industries”. In contrast, essential industries employ different approaches to uphold their activities regarding cost, minimization and effective utilization of labour. This has “resulted in a steep and rapid increase in unemployment, from a low 3.4% within a short period of time, which is approximately a month and a half, from mid-March to April 2020, (942,000) workers were registered as new job seekers at the employment service forces throughout the country” (Job Seekers Data, cited in Bozkurt et al., 2020:68). The youth has been the worse victim of this structure since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of employment in South Africa and even some other member states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In South Africa, Israel, and some other OECD countries, it compounds the unemployment crisis, resulting in furloughing of workers who now constitute up to 83% of job seekers and others who were outrightly fired (ILO Monitor, 2020).

The pandemic crisis has led to the closure of many businesses, including Greyhound bus services and Música stores, which have a huge impact on the economy (Phoenix Tabloid, February 9, 2021). After 37 years of service, the luxury coach liner, Greyhound decided to shut its doors. “It was gathered that Greyhound's closure was due to the company having suffered a significant loss because of the COVID-19 lockdown, and it would not be able to recover. Likewise, Música, the music shop affiliated with the Clicks Group South Africa, eventually closed its doors” (Phoenix Tabloid, February 9, 2021:33).

The associated COVID-19 lockdown impacted differently on people depending on their class or social status. The response of the middle class to the situation is different from that of the poor. Most of those in the former lost their jobs in addition to business closure and a natural decline in their economic buoyancy. However, the lockdown is frustrating for many portends to operate within an enduring scene that may be managed for the stipulated period. Nevertheless, “poor people often have no savings and cannot survive or

sustain livelihoods if they do not work, which puts them in a desperate situation. At the same time, hunger pushes people into deeper and deeper desperation, which was witnessed at various points during the lockdown and posed a severe threat to the fragile social fabric of society” (Buccus, 2020).

The youths of South Africa, not only in Phoenix, are faced with challenges such as drug and substance abuse, crime, unemployment, poverty, and, most importantly, unequal educational opportunities. However, this should not be the case in the daily lives of the youth considering that twenty-eight years have lapsed since South Africa's first democratic elections. The recent research by YMCA “found that 44% of young people have concerns about their studies and exam pressures”. Sithole and Buchana (2021) postulate that the major problem starts from the schooling system, where there is no guidance in assisting learners with choosing the correct subjects to enter the universities or colleges to pursue careers of their own choice, but instead accepting what the institutions of higher education dish out to them.

Historically a portrait of the South African labour market and job creation by the media, including the press, has shown that the country entered the COVID-19 era with the noticeable challenge of unemployment. Thus, the South Africa Economic Update (2021) has discussed this in its thirteenth edition and examined several probing related issues in relation to development in the labour market and the likely impact of this on the fate of the unemployed in the nearest future. According to the paper, “the report finds that job losses in COVID-19 times are disproportionately concentrated among low-income earners, worsening already severe inequalities despite the government’s decisive and pro-poor response with transfer programs that partially cushioned the negative impacts of the pandemic” (South Africa Economic Update, 2021:2). Therefore, by this report, workers in the low wage category are the worse victim of the labour crisis and loss of jobs. The paper demonstrates in its analysis that the loss of jobs among workers in this category is almost four times what is obtainable among those with high wages. The paper analysed facts and figures from the World Bank report on the South African employment terrain and the search for job creation devices. Accordingly, it states that “a new World Bank economic analysis for South Africa finds that young entrepreneurs are one of the country’s best hopes of solving the jobs crisis, which the COVID-19 global pandemic has worsened in an environment of weakened economic growth.” Further, the report argues “that if South Africa were to match the self-employment rates of its peers, it could potentially half its unemployment rates” because presently “self-employment represents only 10% of all jobs”

in the country “compared to 30% in most upper-middle-income countries such as Turkey, Mexico and Brazil” (South Africa Economic Update, 2021:1).

The article observed that the country needs to give more attention to entrepreneurship and that the digital sector could be effectively developed and expanded as many people are investing in the sector. It argues that this should go with strategies of promoting self-employment at all levels. On the digital industry, the writer reveals that the firms only in Cape Town, popularly known as the 'tech capital of Africa', in 2021 utilizing the technology of the digital industry were over 450 and that they employed over 40, 000 workers. The writer explains that this could become one key platform for job creation, particularly for the youth. Much investment has gone into the sector since 2010; in 2020 alone, this amounted to \$88 million (R1.2 billion). Overall, the article examines the theme of unemployment in the country in relation to that of existing potentials for job creation yet to be explored. It concludes that South Africa can “halve its unemployment rates” if these potentials are explored (South Africa Economic Update, 2021:3).

The way forward is also discussed from other perspectives. One viewpoint is that both society and government should mount relentless efforts with the projects and programmes already on the ground because new initiatives would emerge for the inclusion of other ones (Fengler, 2021). In some aspects, the government response to the crisis has been swift with a well-focused vision demonstrated by the international alliance with some developed countries to address major challenges apart from those connected to the distribution of vaccines. According to Fengler (2021:2), the World Bank argues in its most recent report “that the reasons for low growth and high unemployment do not lie in the Government’s crisis response, but instead, the pandemic has exposed long-standing structural weaknesses that have progressively worsened since the global financial crisis of 2008–09.”

The future projection of the World Bank regarding the country’s economy is considered helpful in certain aspects of economic planning and restructuring of the financial sector as well as new approaches to managing human resources. In 2021, the World Bank’s figures on South Africa indicate a future projection of 4% growth in the gross domestic product (GDP), with an expectation of 2.1% growth in 2022 and 1.5% in the current year 2023. The weak or slow rate of recovery is believed to be compounding funding and other financial expectations of public agencies and different sectors of the economy. The national debt was over 80% of GDP in 2021.

There is the expectation of fluctuation and inconsistency in the financial and investment sectors and financial analysts and other experts including those from the World Bank are of the view that stability is hardly attainable until 2026 (Fengler, 2021). The study believes that the government's new approaches with its international dimensional devices can make the anti-COVID-19 economic policies constitute a turning point in the revival of South Africa's economy, including investment, commerce, and organization of the labour market. Moreover, positive developments in the international economic system have been of some help to the country. Among these is a noticeable improvement in the economy of South Africa's major trading partners and allies in bilateral engagements, China and the United States. Fengler (2021) and Bussin (2021) are also of the view that South Africa's integration with the rest of the world can be improved upon and that her economy could have derived more benefit from the favourable developments in the global economy if overall integration with the international economic system is stronger.

Other studies on this theme in South Africa (Bhorat & Hodge, 1999; Edwards, 2000; Buccus, 2020; Samkange et al., 2021) have also focused generally on the issue of unemployment, challenges thereof and the way forward. However, there are no studies exploring the impact of COVID-19 on livelihood vulnerability among the youths of Phoenix in Durban. The present study is a response to this gap. The work seeks to examine the crises of COVID-19 with a primary focus on its adverse effects in terms of livelihood vulnerability and employment among youths in the Phoenix community of Durban and the efforts made to address the situation.

### **1.3) Research problem, objectives, and key questions to be asked**

Since COVID-19 has had an impact on the employment of the youths globally, and its effects were largely felt in developing nations such as South Africa (Buccus, 2020) therefore, this study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the socio-economic profile of the youth population in Phoenix, Durban, and their present fate with regard to job placement.
2. To appraise the link between the pandemic and structural unemployment among youths in Phoenix, Durban.

3. To investigate the on-going COVID-19 induced challenges in the labour sector with regard to job creation and placement at the grassroots level.
4. To come up with appropriate recommendations that can be applied to address the situation with reference to the experience of Phoenix and Durban in general.

The following research questions are considered crucial to the realisation of the objectives stated above:

1. What is the fate of youths in Phoenix in terms of job placements and regarding the socio-economic implication of the increasing rate of unemployment?
2. How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted employment amongst the youths of Phoenix, Durban?
3. What are the current economic and employment challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic amongst youths in Phoenix, Durban?
4. What strategies can be applied to improve the condition of the youths of Phoenix, Durban?

#### **1.4) Research objectives: Broader issues to be investigated**

The Phoenix situation can hardly be studied in isolation from the overall national trends and events in South Africa. In other words, one means of arriving at an objective and practical conclusion is to examine it within the context of broader trends in South Africa. For this reason, the work has two broader objectives. The first is locating South Africa in the broader trend of youth livelihood vulnerability under COVID-19 in Africa. The second is a critical assessment of the menace of COVID-19-induced unemployment in South Africa and the effectiveness of government's response to the issue. COVID-19 is believed to have created a host of structural complexities and contradictions in the socio-economic system, which has weakened several structures put in place to sustain and create employment opportunities (Zulu, 2020). The consequent result is a considerable decline in the employment rate, with data on labour and job placement demonstrating that the unemployment rate is rapidly increasing and that this may be up to 50% in subsequent years, at least by the end of the pandemic (Charles, 2020). Analysing the intricacies of the situation, another study reveals that based on figures from "preliminary modelling by Business for South Africa (B4SA), an alliance founded in response to the pandemic, the

economy could contract by 10% and over one million people could join the ranks of the unemployed due to the impact of COVID-19” (Omarjee, 2020). The work also contends “that none of the measures set up by the authorities to address the unemployment catastrophe seems to have worked” and that “this then calls for new strategies to effectively cope with the burgeoning unemployment, mainly among young people” (Omarjee, 2020).

In response to this gap, the study is structured to commence by evaluating the unemployment situation regarding its numerous influences and their detrimental results on youths’ livelihood vulnerability during the COVID-19 pandemic from a broad perspective and an empirical portrait that captures South Africa’s experience within the broader African continental horizon. Narrowing it down to Phoenix in the wider Durban area of Kwazulu-Natal, therefore, provides a micro-study that projects the experience of this community in addition to acting as a platform for assessing the veracity of theories and generalized concepts in studies at national and continental levels.

### **1.5) Principal theories upon which the research project will be constructed (research design)**

This work adopts two theories to explore the theme of vulnerability among youths in Phoenix in their effort to cope with the unemployment hazards of COVID-19. The first is the Latent Deprivation Theory (LDT), developed by an Austrian British Social Psychologist, Marie Jahoda, to explain the unemployment phenomenon and guide the analytic framework of the study. The theory has provided the platform for foundational research on unemployment and its psycho-social effects since its publication over seventy years ago in Germany (Yeu, 1999). The theory is linked to five fundamental functional issues relevant to this study. Jahoda (1990:134) states that “the psychological aspects of unemployment cannot be taken into consideration in isolation because unemployment deprives a person of various benefits that are typically gained through employment.”

The strengths of Latent Deprivation Theory, which will be discussed fully in the main dissertation, and include the fact that the theory defines the practical and social benefits enjoyed by those with gainful employment vis-à-vis the plight of the unemployed ones in the context of their effort to manage the crisis and the hazards emanating from the daily routine thereof (Bahr, 2022). The theory also defines income in relation to work with regards to time factor and its structural link with benefit and material possessions in the context of the labour market and how this defines the life of the employed versus the unemployed (Karsten, 2009; Donovan and Oddy, 1992).

A host of researchers have come out with new evidence in varying degrees which are in support of the Jahoda's theory in one way or the other with a bearing on different categories of mental health and their correlation with latent deprivation largely based on Jahoda's model. They defined their findings concerning the unemployed and vulnerable who constitute the theory's primary focus. Therefore, since unemployment is part of the primary focus of this study, it needs to employ the theory in some aspects of its data analysis and illustration of its viewpoints. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the theory has attracted some criticisms part of which is the absence of appropriate consideration for differences that may arise in the individual response to taste and values based on experiences and temperament (Hoare & Machin, 2006).

The second theory is “the youth livelihood and empowerment theory of change” (World Vision, 2014; Bohle, 2007). According to its exponents, the theory has a liberal origin and emanated from the ideas and “contributions of many individuals from across the globe that work to increase and improve the opportunities for young people to be civically and economically engaged and to successfully transit into a productive and fulfilling adulthood” (World Vision, 2014:3). It first gained global and scholarly recognition in 2013 during the Sustainable Adolescent and Youth Livelihoods Theory of Change workshop held in Washington D.C. in September that year. A few of the contributors are Linda Hiebert, Paul Stephenson, Cynthia Mulenga, Lou August, and Aaron Ausland.

The theory seeks to expose youths to the vulnerable aspect of change and how to cope with its limitations in addition to strategies of mitigating such limitations partly by creating a platform for transforming some into new sources of income. It is derived from the general theory of change that has gained wide empirical analysis in history. It draws the consciousness of youths to the fact that life is a continuous process of change, and yet some changes are negative, e.g. COVID-19, and even structured to erode the joy of humanity. For instance, though COVID-19 has compelled the human community to expand its horizon of research, it is considered a negative change as it constitutes a major vulnerability to the existence of mankind. Therefore, the theory is linked to a platform of preparing and empowering youth to manage change in whichever way it takes.

For this purpose, it strategically incorporates transformational processes that can accommodate any form of change where the society combines its total endowment in terms of accumulated knowledge and experience with the dynamics of new talents and skills

created by the youths in responding to the situation. By the tenets of this theory, youths are expected to be flexible in skill acquisition and be creative conscious. When a change manifests traits that tend to defile existing knowledge, new ideas and skills would be created to counter such traits (World Vision, 2014).

The present study analysed the scene of youth vulnerability in Phoenix upon the intellectual platform of these two theories in the context of the impediment against job creation and the hazards of unstable labour market amid the socio-economic crisis of COVID-19 that came and eroded the sources of income of many youths.

### **1.6) Research methodology and methods**

The study relied on a qualitative research method, a research approach that helps to collect open-ended structured interactions on the phenomenon under study, which is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihoods and the economics of the youths in Phoenix, Durban. Welman, Kauger, & Mitcheft (2005) propose that qualitative studies can successfully capture appropriate portrait and description of groups, small communities and organisations. Qualitative research gathers data using open-ended and conversational communication (Bhat, undated). The qualitative research method focuses on people's thoughts and why they think or feel that way (Tenny et al, 2022). This method of research captures how people conceptualise their diverse world views and challenges of social life starting from their immediate environment and the practical link between this and other aspects of life, e.g. economy, politics and technological innovations. Therefore, this research adopted the qualitative method as it is flexible in approach and provides a potent platform for gathering and exploring numerous individuals' viewpoints to verify the authenticity of previous evidence or schools of thought.

Data was accumulated using in-depth interviews and the use of an interview guide with open-ended questions to avoid subjectivity. The technique consists of private interactive interviews achieved with the resource of the usage of the researcher in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The interview pattern was a simple one adapted to capture the relevant viewpoints of respondents with questions structured to sustain a device of comparing the ideas of participants partly by making them respond to identical questions. The youth of the Phoenix community of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal were the sole target, constituting the bulk of the informants.

A letter explaining the reason for “the study, ethical considerations, and a request for participation were presented for signing before commencing the interview. Each interview took place at a convenient time and in a safe, non-threatening venue” partly based on my fieldwork plan and largely on the participant's convenience. The researcher obtained consent from all the participants to be part of the study. Consent forms were given to the supervisor. Bhandari (2022) contend that all the participants must be informed about the study's consequences and agree to participate in the study. A standardised consent form was drawn in English for the participants to complete. Where the participants have a problem reading the consent form, the researcher had to read it out to them and explain the content to the participants, before they were asked to sign the forms. The informants were made to understand that participation is voluntary and that one is free to withdraw from the investigation if he/she wishes with no repercussions. The study engaged the purposive approach regarding sampling and its scholarly principles (Gill et al, 2018) which are discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

## **1.7) Structure of dissertation**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter provides a background discussion on the issue of youth vulnerability due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It introduces the problem and justifies the study. This section also presents the study's limitations, research objectives and questions.

### **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The literature evaluates and compares the section of chapter two which focuses on theory and empirical studies that have been carried out by other authors concerning unemployment resulting from failures to identify the gap in the existing body of knowledge which the current study is meant to fill. The research objectives and key questions form the basis for the themes of these discussions.

### **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

This section provides an in-depth explanation of the study methods and materials. Since this is a qualitative study, the outline of the study participants, as well as the sampling technique and the sample size are well defined within a scholarly interrelationship that serves the overall purpose of the work.

### **Chapter 4: Discussion of the findings**

The discussion was based on data collected through interviewing youth residents in Phoenix. The focus shall be on the COVID-19 pandemic impact on youth unemployment in Phoenix. Likewise, the current economic and employment challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic amongst the youth in Phoenix were captured. In concluding this chapter, strategies that can be applied or implemented to improve the living conditions of the Phoenix residents' post-pandemic were also identified.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion, Summary and Recommendation**

Based on data findings, a summary, conclusion, and recommendations of the study are presented. This is structured to fill in the gap in the existing knowledge identified in chapter two whose focus was on reviewing the literature. In this chapter also, the suggestions for further research are made based on the study's findings and limitations.

### **1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The focus of the study is on Phoenix and practically the fieldwork is also concentrated on Phoenix within the wider Durban area of Kwazulu-Natal. Though the literature reviewed embraced the whole of South Africa, narrowing it down to Phoenix, therefore, constitutes a limitation due to the fact that the inferences and conclusions arrived at may not apply to some other parts of South Africa. Again, it is a work on grassroots development with regard to youth livelihood vulnerability. Therefore, the concepts and theories employed for illustration of the Phoenix situation are not likely to apply to certain issues at the national level. Finally, the collection of information involved interaction with individual families to share their experiences with the researcher. In this case, some families and individuals will always consider certain issues too confidential to be disclosed which, therefore, also constitutes a limitation.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

Unemployment in South Africa is not a recent phenomenon. The history of unemployment can be traced back to the apartheid era when democracy was fully introduced in 1994. It is not surprising that today the greatest problem confronting South Africa is that of rapidly increasing rate of unemployment, especially among the youth (Habanabakize & Dickason, 2021). By way of clarification, any individual who has reached the age of 15 years and above is considered to have attained the age of employment and when such employment is not available while the person is active and searching for a job, he/she is deemed unemployed (Baoteng, 2015).

Unemployment, though, as a broad concept, could either be frictional, Structural, demand deficient (cyclical), and seasonal unemployment (Bangane, 1999). Frictional unemployment is a type of unemployment that arises when workers are searching for new jobs or are transitioning from one job to another while structural unemployment refers to a mismatch between the jobs available and the skill levels of the unemployed. On the other hand, cyclical unemployment is caused by the contraction phase of the business cycle, whereas seasonal unemployment results from regular changes in the season.

Workers affected by seasonal unemployment include resort workers, ski instructors, and ice cream vendors (Oyebamiji, 2021; Amadeo, 2020; Bangane, 1999). Commenting on the continuous increase of unemployment in South Africa, Fengler et al, (2021) argues that political dynamics and accompanying economic policy frameworks have impacted the structure and momentum of employment growth in South Africa over the past two decades. The study also noted that, contrary to speculation in several quarters, unemployed people in South Africa are worse off and less satisfied with their quality of living and are therefore, leaving no stone unturned to get themselves a source of income.

The authors clarified that several impediments and constraints of entry into the informal section increase open unemployment in South Africa. Put simply, that the informal section in South Africa is not generally a free-entry sector as often made to believe; instead, there are a lot of impediments that prevent lots of the unemployed from having access to the sector.

Fengler et al. (2021) noted that several activities in the informal sector in South Africa and many other developing countries are without a doubt highly structured or stratified, demand skills, experience, and strong connections to access. This, without doubt, has exacerbated the unemployment levels, thereby opening room for intense competition for very limited jobs among millions. And with the COVID-19 ravaging the country, the unemployment situation will only get worse. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a devastating loss throughout the world, including loss of working hours and employment with a catastrophic effect globally. The crisis is expected to wipe out 6.7 per cent of working hours globally in the second quarter of 2020, equating to 195 million full-time workers. Arab States (8.1 percent, equivalent to 5 million full-time workers), Europe (7.8 per cent, or 12 million full-time workers) and Asia and the Pacific (7.2 per cent, 125 million full-time workers). Huge losses are expected across different income groups especially in upper-middle-income countries (7.0 percent, 100 million full-time workers), which far exceeds the effect of the 2008-9 financial crisis. Namibia 33.4 %, Nigeria 27 %, Libya 17.3 %, Central African Republic 6.5 %, Kenya 10.3, South Africa 23.3 nearly 20 million jobs in Africa are threatened by the COVID-19 crisis which affects youth unemployment twice that of adults, and the potential for social unrest is real (IMF, 2023).

The following themes are covered in the reviewed literature: i) the socio-economic implications of COVID-19 ii) the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on unemployment iii) the current economic challenges resulting from COVID-19 iv) Best practices from other countries on strategies to improve the unemployment as a result of COVID-19.

### **2.1.2 The Socio-Economic Implications of COVID-19**

South Africa is among the African countries where the COVID-19 pandemic was at its peak in terms of the number of people infected and the harm done to different sectors of the economy which invariably resulted in crisis in social life (Patrick, 2021). Consequently, all public and social institutions, including religious institutions like churches and mosques were adversely affected. Many programmes for social, political, and economic development were crippled. Among them are programmes for youth development, revitalization of small and medium-scale enterprises, and food production in the aspect of fishing, animal husbandry, poultry, and encouragement of new initiatives in the agricultural sector (Patrick, 2021). Overall, COVID-19 was a vulnerability to all sectors of the economy and every aspect of social life. Among the sectors that are affected and now attract due attention in both scholarly studies and policy formulation are the informal

economy, public enterprises, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), agriculture, food production, health, human resources development, development agencies, and income generation versus job creation.

Relatively the informal economy did not receive significant attention in South Africa until the outbreak of COVID-19 compared to the attention it receives in some other African countries (Khambule, 2020). The reason is, however, difficult to identify. Apparently, it is anchored on the belief that South Africa is relatively developed compared to most other African states and therefore, it can rely on the formal sector for the totality of social and economic development. However, at the same time, it is observed that “Policy gaps and the lack of recognition of the importance of the informal sector are not unique to the South African context and two of the key contrasting views of the informal sector have often suggested that, on the one hand, the sector is an indicator of a ‘backward’ and unproductive economy while, on the other hand, it is understood as a critical source of employment and earnings for workers on the margins of the labour market” (Cichello (2017:2).

Poverty is a serious challenge to the South African economy. It is an obstacle to the effective management of human resources and implementation of certain policies and therefore reduces the rate of socio-economic development. The poverty reduction issue is making many analysts interested in the informal sector. Oyebamiji (2023) observes that among the merits of the informal economy is the potency to enhance production and stimulate the demand for goods and services, adding that even more significant is the creation of a platform that helps to provide jobs for citizens that are economically marginalised, as the formal economy leaves many people unemployed. Apart from the government, local organizing committees in our grassroots society organized religious bodies, and similar constituted authorities can assist in making the informal sector a platform for empowering the youth for self-reliance and national development (Oyebamiji, 2023).

Commenting on this, Cichello (2017:2) argued that “against the backdrop of very high rates of unemployment in post-apartheid South Africa, the role of the informal sector, the informal economy or informal employment, more broadly, in employment creation and overall development has been marginalized” and that “even where there has been some degree of recognition of the importance of the informal sector to employment creation and livelihoods, policy responses are often unsupportive.” He justified this contention with statements of a previous President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, who once associated the informal economy with poverty and underdevelopment, claiming that it is hardly

connected to the formal economy (Cichello, 2017; Devey et al., 2006).

Only a small percentage of the total work force is engaged in the informal sector in South Africa. In 2015, data compiled by Statistics South Africa (SSA) indicated that this was made up of 2.4 million jobs spread over different provinces in the country, said to be equivalent to 17% of total job placements (Statistics South Africa, 2015). The sector consists of people organizing and coordinating its different units for wholesale business and retail regarding repackages of goods and distribution and in management of provision of services. For instance, the SSA figures of 2015 show that its overall commercial activities may be classified into the trade sector and retail business (44%) while construction is 16%. Total services also amounted to 16% while all other activities were 24%. Earlier figures compiled by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) for South Africa in 2013 indicated that “in terms of status in employment, most of those working in the informal sector (61%) are self-employed while 36% are employees” (ILO, 2013). The informal economy has experienced some noticeable reorganization and restructuring in the last five years (Patrick, 2021), and new figures are expected regarding the total output of goods, services rendered and total number of participants in terms of population. However, such accurate figures were not made available by the relevant constituted authorities until the eve of COVID-19 (Patrick, 2021). The figures for 2019 indicate that the “statistical composition of the informal economy in South Africa is approximately 3 million people working and translates to 18–20% of the total employment in the country” (Statistics South Africa, 2019).

On the employment platform, it is observed that some sectors have recovered while others are yet to do so (cited in Leshoro, 2022). Among those yet to recover is the construction industry which managed to engage only 10 000 more workers in the first half of 2022 when the finance sector, for instance, absorbed 128 000 while 276 000 workers were engaged by the community and social services sector. Other key ones still lacking behind in terms of recovery are manufacturing and mining. Leshoro (2022) explains the need for these sectors to explore new grounds and mark out new strategies for recovery because on a relative term they possess more potential for job creation. This implies that government support would also be helpful for the revival of the sectors. The Director of Econometrics, Azar Jammine, also said that some producers and firms probably used the pandemic as a pretext to retrench some workers and retain the most productive ones and that this partly accounts for the current slow rate of job creation in some sectors (Leshoro, 2022).

But other factors identified as antagonistic to jobs creation programmes are the challenge

of load shedding in some parts of the country and some development in the global economy having adverse effects on local economic policies. The other challenge is the effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the global economy, while the other is the adverse effects of some economic policies in China on her trading partners, the major one being the economic lockdowns that have turned out to be harmful to several countries in the global supply platform. Azar Jammine was of the view that these challenges, including the load-shedding problem in Kwazulu-Natal, contributed significantly to the increase in the cost of production and that the recorded increase was up to a hundred percent in most cases (Leshoro, 2022). Summarizing the impact of this on youth, the article stated that there was a noticeable improvement in youth unemployment. The data compiled showed that “youth unemployment remained elevated in the second quarter” of 2022 “with the total number of unemployed youths between the ages of 15 and 34 dropping to 2% of 4.8 million” (Leshoro, 2022:4).

However, the data are not comprehensive enough to have concise assessment of impact of the new industrial expansion and labour market reorganization on youth as one of the contributors said that “35.7% of 10.2 million young people aged 15 to 24 years were not in employment, education or training” and this is 2.7 percent above what was obtainable in the same period in 2021 (Leshoro, 2022:4). The survey did not also provide enough facts and figures for assessment of the scene regarding gender and race. It mere states that the black is the worse victim of the COVID-19 induced unemployment and “black women bear the brunt of the unemployment crisis in the country” (Leshoro, 2022:4).

Until the outbreak of the COVID-19, there was a general belief in different sectors and even among some constituted authorities that the informal economy is immune against global economic crises and social mishaps on the ground that “it functions outside of mainstream economic principles and regulations” and that “this perception led to the informal economy being regarded as an employment shock absorber during economic crises” (Khambule, 2020:91). But all these have been subjected to a critical test by the hazards and complications of the COVID-19 scene. This school of thought was operating on an erroneous platform as the COVID-19 respected no sector, institution, race or colour. Yet, it is among the reasons why government policies have not given it the type of attention it deserves. It has been observed that in most cases, that government merely pays lip service to the sector in terms of observations of what should be done to improve on its potency for the purpose of socio-economic development (Cichello, 2017). This is largely in connection with the placing of too much emphasis on the shortcomings of the informal

economy by government agencies, even when writers and social analysts provide an objective portrait. Among such objective view of the sector is what Mróz (2015:80) tags ‘Beauty and the Beast’, where the benefits of the informal economy are well explored before explaining that “the negative elements are related to almost non-existent social security contributions, inability to contribute to the tax necessary for improving public infrastructure to stimulate further economic activities, social transfers and the unfair competition against formalised businesses.” Khambule (2020:95) is of the view that “these pros and cons often lead to governments needing to weigh the benefits of informal economic activity in business centres and earmarking certain places...for informal economy activities to limit competition with formal businesses.”

However, under COVID-19, there seems to be some positive changes in government attitude towards the sector. This was apparently partly due to the response of international agencies. Thus, commenting on the need for a more vibrant public sector, the international labour organisation (ILO) stated that “the COVID-19 pandemic presented a need for innovative social policies linked to the design of robust and universal social protection systems that can act as automatic economic and social stabilizers in the face of crises” (ILO, 2020: 3). In South Africa, the informal economy is part of this ‘social protection systems.’ In any case as the COVID-19 crisis tended to defile almost every effort and strategy, policy makers have no option than to give the informal economy a measure of consideration about reduction of poverty and hardship.

Commenting on the South African scene and in terms of this response, an author and social analyst wrote:

“The South African government adopted a R500 billion (over \$26 billion) stimulus package, equivalent to 10% of the country’s GDP, to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on businesses and citizens. This was also supported by the South African Reserve Bank cutting the repo rate by 275 basis points, which is estimated to unlock more than R80 billion in the economy. These measures were designed to alleviate the social and economic pressure against the increased poverty rates, with the government dedicating a 6-month special Coronavirus grant targeting the poor and elderly through increasing social grants. This also included a special COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress grant of R350 per month for the next 6 months for the unemployed without any form of government support” (Khambule, 2020:101).

Relating this to the lockdowns and related issues, the same author wrote:

“In addition to the lockdown regulations that South Africa introduced to combat the spread of COVID-19, the government implemented emergency measures such as the release of disaster relief funds, tax relief, small business funding and the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) as a measure to mitigate adverse economic outcomes. The second phase of the government’s response was to stabilise the country’s economy and address the decline in the supply and demand side that resulted in economic downturn and a threat to job security. This was undertaken through the R500 billion social and economic relief. This is an important milestone in South Africa’s uneven development landscape as the 500 billion was primarily focused on alleviating the already high level of poverty and unemployment in the country by keeping the ailing economy afloat. According to the Presidency, the R500 billion social and economic relief is intended to boost the health budget (which received R20 billion) to intensify measures of dealing with the pandemic and relieve hunger and social distress” (Khambule, 2020:101).

His facts and figures and analytical framework were based on government policy focus and financial allocations as contained in official documents from the office of the President and South African Reserve Bank (e.g., The Presidency, 2020).

Overall, the COVID-19 crisis is among the factors that made the government identify the virtues of the informal economy and create measures for utilizing them against the poverty and hardship that were rapidly emanating through the pandemic. This is largely because COVID-19 created the imperative for all government agencies and policy makers in both public and private sectors to be creative and innovative conscious and to respond to every new decision and method with this mind-set. As mentioned above, the pandemic attracted the attention of international agencies to the coping mechanisms of each country, particularly the worst victims like South Africa. It is in connection with this that the international Labour Organisation encouraged with emphasis an innovative and “robust and universal social protection systems that can act as automatic economic and social stabilizers in the face of crises” in several countries, including South Africa (ILO, 2020: 3). As a result of this, the South African government approved the sum of R500 billion as a means of sustaining business ventures through granting them financial support. It was also meant to mitigate the hazards of the pandemic regarding the survival of individual citizens. This package amounted to about 10% of the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The project and its implementing policies were also supported by the South African Reserve Bank, which further disbursed the sum of R80 billion for the same purpose (Khambule, 2020).

On a general note, the lockdown measures implemented to restrict the spread of COVID-

19 have done massive damage to economies. Numerous commentators have argued that the coming recession could be as deep and as devastating as the global recession of the 1930s (Buccus, 2020). Many countries, including those in Africa and the Middle East developed different policies and strategies to protect the economy and social life (WSFS, 2021; Mukumbang, 2020). For instance, the Israeli policy at the beginning of the pandemic was viewed as very severe: it forced, practically at the same time, comprehensive restrictions for example, not leaving home for any public spaces, remaining at home aside from when absolutely necessary to go out (i.e., work, as per recommended limits; purchasing food or medication; getting clinical treatment; performing other fundamental exercises), and a restriction against congregating (New Ministry of Health Guideline, 2020). At this time, all educational institutions for kids ages 0–18 was covered until mid-May 2020. Eateries and entertainment venues, shops of all kinds, shopping centres and malls, inns, and numerous other organizations barring those characterized as fundamental, for example, supermarkets and drug stores, had to close without a moment's delay.

Even though industries considered essential maintained their activity, non-essential industries were not left out. Young people are among the groups most affected by the crisis, not only in Israel but also in other member states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (ILO Monitor, 2020). In some situations, industries were allowed to utilise just a predetermined number of labourers. Moreover, in April, the Israeli government announced curfews and a 100-meter limit on movement from home for nonessential activities. This reality came about quickly in a steep and rapid increase in unemployment, from a low of 3.4% in February to a pinnacle of 26% before the finish of April (Statistics South Africa. 2020). In a brief time of a month and a half (from mid-March to the furthest limit of April), around 1,000,000 workers (942,000) were registered as new job seekers at the employment service forces throughout the country (Posel, 2022). Most of these new job seekers (about 83%) were employees who had been furloughed; others had been fired (Statistics South Africa. 2020).

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy has resulted in the closure of more businesses. For instance, Greyhound and Musical stores have officially announced the closure of their businesses (Phoenix Tabloid, 9<sup>th</sup> February 2021). After 37 years of service, Greyhound has decided to shut its doors. The luxury coach liner announced its closure on 3 February, saying that their services will run until 14 February and thereafter will close completely. It was gathered that Greyhound's closure was due to the company

having suffered a great loss because of Covid 19 lockdown and it would not be able to recover. Likewise, Música, which is affiliated with the Clicks Group South Africa, that the Música stores will officially be closing their doors on 31 May (Phoenix Tabloid, 9<sup>th</sup> February 2021).

### **2.1.3 COVID-19 and the Challenge of addressing Unemployment in South Africa**

Unemployment is among South Africa's most serious challenges. Youth unemployment is a bloodbath with close to 60% of South Africa's young people unemployed. Undoubtedly, young people are also the most affected by the economic crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The catastrophe of youth unemployment is set to get much worse in the context of COVID-19. The problem of unemployment in South Africa is not recent (Fengler et al., 2021; Borat & Hodge 1999; Edwards 2000). Gross employment has been still or falling since the mid-1980s. The underlying attributes of falling employment have been brought about by various components identified with the politically sanctioned racial segregation government's approaches pointed toward advancing 'separate turn of events'.

Following a current International Labour Organisation (ILO) report, more than 40% of young people are grappling with the challenge of unemployment. The report paints a dismal picture of the future of youth job security. People globally were working in sectors most affected by the pandemic; and close to 75% were informally employed (Buccus, 2020). They include the food sector, transport industry, including air transportation and provision of services like entertainment and beauty services. We may not know how long the COVID-19 crisis will last or how many lives it will still be lost and also do not know how severe the coming recession will be and how long it will last. But we do know, for sure, that we are heading for a serious economic crisis (WSFS, 2021).

Job creation under COVID-19 is a key issue in the developmental policies of global economy and of course, South Africa is not an exception. This involves a number of issues, and its success depends on a host of factors. One such factor is sustainability. Under COVID-19, it was difficult to sustain projects for economic or social development at any level compared to the pre-COVID-19 society. For one thing, sustainability is partly a function of the ability of business units to manage changes and associated crises and under COVID-19 no constituted authority or entrepreneur could be accused of poor management because all hands were on deck to face the challenge. Therefore, it is only on grounds of gross negligence and obvious levity in policy framework and decisions that

the management of a company or firm might be accused of poor management of strategic issues arising from unanticipated changes in social structure, economic planning, and industrial relations. Another thing is the degree of relevance of adopted policies and business plans. During COVID-19, it was difficult to define this concept of relevance with regard to business master-plan and long-term focus because the crisis tended to defile even the most potent of such business plans (Bussin, 2021; World Economic Forum, 2020).

Creation of jobs also goes with the right government policies and effective management of human resources because management personnel are engaged to handle the structures required for job creation. In other words, the government policies and entrepreneurial culture required to create jobs are handled by individuals and assistants that must also be well managed. Having the right people, e.g. experts in relevant positions, is essential to realising expected results. But appropriate governmental policy framework is a key pre-requisite for successful job creation for youths. Under COVID-19, the government appears to have done its best though the assessment of government effort has attracted some controversies (Bussin, 2021; Swart-Opperman, 2019). These are also reflected in the policy focus and handling of the informal economy and non-governmental organisations discussed above.

Beyond government policies, the management of human resources at both grassroots and national levels involved many things in the context of job creation for the masses. Among them is the potency of the social networking systems and the vibrancy of public policies put in place to manage and upgrade it. Another is the ability to integrate social and grassroots institutions into the overall policy framework. For instance, in Phoenix, grassroots institutions have tried to collaborate with local development agencies with regards to job creation, particularly for the growing youth population. But there seems to be no link between government policies and programmes at the national level in strategies and responses to emerging challenges. This is closely related to the issue of communication gaps between different public agencies and between such agencies and local institutions in terms of initiatives, focus and guiding principles (Bussin, 2021).

Yet, one key challenge often grappled with by both government agencies and companies in job creation projects or programmes is the issue of cost reduction. This sometimes leads to retrenchment or cutting of salaries and wages. Under COVID-19, the prevailing hazards of the day compelled every firm and government department to be engrossed in the search for devices of cost reduction. The task of combining this with job creation was, therefore, not an easy one. In South Africa, many organisations, especially in the private

sector, were rather looking for the slightest opportunities to retrench workers instead of how to initiate ideas and projects that can accelerate the rate of job creation. This is why Habanabakize (2021:1), in the assessment of the scene, responded with a question mark thus: “South African Job Creation, a Myth or Reality?” Adopting the theory of John Keynes on labour and employment, the study contends that job creation can only be attained through what the author refers to as “economic injections components (exports, government expenditure and domestic investment)” and that “money invested or introduced within the economy to improve economic activities is perceived as an injection while the money saved or taken out relates to leakage or withdrawals.” Statistical data on the labour market in South Africa indicates that the percentage of those unemployed rose to 32.5 in 2020 (Habanabakize, 2021).

#### **2.1.4 The Current Economic Challenges Resulting From COVID-19**

The lockdown has meant fundamentally different things for the middle class and for the poor. There are people in the middle classes who face the loss of jobs or businesses and a real decline in their economic situation. But for many, the lockdown is largely just a matter of enduring a set of manageable frustrations. But for poor people, who often have no savings and cannot eat if they do not work, the lockdown is mainly a very different situation. Hunger places people in a desperate situation. At the same time, hunger is pushing people into deeper and deeper desperation, as we witnessed at various points during the lockdown, posed a serious threat to the fragile social fabric of our society (Buccus, 2020).

Previous studies (Patrick, 2021; Opute, 2020; Mthethwa, 2020) have focused generally on the challenges of unemployment in South Africa, particularly, there is a great deal of literature on the impact of COVID-19 on employment and the unemployment rate in South Africa. However, studies on the assessment of the contributions of COVID-19 pandemic to unemployment in the Phoenix area are little non-existent. Stemming from the obvious gap in the literature, this study’s aim is to explore the challenges and assess various impacts and adverse effects of Coronavirus pandemic on employments amongst residents of Phoenix, a residential suburb in KwaZulu Natal Province of South Africa and the strategies employed to overcome the challenges.

### **2.3 The South African Youth Livelihood Vulnerability in the Context of adopted Theoretical framework for this Study.**

An unstable labour market, particularly when the economy retracts and there are scarcely any job options, is a significant source of stress, not only to the unemployed but also to those with a source of income through monthly salary or wages. This is because the scene is often associated with hazards exploited by employers of labour to intimidate and even exploit workers, particularly the youth. This study is anchored on two theories namely, the Latent Deprivation Theory (LDT) and the youth livelihood and empowerment theory of change. Both theories, particularly the second one, examine livelihood vulnerability partly with emphasis on its adverse effect on the conservation of resources. But conservation of resources involves many issues and unemployment which is a major source of youth livelihood vulnerability is a key obstacle to its actualisation. As explained in Chapter One, the psychological aspects of unemployment often linked to stress and related issues, can hardly be analysed in isolation from other hazards associated with unemployment (Jahoda,1990). Therefore, these theories are adopted to explain the factors that create insecurity and risk of psychological distress in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic with regards to the role of unemployment and related crisis in youth livelihood vulnerability. In the stress literature (Patrick, 2021; Mthethwa, 2020), the crisis of unemployment is viewed as one of the primary life events that can only be resolved partly through some friendly or mental change concerning the individual. There are paradigms within the Latent Deprivation Theory that are typical clarification for the connection between unemployment and mental wellbeing, which are adopted in the current study (Yeu, 1999). Therefore, this theoretical model accommodates the effects of stress on psychological distress in general and recommends that being unemployed increases the likelihood of encountering stress-inducing factors like absence of resources, restricted freedoms, and low self-respect, and restricts admittance to advantages and security (also see, Sankar, 2020). That is, unemployment is likely to bring in its wake a range of losses, including those of social ties and monetary strength, and these misfortunes might be unpleasant to all by themselves. Consequently, unemployment expands the danger of debilitated psychological wellness (Sankar, 2020; Pearlin,1989).

The existing literature (Patrick, 2021; Opute, 2020; Mthethwa, 2020) demonstrates that employment serves both manifest and inactive capacities. The manifest or expected capacity of employment is earning a living, though the inactive or unintended capacities incorporate personality definition and association with significant social foundations

and affiliations (Patrick, 2021). Likewise, there are psychological costs of unemployment, including one's potential loss of meaning in life, hindrance of individual personality, and loss of confidence commonly derived from one's work (Layard, Clark, and Senik, 2012). Unemployment is distressing because it includes the deficiency of these advantages. Be that as it may, the extent of unemployment on one's psychological distress may likewise rely upon logical stressors happening at large-scale levels of the social reality in which the individual is embedded (Wheaton, 2009). One well-documented chronic macro-level stressor contains downturn, economic crisis, and high unemployment (Herbig, 2013; Helliwell, 2014) – the exact situation that happened in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, there are several defensive variables buffering the effects of unemployment on psychological distress (Wheaton, 1989). They are often tied to different social systems and individual perceptions. Among them is the Latent Deprivation Theory, a theoretical framework to understand how personal resources moderate the horrible effects of unemployment on psychological distress. Hobfoll (1989) clarifies that people will experience distress when they feel threatened with a loss of something they value or when they experience a loss. The anticipated or observed loss of resources, such as job loss, could be perceived as a reduction in the ability to manage challenges, prompting a decrease in one's prosperity. But the youth livelihood and empowerment theory of change recommends four classes of resources: objects (e.g., shelter, food, transportation), conditions (e.g., secure employment), mental qualities (e.g., hopefulness, feeling of dominance), and energy (e.g., time, money, knowledge) (Bohle, 2007). In this context, it complements the first theory on the issue. Having a job is viewed as a conditional asset that assists people with acquiring different kinds of resources like items and energies (i.e., food, shelter, money) and individual resources (e.g., dominance) (Holmgreen, 2017; Hobfoll, 1989). At the point when "conditions" and "energy" are inadequate people cannot manage natural dangers, and this has adverse effect on prosperity (Holmgreen, 2017). Besides, people who do not have many resources are more powerless against the deficiency of assets, while those with greater resources are able to gain additional resources. These are among the key issues explored by the youth livelihood and empowerment theory of change. Thus, those with limited resources are expected to encounter more serious pain in the wake of unemployment compared to individuals with greater resources.

These theories are, therefore, helpful for empirical exploration of the theme of COVID-19 in relation to youth livelihood vulnerability. Also, working on the current pandemic of

COVID-19 has determined my area of interest with regards to the career of a researcher in the search for solutions to the challenges of mankind. The methodology and data collection were relevant guides in the process of data analysis and in the context of addressing practical situations, even about engagement at work and issues in the labour market.

## **2.4 CONCLUSION**

The existing literature defines the genesis of unemployment in South Africa, illustrating its intricacies and how it became a national issue during the apartheid regime. Several studies identify different types of unemployment and analytically explain the most common ones regarding the South African labour market. Overall, the studies explore unemployment historically and conceptually in South Africa in relation to the existing theories, most of which are relatively recent. The studies demonstrate the need for a blend of historical and theoretical ideas to address the challenges. Relating this to COVID-19 and with regards to youth livelihood vulnerability, a good number of studies compare the lapses in the formal sector with the huddles in the informal economy based on employment figures and changing structure of the labour market. Despite this, what occurs at the grassroots is hardly addressed as the focus of the literature has been on issues at the national level. Each community, including Phoenix, may have certain peculiarities whose understanding could be helpful in tapping grassroots initiatives as well as addressing issues at the national level. The present study is meant to fill this gap.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 INTRODUCTION**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research depends on systematic and well-structured data collection techniques using open-ended and conversational communication (Bhat, undated). The qualitative research method does not only focus on what people think but much more how they feel. This study therefore adopted the qualitative approach because of its flexibility and ability to capture the various forms of responses from the selected respondents and its ease in terms of analysis and

drawing of inferences during the desktop research.

Furthermore, considering the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic is relatively new in the academic circle, there are still a host of viewpoints and perspectives to be derived from individuals and communities based on what they consider their peculiar experiences and the challenges encountered. Guided interview was conducted involving 20 youths, most of whom were unemployed and selected from all races and gender groups in South Africa (see table 4.1 in Chapter Four), and the conversation recorded for transcription. There was a face-to-face interview with informants selected from different wards in Phoenix. Besides the oral sources, documentary sources such as newspapers and periodicals were consulted to enrich the study. In some cases, oral information may act as a check on the veracity of documentary sources and vice-versa.

### **3.1 Data Collection**

The process through which information is gathered and measured on variables of interest through an established, systematic manner that allows individuals to answer queries, state research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes is referred to as data collection (Gill et al., 2018). In this study, primary and secondary sources are employed to complement data collected through fieldwork. Secondary sources such as textbooks, government publications, and published reports are relied upon in discussing topical issues. This has become necessary because they are sometimes employed to verify the authenticity of primary source materials and vice-versa.

### **3.2 Recruitment Strategy**

A Nonprobability sampling technique was adopted in selecting participants for the study. In this case, purposive sampling techniques were used to select youths across the Phoenix area. The target was youths for the research and youths who have been affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic unemployment. Therefore, it is imperative for first-hand experience as it pertains to the impact of unemployment. This is combined with snowballing where the first set of informants help to link the researcher to others who have had similar experience like them. The method of purposive sampling was used to develop the sample of the research under discussion. According to this method, which belongs to the category of non-probability sampling techniques, sample members are selected based on

their knowledge, relationships, and expertise regarding a research subject (Campell et al, 2020; Nikolopoulou, 2022). This is so because the target respondents for the research were individuals who have been affected by the crisis of COVID-19 and therefore have first-hand experience as it pertains to the impact of the loss of employment, individuals who also helped to link the researcher to others like them who have had similar experiences.

### **3.3 Sampling**

Sampling refers to studying a proportion of the target group in the research conducted. Sampling is necessary as complete coverage of the target population may be impossible (Nikolopoulou, 2022). There are two forms of sampling, which are, probability and non-probability (Nikolopoulou, 2022). Probability sampling is the sampling where every unit in the population under study has the same chance or opportunity of being selected and it is also representative of the total population and findings can be generalised to the whole population under study (Campell et al., 2020). On the other hand, non-probability sampling is mainly used in explorative research and qualitative analysis, where the research aims to elicit information, gain an understanding of the population group and to discover issues that the wider population has no or limited knowledge of (Campell et al., 2020). The information collected from interviews is utilised to understand participants' experiences or the meaning that they give to social issues (Campell et al., 2020). Hence, the non-probability sampling technique was used in this study. The non-probability technique allowed the researcher to gain a rich understanding of the lives of the youths of Phoenix area.

As already indicated, the non-probability purposive sampling method was used in this study. Purposive sampling is a technique used where the researcher decides the category of informants or participants that can feature in the sample based on the requirement of the project (Dana and Turner, 2020). The authors also try to distinguish between it and "simple random sampling" which "gives equal probability to all elements" (Dana P. and Turner 2020:2). For this study, the sample consisted of twenty respondents who were interviewed, cutting across different sections of the area and different race groups interviewed. For this research, a balance in gender of respondents were adhered to; hence, ten males and ten females were sampled, which included persons residing in Phoenix who have had experienced the impact of COVID-19 unemployment and are above the consent age of 18 years. As indicated, all the respondents for this study were selected using purposive sampling techniques, which is a sampling approach that the researcher decides

based on what s/he considered best for the study or problem to be addressed rather than strict consideration for accepted conventions.

A total of 20 respondents were interviewed, cutting across different sections of the area and different racial groups of the community. For this research, apart from gender balance, all racial groups were considered based on the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1988. Thus a balance of the gender was sampled, including males and females who have had experience with the impact of COVID-19 and are above the consent age of 18 years and within the youth age according to the country's constitution. Importantly, most of the respondents include male and female unemployed youths. However, a few employed and underemployed were included in the sample because their experience before they were able to secure a job is also required to balance up the analysis. In particular, there was more emphasis on youths who lost their jobs during COVID-19, adversely affecting their livelihood. As indicated, all the respondents for the study were selected using purposive sampling techniques.

The duration of each interview was between 30 minutes, with a social distance of one meter. Tenny et al. (2022) clarify that scheduled interviews are planned interactions between the respondent and the interviewer after prior arrangements with the respondent. The criteria involve establishing the qualitative study results to be credible (Amin et al., 2020). The question of the semi-structured interviews was aligned with the study's objectives. Therefore, to ensure that the study is credible, the research instrument ensures that the results show what the study intends to address.

### **3.4 Data Quality Control**

The following aspects of data quality were ensured: credibility, validity, conformability, transferability, and reliability. Under credibility, the researcher ensured that the research results are trustworthy and believable. This was done through facilitating and probing for rich, accurate and clear information from sources of data collection. The researcher spent a large amount of time to gain a deeper insight into the phenomenon being studied. Therefore, objectivity is the primary focus in this case. This is to enable one to apply the results and inferences derived from the work to practical challenges of life based on prevailing theories and concepts. This also encompasses relevant assessment through comparative analysis with what is obtainable in other communities.

Transferability was ensured in that enough data was collected and analysed to determine

the comparison of the findings and the transferability of research to a similar environment or population and provide similar findings. Generalisations or research transfer was suggested in areas of similar problems based on rural infrastructure development. Conformability implies that sources of information were consulted and aligned to ensure support on the analysis and interpretation of the research findings. All the sources that were used by the researcher for this have been acknowledged.

A wide range of terms in qualitative studies describes validity and are therefore, considered relevant to this work. This concept is not a single, fixed, or universal concept, but rather according to Tenny et al. (2022:4), “at its core qualitative data is looking for themes and pattern that can be difficult to quantify” and that there is a need to ensure that some essential ingredients of research “are not lost by trying to quantify something that is not meant to be quantified.” According to the authors, there are certain issues in life that are hardly amenable to the operative laws of mathematics and compilation of figures and are therefore better analysed through a qualitative approach.

Reliability is considered in the classification and utilisation of data. This has to do with people's confidence in the overall research methods employed and the data interpretation and analysis outcome. Therefore, the researcher ensured consistency in the research findings and avoided irregularities in data collection, analysis, and alignment with the reviewed literature to ensure the credibility of the research findings.

### **3.5 Procedure**

A letter explaining the rationale of the study, ethical considerations and a request for participation will be provided to participants to sign before commencing with the interview. Each interview will take place at a convenient time and at a safe, non-threatening venue that will be jointly agreed between the participant and the researcher.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

Data analysis mainly comprises the reduction of data, displaying of data, drawing of conclusions and verification. The analysis involves working with data by organising, tying data into manageable units, synthesising data and searching patterns, and discovering what is important and to be learnt and what to tell others (Popenoe et al. (2021). The study used thematic analysis where the data was analysed using different themes covered during

the interview sessions. Braun and Clarke (2006:93) define thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data”. Thematic analysis is a widely used method of analysis in qualitative research. For Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is the first qualitative method which should be learned since it offers essential skills that are beneficial for conducting many other kinds of analysis. Caulfield (2022:3) states that thematic analysis “allows you a lot of flexibility in interpreting the data and allows you to approach large data set more easily by sorting them into broad themes,” explaining that this, however, requires appropriate care. The author listed some steps that may be followed by the researcher and among them are familiarisation. Thematic analysis is a widely used method of analysis in qualitative research. For Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis is the first qualitative method which should be learned since it offers essential skills that are beneficial for conducting many other kinds of analysis. Using thematic analysis is advantageous because it is a method rather than a methodology, meaning it is different from other qualitative methodologies as it is not tangled to a specific epistemological or theoretical perspective. Caulfield (2022) also find thematic coding as a process performed within major analytic traditions such as grounded theory, rather than a specific approach, where they argue that thematic analysis should be considered as a method. Most importantly is its flexibility. The goal of thematic analysis is to identify interesting and important data patterns and use these themes to address the research or say something about an issue. A good thematic analysis is more than summarising data, but it also interprets data and makes sense of it.

The interviews were transcribed before analysing the data. During the process of data analysis, the relationship between major themes and sub-categories was identified. Through the coding, the researcher made sure that all the interview sections that are related to the same heading were retrieved with ease.

The source materials collected are classified and synchronised as one means of determining the veracity of their content in terms of how much information, including data that can be derived from each document or audio record. The generated data were coded and subjected to a combination of thematic and matrix analysis. Thematic analysis is a method of analysing qualitative data that includes interview transcripts to be able to bring out themes and meanings. On the other hand, matrix analysis is the study of matrices and the algebraic properties of matrices (Welman, 2005).

This approach to data analysis captures how people conceptualise their diverse world views and challenges of social life starting from their immediate environment and the practical

link between this and other aspects of life, e.g. economy, politics and technological innovations. Therefore, this research adopts the qualitative method as it is flexible in approach and provides a potent platform for gathering and exploring the viewpoints of numerous youths as means of verifying the authenticity of previous evidence or schools of thought. However, where considered inevitable or relevant quantitative data are incorporated. Some quantitative data, like the table and chart in Chapter Four, are generated from qualitative data. In other words, some efforts were made to convert oral information into quantitative data where figures can be of help in defining or providing an empirical portrait of a scene or event.

The interview pattern was a simple one adapted to capture the relevant viewpoints of respondents with questions structured to sustain a device of comparing the ideas of participants partly by making them respond to identical questions. The primary concepts and conventions, including a letter explaining the reason for the study are strictly adhered to. Among these is ethical consideration which is partly for the purpose of protecting the interest of participants. By this, a request form seeking the willingness of people to participate was prepared to be filled by those who are interested. The researcher obtained all the participants' consent to participate in the study. In other words, consent form was given to each participant to indicate their willingness to participate. Tenny et al. (2022) contend that all the participants must be informed about the study's consequences and agree to participate in the study. A standardised consent form was drawn in English for the participants to complete. Where the participants had a problem reading the consent form, the researcher read it aloud for them and explained the content to the participants, and they were asked to sign the forms. The informants were also made to understand that participation is voluntary and that one is free to withdraw from the investigation if he/she wishes with no repercussions.

The study employs the purposive sampling technique and its scholarly principles as already defined in some studies (Campbell et al., 2020; Lewis & Sheppard, 2006). Explaining the intellectual potency and relevance of this sampling method in studies of this nature, Gill et al. (2018) explain that this sampling technique partly requires the researcher's initiative in deciding the relevant set of informants, though some theories may be introduced if they could enhance the objectivity of the overall approach. Applying it to this study, the researcher, therefore, decides what needs to be known and creates a platform for the selection of the right informants, particularly youths who can and are willing to participate individually and through group discussion. The questions of the semi-structured interviews are aligned with the study's objectives. Therefore, to ensure that the study is

credible, the research instrument creates a platform for proper interaction between the qualitative data from fieldwork and whatever is derived from published works.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

Ethics are linked with morality and both deal with matters of right or wrong (Bhandari, 2022). The study upheld the ethical considerations of Voluntary Participation and Informed Consent, No Harm to Participants, Anonymity and Confidentiality and Deceiving Subjects. Pseudonyms were used to confirm the confidentiality of the participants. Participants were given different names. Some interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants, whilst others refused. Interviews were conducted to cover a detailed description of the contributions of COVID-19 to unemployment in the Phoenix area of Durban.

### **3.8 Voluntary Participation and Informed Consent**

Ethics in research is important as it helps to create a platform that protects the participants and also enables the researcher to collect data within the framework of well-defined and accepted standards, thus avoiding research procedures which could cause harm to participants (Bhandari, 2022). At all stages of this research ethical procedures were followed. Before eliciting participants, the research proposal was approved by the Board of Ethics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (see Appendices I-III), which ensured that the questions being asked to respondents were fair and did not produce any psychological harm to participants.

The researcher obtained consent from all the participants to be part of the study, which is signed consent forms and is stored and submitted when the need arises based on the research ethics of the University (see Appendices I-III). (Bhandari, 2022) contend that all the participants must be informed about all the consequences of the study, and they must agree to participate in the study. A standardized consent form was drawn in English for the participants to complete as all consented to understand English. If the participants had a problem with reading the consent form, the researcher agrees to read to them explaining the content to the participants and they were asked to sign the forms. The participants were made aware of the fact that participation in the study is voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the investigation if they so wished with no repercussions.

The participants were given time to read through the consent forms. The participants were asked to give their consent for participating in the study. A few interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants giving consent to audio recording. The interviews were held at a time which suited the participants.

### **3.9 Conclusions**

Without a doubt, the emergence of COVID-19 had a devastating effect and cannot be forgotten any time soon due to the harm done to many families and our social system. Economies of countries have been destroyed with looming poverty, hunger, and unemployment on the horizon. More worrisome is the impact of this COVID-19 which has equally altered the social relationships among people, especially in developing countries. Overall, the fieldwork is structured to capture the experience of Phoenix, with particular focus on the youth. This is done with regard to employment vis-à-vis the crisis of the labour market in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and in relation to youth livelihood vulnerability. With a well-focused approach in the fieldwork methodology, it is expected that the next chapter on data analysis will help to provide a new insight into some practical challenges in grassroots communities on this theme using Phoenix as a case study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Data are not end on their own but a means to an end. This implies that data have to be interpreted largely based on verified and accepted conventions and partly based on the perspectives and empirical initiatives of the individual handling the project. In other words, a field researcher is searching for a solution to one challenge or the other for the benefit of the entire society or one sector or section of a particular community (Crawford, 2020). The nature of data collected and the fieldwork approach depend on the issues involved and the intricacies surrounding the problem identified whether at the national or grassroots level. The researcher is sometimes also guided by trends in the historical development of the problem under consideration and results from previous fieldwork or studies on the theme and related issues. In most cases, the researcher can hardly do without adopting concepts and one or two theories as they help to fine-tune his/her focus and analytic framework (Crawford, 2020).

FIGURE 4.1

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Monthly income (R)</b>	<b>Household size*</b>
A	25	M	Single	Unemployed	---	5
B	27	M	Married	Employed	15000	4
C	23	F	Single	Underemployed	2000	5
D	24	F	Separated	Underemployed	1800	4
E	26	M	Married	Unemployed	---	3
F	21	F	Single	Employed	5000	5
G	23	M	Single	Underemployed	2000	5
H	27	M	Married	Unemployed	---	3
I	19	F	Single	Employed	4000	4
J	20	F	Single	Unemployed	---	5
K	19	F	Single	Unemployed	---	5
L	22	M	Single	Self-employed	6000	4
M	24	M	Single	Employed	10000	5
N	26	M	Married	Employed	20000	4
O	21	M	Single	Unemployed	---	5

P	24	F	Single	Unemployed	---	5
Q	28	M	Married	Employed	30000	4
R	26	F	divorced	Self-employed	10000	3
S	25	F	Separated	Underemployed	2500	3
T	22	M	Single	Unemployed	---	5

M-----Male; F-----Female

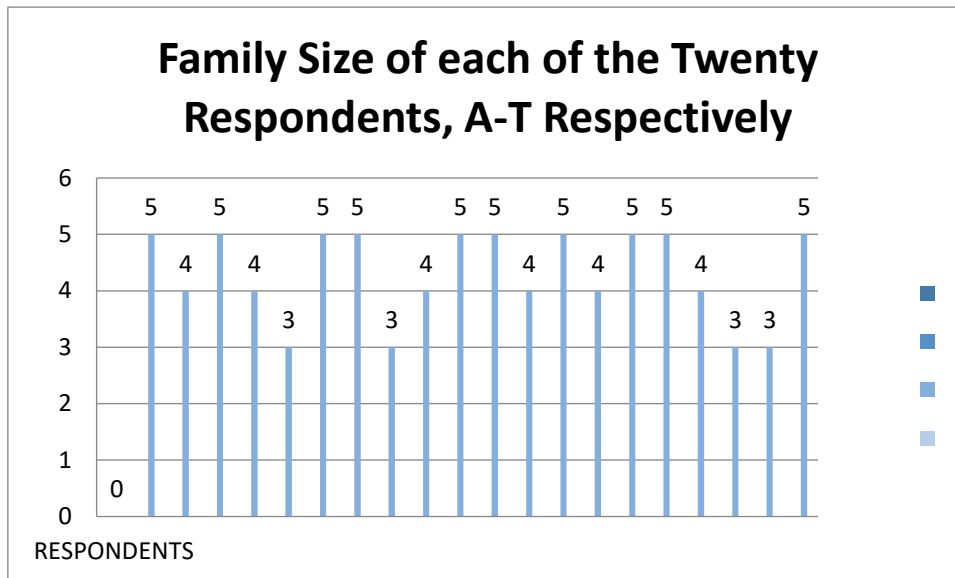
## 4.2 Social-Demographic Data

For the married, household size refers to the participant, spouse and children, but for the singles it refers to the participant and his/her siblings in addition to the father and mother. The study is meant to embrace the totality of youth livelihood vulnerability under COVID-19 and is, therefore, not restricted to the experience of the unemployed youth alone. Therefore, for objective exploration of the theme in the context of the challenges of youth with key emphasis on the unemployed without ignoring the hazards facing the few employed and underemployed, there is need for a sample that incorporates the three sets but with significant attention paid to the unemployed. Besides, the employed and underemployed youth were once unemployed and therefore, their experience is required for objective analysis.

As illustrated in the table above, the research sampled Twenty (20) respondents in the interview from the target population, which is the unemployed youth of Phoenix as a result of COVID-19. Ten of the twenty respondents were male and ten were female. This is partly to ensure gender and race equity balance in the research. Twelve of the interviewed respondents were singles, five married, two separated, and one divorced. The employment profile of the respondents shows that six of those sampled were employed as salary earners, two self-employed, four underemployed and eight were unemployed. The average monthly income of the respondents shows that five of them earn above 3000 Rand and seven earn between 1500 and 2500 Rand a month while the remaining eight earn nothing but are sustained through financial support from relatives and friends. Household size of the respondents shows that ten of the respondents interviewed are members of household sizes of 5 people, 6 each belong to household size of 4 people while each of the remaining 4 belong to household size of 3 people. The data indicate that 75% (i.e. six) of the respondents from the household sizes of between 1 to 3 people generate incomes in the family. For representation of qualitative data eight selected oral interviews are presented below as well

as a chart illustrating the family size of each informant, in addition to summary tables of outcome, Table 4.1 above.

FIGURE 4.2



The issue of unemployment and its adverse effect on youth livelihood under COVID-19 is the primary theme emphasized by the respondents. As explained under literature review, the issue has attracted the attention of different writers at the national level. The piece below is a personal experience of the first informant referred to as respondent A.

*I am 25 years old and a single. I lost my job at the peak of the COVID-19. This became a major problem to my life and even my younger brother who still needed my assistance in a number of issues. The room I lived belonged to my father because he has a house in Phoenix and I could ignore the issue of house rent. But I could not even afford simple meals and pay electricity bill. I was almost begging to eat. The restaurant where I worked was forced to reduce the number of workers because of the COVID-19 crisis. It got to a stage where many people felt that the virus can also be spread through uncontrolled interaction with people in canteens and similar places. A form of online marketing was, however, introduced to enable people order for food through phone calls, What Sapp and similar devices. But the monthly sale was too small to retain the workers, except for a very few. Right now I am still into some menial jobs, including hawking of second-hand wears. (Respondent A)*

Overall, the respondent explains what he passed through with his family as COVID-19 compounded the crisis in the labour market. The youth are being tossed here and there in search of means of survival as most of them have little or no investment and relatively little

experience as they are just starting life. Since majority of the youth still derive their means of livelihood from the informal sector as in the case of this respondent and indeed majority of those interacted with in the course of the fieldwork for this work, it will be reasonable to agree with studies which recommend government full involvement in the informal economy as an asset to sustenance of livelihood among the masses (Patrick ,2021; Ngumbela, 2020; Neves, 2017). In other words, this will help to regulate the sector and gradually contribute to creation of sources of funding for a number of the numerous small and medium-scale enterprises accompanied with the development of new initiatives and innovations in the sector. Though the next participant or respondent managed to retain his job, his story and experience still centres on the lapses in the informal economy. For instance, Patrick (2021) and Ngumbela (2020) emphasized the relationship between food insecurity and livelihood vulnerability vis-à-vis the key role played by the informal sector in sustenance of production. Among the issues mentioned by the next respondent is scarcity of food items making them hardly affordable to many youth. He pointed out how those of them who managed to retain their jobs even in the informal sector faced constant threat and intimidation as explained below.

*I am 27. Though I managed to keep my job I am a victim of the COVID-19 pandemic like many of my colleagues and relatives, some of whom managed to sustain their jobs like me while majority were thrown into the labour market. In the first place, those of us still in employment are surrounded with a series of fear and apprehension emanating from the job itself, e.g. haunted with frequent rumours from within, and messages from board meetings on the imperative to reduce the number of workers in the organization due to the crisis of the pandemic. There were enough reasons to agree with some of my colleagues who said that in most cases it was rather employed as a mere excuse for intimidation and harassment of workers, with the tendency to make them worship and see the employer as demi-god. Secondly, there was scarcity of food resulting in increase in the prices of anything food, including food items. Besides, electricity and water rates were on the high side. (Respondent B)*

The next respondent was looking at how to address the challenges created in his family under COVID-19 in the context of what the labour market has to offer, either a job in the formal sector or by exploring the informal sector for any source, wage earning engagement or self-employment. Like most other countries in the world, the formal sector in South Africa does not have the resources to engage most of the unemployed (Cichello, 2017; Valodia, 2012). In other words, workers in the formal sector are even less than 50% of the entire

labour force. Her response is a portrait of some key issues surrounding youth livelihood vulnerability which the society has to take into consideration in structuring social relations, wealth creation for a sustainable economy and management of the various units in the labour market. All these still point to the need for government to have a second look at the whole issue of livelihood vulnerability as it applies to youth in the context of employment and in relation to policies in the formal sector and empowerment of the informal economy for handling the situation. However, it would appear as if government is yet to believe in the virtue of the informal economy as it has been observed that a “former state president, Thabo Mbeki, somewhat controversially, identified informal workers as part of the ‘second economy’ which is characterised by poverty and under-development and which is structurally disconnected from the formal economy” (Cichello, 2017:2). Moreover, some form of projection into the future as contained in the National Development Plan indicates the need for creation of not less than 1.2 million jobs in the informal sector by 2030 for the country to actualise its dream of minimising the rate of unemployment (National Planning Commission, cited in Cichello, 2017).

It is significant to point out that in spite of this projection the policy document is almost silent on the strategies and methods of getting this actualised (Cichello, 2017). Therefore, it is not surprising that livelihood vulnerability, particularly among the youth, is on the increase. With this scenario, one can understand why a number of youths, like the next respondent, are almost totally confused, saying they do not know where to begin and probably hardly know where to end it as narrated below:

*Well I don't really know where to start from when it comes to COVID-19 and the crisis it has created in my family. I'm 23 years old and when other youths are discussing the pandemic their conversations are largely about jobs and general hardship created in their families, e.g. scarcity of food due to lockdowns, inability to secure jobs or even loss of jobs and a blurred future. But I believe that mine is largely different. I lost my father to the COVID-19 virus and as if that was not enough we were not allowed to give him a befitting burial. Then many things started going wrong as we lost the bread winner of the family. My brother was in a state of depression because of the circumstances surrounding the death of my father. At a certain stage he was in isolation initiated by the hospital during which we could not see him. My brother, in particular, was not at home and felt very bad that he could not arrive to see my father before his death. Thereafter, most of us still feel that the struggle continues and started thinking of what to do to sustain the family and actualize our individual visions. Yet*

*securing a source of income is getting more and more difficult daily whether in terms of job or through small scale business.*  
(Respondent C)

The issue of gender-based violence is another phenomenon that is compounded by poor livelihood as demonstrated by the case of the next respondent. There are cases of violence emanating from poverty, loss of job and outright failure in career. Thus, we have situations where a man resorts to abnormal drinking of alcohol as well as smoking due to idleness resulting from loss of job or business failure. One outcome of this is violence to well-wishers and supporters, starting from the wife or fiancée who may be thinking of supporting and advising him on the right way forward. Some may resort to taking drugs that make them violence without the wife and relatives knowing the source. The case of respondent D below belongs to this category:

*I am 24 and married. Right now, I am not with my husband and I will attribute it to the COVID-19 palaver. At my husband's place of work, they said that most of the workers should sign an undertaking to become casual, paid daily and may be asked to stay at home for some days each month depending on the new programmes of the company in trying to cope with the COVID-19 crisis. We were managing with this when my husband and some other workers were asked to stay at home for a while because of new developments in relation to the problems of COVID-19. We were therefore, expecting the company to call them back. But they were not called back, rather more workers were asked to stay at home. It was then my husband became violent to me, sometimes accusing me of being responsible for his problems. Unknowing to me, he had a girlfriend outside and he also became violent to her. He even beat her mercilessly on a number of occasions and by chance I met somebody who knows me and my husband that told me all that happened and that my husband was keeping that girlfriend before we started our courtship. But his violent attitude was getting worse and a relative advised me to leave with my baby. That was how I left and reside with my aunty. (Respondent D)*

Respondent E below also has a story that explains the harm done by COVID-19 and this revolves around ill-health, a rapid increase in the prices of goods, loss of jobs and an intimidating labour market. Overall, it is also a pointer to the theme of youth livelihood vulnerability as shown below.

*The COVID-19 has been harmful to many people with adverse effect on the focus and vision of many youths. My sister was infected by the virus and it took her long time to recover. Yet we were told*

*to thank God for surviving. My mother was now the one bearing all the financial responsibilities. My company stopped most of us without any pay off. Before then there was one board meeting after the other and the discussions were intimidating to workers. It was as if the workers are not working for the money they receive. Overall, COVID-19 has done much harm to the vision of many youth as the prices of many items increase amid a labour market that has little or nothing to offer. (Respondent E).*

A number of pre-COVID-19 stories in our social media and newspapers discuss the theme of livelihood vulnerability and even with regard to how this applies to youth (cited in Dhayalan, 2021). It must be admitted also that the indices of youth livelihood vulnerability were noticeable in the South African socio-economic setting before COVID-19. They include few vacancies in the public sector in relation to the number of job seekers, a weak informal economy resulting in poor wages and apparent insufficient government support for small and medium scale enterprises, with multiplier effect of business failure and intimidation of creative youth thinking of small-scale business (Casale, 2010; Statistics South Africa, 2014). These are issues that ought to be addressed even in the absence of COVID-19, a probable reason why the next respondent thinks that “maybe we are hiding under the canopy of COVID-19” as narrated below.

*I am 21 and at the completion of my high school education, my mother said that I should not start thinking of any good job until my university education, claiming that South Africa only have menial jobs for people with low educational attainment, particularly girls. However, I managed to get something doing and I said I would further my education after one or two years. But COVID-19 has almost scattered all my plans because my father was sick and managed to survive. Right now, the family is yet to completely recover from the shock. But is like things are getting normal and as my mother has rightly said if things were really in order before the COVID-19 global problem, by now there should be something for youth and we should know where we are heading to. I don't really know what to say but is like we have our own problem before and nobody is talking about that now, maybe we are hiding under the canopy of COVID-19. (Respondent F)*

The truth, therefore, is that COVID-19 compounded the situation. These elements were evolving before COVID-19, but within a manageable level. Some were still dormant and yet to really surface as in the case of inflationary prices and complicated food insecurity challenge. Whatever the situation before 2019, to say the least, the outbreak of the pandemic

is like adding fuel to burning fire (Patrick, 2021). Therefore, there is need for empirical study of the extent of harm done by the pandemic in order to be able to come out with appropriate solutions. Respondent G below seems to share in this view.

*Well COVID-19 has come like a tsunami without previous warning for anybody. I'm witnessing such a global health crisis at 23. The youth have a lesson to learn from it, i.e. be prepared for the unexpected, anything can happen anytime. In other words, change can come with anything, both pleasant and unpleasant, don't always expect good. I was working as sales boy until the COVID-19 started and the first lockdown in the second half of 2019 put me in confusion, especially as it was now like introducing a horrible life style to replace what we were used to. Now as a student in the university I see COVID-19 as a lesson, though a hard one. Nobody prays for such but we must prepare ourselves for the unforeseen. Both the society and government must do the same. The attack of COVID-19 was ravaging and many people and families are just trying to put themselves together. Even my uncle lost his job due to the crisis and for the young ones like us it is now assumed that we should accept the present set-backs of unemployment and perpetual dependence on parents as our fate. Now we keep depending on our parents even when they are no more comfortable seeing you around them. (Respondent G)*

Respondent H says that there is hardly any family or individual without one challenge or the other attributable to the pandemic. This would support the viewpoint that COVID-19 compounded the existing socio-economic problems. By so doing it eroded many opportunities that could be exploited by youth to improve their source of livelihood (Patrick, 2021). The narrative below is a piece of his experience on the issue.

*I am 27, a university graduate without a job before COVID-19. But I believe without the COVID-19 I would have been employed by now. I just applied for some jobs, including one in the eThekweni council when the crisis erupted. Most families are affected and within a family almost everybody has one challenge or the other in connection with the COVID-19. Hence, it is difficult to think of depending on parents or relations. At my age I should even think of assisting younger ones rather than depending on others. I think one problem of the pandemic is that of increasing number of dependants, continuous creation of dependants until everyone becomes a dependant and no one to depend on. Cost of living is high and therefore a rapidly falling standard of living. While the youth are thinking of how to cope, the society and government need to go back to the drawing board. (Respondent H)*

### **4.3 Youth Livelihood Vulnerability in the Context of Food Production, Cost Reduction and Development of Human Resources in the Broader South African Perspective**

The findings here and subsequent sub-titles of this chapter are illustrated and analysed partly in relation to existing findings from other fieldworks made available in the mass media, particularly the press. Here we look at farming and food production which are among the key sectors to consider with regard to youth livelihood vulnerability, especially in rural communities like Phoenix. This is because even in Phoenix, there are youth who earn their monthly income from the sector, particularly the food processing and distribution aspect. A number of field surveys on the sector in the COVID-19 era have been made available through the press. Phakathi (2021) discussed the outcome of one of such surveys which attempts a portrait of the pandemic experience of Mavis Motlokoa, who is into a farming project in the Free State town of Harrismith. Mavis Motlokoa is a female farmer that runs a poultry farm combined with rearing of cattle for purpose of milk production. The survey demonstrates that she is still trying to recover from the loss incurred at the peak of the crisis created by the pandemic. She explained how the lockdowns antagonized all her business plans and strategies.

With a farmland of 463 hectares she supplies Harrismith and its immediate neighbouring communities' eggs and chickens, in addition to supply of milk to Nestle Food PLC, a company in the food processing sector. According to the farmer, there was a sharp drop in sale even though milk and egg are essential food items apart from the general belief that the COVID-19 crisis was not likely have any significant adverse effect on the sale of food since whatsoever happens people must eat. Yet, her total sale dropped very rapidly with a corresponding loss of income up to the tune of 70%. She explained that "the majority of my clients are labourers from the community who lost their jobs during the lockdown and their loss of income resulted in our loss of income because we couldn't move the stock" (cited in *Phakathi, 2021:1*). In this situation, the farm could no more produce enough milk to meet the demand of Nestle because the cows could no more produce enough milk due to poor feeding as there was no sufficient money to take care of the animal feeds. As a result of this, she started thinking of new methods of sustaining the business. First, she introduced sales on credit with the hope that her clients would pay when situations normalized.

Secondly, as bills were accumulating in relation to a rapidly declining income, she decided

to reduce the monthly pay of her farm workers with a promise of compensating them when the situation improves. There is need to point out that surveys of this nature may give us little insight into some other issues. In her financial crisis, Motlokoa tried to benefit from the highly publicized COVID-19 Relief Fund by applying for financial support. Even though the fund is structured to give priority to farmers, she never received anything from the agency in charge. Yet an earlier survey team also visited the farm in January 2021 before this very one of May that forms part of this publication.

Phakathi (2021) observes that the experience of this farmer is not unique because most farmers in South Africa were faced with the problem of rapidly increasing cost of production while it was difficult to sustain expected quality and quantity of production. He cited some examples for illustration. One of them was a “study conducted by researchers from the University of Leeds in the UK working with partners including FANRPAN and NAMC which noted a decline in farm incomes due to lockdown regulations, forcing some informal farm workers and households to cut-down on food expenses, for example by shifting to cheaper food” (Phakathi (2021:2). This implies that with a loss of job and absence of income, many people are forced to modify their dietary and nutrition culture with hardly any regard to medically accepted standards.

Dr. Harriet Smith who embarked on a similar fieldwork to assess the plight of farmers under the pandemic identify the need to make government know the nature of programmes and policy framework that can enable farmers to be resilience during crisis, either arising from social development or climatic variations. Citing example of a mixed farm in Qwaqua community, he emphasised that mixed farming is one means of achieving this as it enables a farmer to combine the planting of different crops, both food and cash crops. He said that farmers on such platform will find it easier to cope with natural disaster and similar unanticipated hazards like COVID-19 (Smith, 2021). Through a fieldwork that gathered the observations and viewpoints of 50 people in the sector, mainly farmers and other stakeholders, among whom were local authorities, the author examines strategies of raising a crop of farmers that adopt farming techniques that make the sector resilient to social crises and natural disaster. Therefore, he also embraced their current coping mechanisms as this is helpful in identifying the way forward on the theme of resilience through adoption of new programmes and agricultural policies. The author explains the involvement of the National Agriculture Marketing Council as well as its perspective on the issue. The Council stated that government new policy regulation placing a ban on large public gatherings and similar social events like festivities constituted a major hindrance

to the sale of livestock and thus impacted negatively on farmers in this business. Bonani Nyhodo, the senior manager of Agricultural Industry Trusts also subscribed to the viewpoint of *the* National Agriculture Marketing Council (NAMC). Bonani Nyhodo said that the South African informal market provides the major platform for the distribution of livestock and food items derived from livestock (Smith, 2021).

Existing studies (Mthethwa, 2020; Ngumbela, 2020; Patrick, 2021) have tried to narrow the impacts of COVID-19 down to the issue of food insecurity in rural South Africa. The standard of livelihood is gradually dropping and this has been compounded by the adverse effects of COVID-19. Agriculture among many families is gradually degenerating into subsistence farming and yet the output is hardly enough to sustain the family (Mthethwa, 2020). It is believed that diversification of sources of income would be of help. At this point, it must be recalled that the idea of mixed farming for farmers recommended by Dr. Harriet Smith, cited above, is among the features of the emerging school of thought on diversification of sources of income in rural communities of the country. With analysis based on data from Statistics South Africa and figures from personal fieldwork, Mthethwa (2020) contends that while incorporating agriculture, income diversification for rural households will enable them to afford other household necessities in addition to food items in the right quantity and quality within medically recommended nutrition guidelines.

These have been discussed within the context of resilience for rural dwellers, including youth because it is a means of addressing the challenge of livelihood vulnerability. The concept of resilience, also mentioned above, may be defined as the ability to absorb shock in different endeavours of life. This includes running of the family, immunity in terms of health, ability to keep one's career or business amidst unforeseen crises and so on. In this case, the argument is that rural families or farmers who invest their individual resources into different small-scale businesses will find it easier to cope with the unforeseen like COVID-19 because if one of the investments crumbles, the others would survive to keep the household going. Mthethwa (2020) is of the view that both individuals and families are vulnerable to food insecurity when there is absence of mechanisms for absorbing shocks. This also means the absence of welfare packages to assist the households where they have done their best and yet there is still need for assistance.

Therefore, assurance of resilience for the family or individual is a function of three primary factors. The first is the individual's personal mental acumen, acquisition of relevant skills, and exposure to relevant ideas in career and social life. The second is the structure put in

place by the society in terms of social net that ensures that no one drops below a particular level of income or standard of living. This is sustained through well-established cultural institutions and linked to the political system and the totality of economic life, including investment culture. The third is the deliberate effort made by government to provide welfare packages in different ways. This may be by subsidizing certain services and payment of relief fund and unemployment allowance. The concept of resilience can be classified as one of the key issues to be incorporated into the analytical framework of livelihood vulnerability, particularly with regard to the challenges encountered when applied to youth.

At the national level, there are some commercial farmers with relatively large farm projects. But the important point here is that despite the teeming population of South Africa, only 30 000 farmers can be said to be operating on a commercial scale (Ngumbela, 2020; Jarana 2018). The data on subsistence and small-scale farmers are not comprehensive enough to depend upon with regard to policy formulation (Ngumbela, 2020). However, the records have a figure of over 200 000 of small-scale farmers and an estimate of 1200 000 farmers operating at subsistence level. Yet majority of this set of farmers have little or no access to relevant source of funding and required information to enable them explore more opportunities and also to make them reliable instruments of actualizing government objectives of poverty reduction and promoting food security. It is even observed that their access to market is limited (Jarana, 2018), yet production is hardly complete until the goods get to the market. This is despite the fact that the country's constitution has accommodated the issue of citizens' right to food since 1996. Therefore, it can be said that somehow and to some extent, the issue of food security has been among the policy focus of different governments since then. But as already discussed above, the socio-economic terrain of South Africa is yet to be structured within the relevant dynamics required to sustain the level of agriculture that can actualize and sustain food security for all citizens nationwide. Overall, there are still many lapses in the agriculture and food sector. Ngumbela (2020:2) observes that "addressing the challenges posed by food insecurity requires a thorough understanding of vulnerability and food insecurity conditions at a household level" while "being able to identify those who are the most vulnerable and their coping and survival strategies will help government officials to design appropriate relief and development intervention" programmes.

It is also observed that poverty is one of the key obstacles to the sustenance of food security. Current facts and figures indicate that the country needs to come out with new policy framework in order to stem the growing rate of poverty among the masses (Ngumbela,

2020). The figures as at 2013 shows that number of South Africans living in poverty was about three million. In an article published in the press in May 2013, Steven Timm provided comprehensive facts and figures stating that “More than half (55%) of the population lives on less than R1138.00 (\$107.00) a month, up from 53% in 2011” and “that in a country with 55 million people, 34 million are going without some of the basic necessities such as housing, transport, food, heating and proper clothing with one in four citizens surviving on less than R531.00 a month and is not able to afford enough food to keep themselves healthy”

Development of human resources since the outbreak of COVID-19 is a difficult theme to assess in terms of progress or lapses. Bussin (2020) explains that all enterprises and companies were taken unaware but have to introduce new methods of human resource management without ignoring the interest of shareholders or investors. Effective management of resources, whether human or otherwise, requires peace and a favourable atmosphere where production and distribution of goods and services are well structured for realization of set-down objectives. But under an atmosphere of crisis induced by the pandemic that was rather strange to even experts in the health sector, no company or business enterprise was to blame for adopting any approach or model that could keep it in production. Even if such approaches might even sound ridiculous at normal time by the ethics of business organization, the affected companies were just left to look at the drawing board on their own for any possible alternative. This obviously affected the management of workers and the overall structure of the labour market. As such, the programmes and projects for youth development, training and employment were not left out. Robbins & Judge (2019) and Ashkanasy and Ashton-James (2005) are of the view that within the intents of management principles, the business enterprise has its own emotional lapses which are bound to surface under crisis or some acute unfavourable circumstances. According to them, the overall impact of this would be reflected in all units and engagements, including handling of workers, industrial relations and social network. Inconsistency and lack of harmonious approach to issues involving management of human resources are noticeable during such emotional lapses (Robbins and Judge, 2019).

According to Zinn (2020), Bussin (2020), and Robbins and Judge (2019), workers are required for actualization of expected results, but under crisis like that of the COVID-19, there was need to strike a balance between workers interest and sustainability of the company. Commenting on this, Zinn (2020:34) explains that “companies are making business decisions that will impact their sustainability and there has to be a balance between

commitment to staff, and the ability to have a potential recession or depression through difficult cost-saving decisions and as such companies must manage sustainability by being empathetic and compassionate to employees, retrenching at last resort and understand the challenges employees face.” World Economic Forum, (2020) explains that firms and other business enterprises were never in a position to give workers and the society the type of attention that may be expected from affected individuals as such enterprises were under serious pressure from all stakeholders, including the demand of shareholders.

One important thing examined by experts under the COVID-19 economic platform is the issue of cost reduction by a business enterprise under stress. The consensus is that during crisis like the type experienced under the pandemic cost reduction is almost inevitable and yet this may have adverse effects on workers as their salaries or wages may be reduced. Retrenchment is also a noticeable feature of the determination of a company to reduce cost in order to be able to cope with new adverse developments in the economy, particularly with regards to the impact of this on the production and distribution of its goods and services (Bussin, 2020). One issue seriously examined among these experts is the comparative impact of the various alternatives on workers’ morale during crisis, i.e. retrenchment versus cutting of salaries/wages. Reduction in income of employees may also be done by reducing the number of working hours as a form of compensation for the affected workers.

The analysis of workers' morale in a period of crisis or disaster in relation to the company’s reaction and management approach is considered imperative because the employees’ commitment and determination to meet the production targets of the company, actualize its objectives and sustain its aspirations is closely connected to level of morale (Bussin, 2020; Marechal, Kube and Puppe, 2013). These studies also argue that in most cases, reduction of wages or salaries tend to damage the morale of workers. However, under the pandemic, one would expect workers who are faithful and considerate to imbibe a measure of endurance knowing fully well that they may receive compensation when the crisis is over and that the company can hardly survive without the cost reduction policy.

The theme of livelihood vulnerability is hardly discussed in both scholarship and policy formulation without analysis of the provision for employment opportunity versus the unemployment index in the labour market (Patrick, 2021; Ngumbela, 2020; Neves, 2017). According to the participants from the fieldwork survey, when the unemployment rate in our country, South Africa, is above 35% with more than half of the youths unemployed, we are the first to complain about the crime rate and violence in our country. As indicated

under literature review, there were other reasons for unemployment apart from COVID-19. These other reasons are, however, not quite new to social analysts and policy makers. Among them are economic recessions, unguided importation of goods, poor policy for youth development, inadequate structure for innovations, and actualisation of self-reliance.

Responding youths have indicated having knowledge of unemployment, which was in existence, however they say COVID-19 has added to the already existing problem making it even more difficult to secure jobs after COVID-19. Noting that they have been following up daily by listening to the news, which some noted are deeply painful especially for the sit at home parent who has children that have been well fed before the COVID-19. Most of the interviewed respondent youths indicated COVID-19 has come like a tsunami with no warning signs which they have never prepared for. It has been noted that it is a daily topic now well known throughout the world.

Most of those interviewed (respondents A, B, C, D, E and H) noted that the pandemic seriously impacted the youths together with members of the family of Phoenix, and the country as a whole. It was noted there were acute challenges and complicated provocations, resulting in many households being left alone and neglected even though they face significant challenges largely because corporate bodies and constituted authorities lacked the required resources and technical know-how to address the situation. A respondent youth has indicated that it had impacted a vast drop in his salary from R40 000 to R12 000. The respondent youth also noted that COVID-19 virus has compounded people's consciousness about fear of the unknown and that Phoenix is no exception. Thus, in her contribution a 26- year old youth responded thus:

*It is like we often sound strange to people when we give our opinion but yet I believe these are issues discussed throughout the city and across the country. As it is, with the way this crisis engulfed every nooks and cranny of the country one is getting more scared about the unknown, even though enlightenment programmes are now taking new dimensions trying to teach youth different things when it comes to personal initiatives, innovations and creativity. All these are happening here because youth are striving to survive, the issue of livelihood and therefore employment is paramount to society. (Respondent R)*

A sampled youth noted that COVID-19 has initiated much feud in some families and between

friends after losing their jobs leaving them traumatised. In some other cases they can no longer provide adequately for the family financially. Hence it has become so disastrous that it led to domestic violence, separating families. Other youths sampled said they have no words to describe the graveness of COVID-19, which left families devastated and hard to recover. Whilst other youths said that not many of them have the financial capacity or savings to fall back on while seated at home without any pay at the end of each month totalling to almost three years. It has further entrenched poverty amongst households who were already living in precarious financial situation prior to COVID-19. Also, the fieldwork reveal that families were psychologically devastated especially having their loved ones buried or in an unbearable state of illness no one would ever want to experience, particularly when this is combined with job loss.

#### **4.4 The impact that COVID-19 unemployment has on youth and their families in Phoenix**

One youth explained how the COVID-19 crisis has caused him to lose his job because he was in the hospitality industry, specifying that restaurants closed at the peak of COVID-19, resulting in all his accounts being in arrears. He said when it did open, it opened with curfew times of which many felt it was not safe to eat out and choose to eat at home reducing even further working hours and fewer days work, hence he does not know if he will ever recover. I myself had the first-hand experience of my interviews being called off because of COVID-19. According to him, presently it is becoming more difficult to get employment as he is now three years older while employers now prefer to employ casual or temporary workers at this time avoiding risks which emanated from COVID-19.

Another respondent has indicated that food is becoming increasingly costly and that electricity and water rates have skyrocketed which added a further strain to her budget and can barely survive. She added thus:

*This has undoubtedly left a lot of uncertainties to us as youths of Phoenix and of South Africa as a whole. Moreover, it threatens the livelihood of our future, and graduates, economically, socially, and mentally and the growth of the South African nation as we are the future of our country.*

Another respondent specified that she lost her dad because of COVID-19 and with dismay that their family livelihood will not be the same again and the struggle continues, as she has become the sole bread winner with just the R350 COVID grant. She further stated that

after her dad died of COVID-19 they were not even allowed to give him a dignified funeral. Her brother cannot come to terms of not seeing the father 30 days before his death due to hospitalisation. Now he is suffering from a severe depression and cannot seek employment under that condition to assist the family out of the crises.

A few other youths indicated that their families are truly suffering due to loss of jobs and are becoming mentally disturbed. This has impacted on incidents of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) dramatically which was because of the shortfall or no salary. Those who consume alcohol or cigarettes can no longer afford and take the frustration on family and friends. A youth has explained how he was given some days off at his place of work and was never called back to work, which made life very difficult for his family which left him highly depressed and is embarrassed to speak out on the condition of his family lives, coupled with the fact that his sister got infected with COVID-19 and had a long recovery. According to him, “Due to COVID-19, many companies have closed down without paying benefits, which left them in the great battle to survive.” A self-employed respondent who is into interior decoration indicated that “many people have put a hold on renovating of their homes due to loss of income caused by COVID -19, which has created a huge gap in his ability to generate an income thus having a serious adverse effect on his personal budget.”

A graduate who is 27 years old said that she has not exactly secured a job. However, if it was not for COVID-19, she would have been employed by now. Noting that she was shortlisted for a few interviews which were postponed by the municipality and that “as a former employee of the eThekweni council, she can attest to that.” In a short time, COVID-19 has become an obstacle to her vision of being gainfully employed in that organization to enable her to earn an income that can enhance her livelihood. A few youths in the art and entertainment industry interviewed explained that they can no more gain contracts because the pandemic has crippled all outdoor activities required to keep them in business.

COVID-19 has affected numerous youths of Phoenix in many other ways. Responding to the situation, one of them has stated how he had to cut off his medical aid even though his son’s health was in a critical condition. The deadly COVID-19 has reduced the income drastically, which had affected their lives to the extent that they had to adjust themselves according to the ‘have-nots’ lifestyle. Few other youth have also mentioned that the loss of income or reduction in salary due to COVID-19 has left them in an unstable condition and took them backwards instead of forward.

In some other interviews, it has been discovered that loss of income has grossly compounded their livelihood beyond their expectation, of which they don't have extra cash for social gatherings, and it has affected their relationship. Some of the participants noted that even though they are unemployed, they still need medications and need to eat healthier to boost their immunity. Yet there is problem of affordability. One of those interviewed argued that as an artist, he depended vastly on interactions, and must travel to other provinces to establish links with people who require his services. Another respondent who is a domestic worker said due to COVID-19 she has lost her job. Her employer is sceptical of her travelling by public transport and may encounter a non-symptom person in the public transport. Thus, the employer has left her in complete emptiness until the battle is won against COVID-19. Another respondent interviewed mentioned she was supposed to get a performance bonus at work, however due to COVID -19 it has not been granted, but she is grateful she still has a job. She also stated that, "COVID-19 is not the only cause of unemployment, there was unemployment prior to the deadly virus in South Africa, is not a new problem; however, COVID-19 has added fuel to a burning fire."

A respondent noted that he could not give his son basic parental care because COVID-19 has affected his budget tremendously. While some others noted that there was not enough money in their accounts, hence they turned to Debt Relieve. "COVID-19 had altered the monetary value and has left us in an awful state to manage the necessities," noted a respondent. They confessed that what they had done previously, they can do them no longer. Consequently, they needed to adjust according to their new earnings. One of the Phoenix residents notes that he has incurred about 30% of the bottom-line reduction in income of his family. Some argued that they would have been far more stable if the COVID-19 pandemic had not occurred. However, few residents truthfully indicated that they were not affected by the pandemic because they were not the sole breadwinner.

#### **4.4.1 The impact COVID-19 has on Meeting Financial Obligations like Mortgage and Car Loans**

A respondent that had a drop in his salary said he had to get a cheaper car which is economical to fit his pocket. According to him, thank God that he did not have a mortgage on bond and his parents had provided him with accommodation. Whilst another respondent said she does not have to pay for bond, but according to her, "I assist my mum financially after my father's death, fortunately she is not married yet and they had to bring in a boarder to

substantiate the loss income to pay for lights, water and rates.” Another respondent who is a widow said her bills are now gone into arrears as interests are building up and making it even harder. However, two months ago she went on a prepaid system of the 80/20 plan. Whilst another respondent noting that though he doesn’t have car instalment but still have to pay for travelling. He uses a private mode of transport and is quite costly but has no choice because public transport doesn’t go to his workplace. Another respondent said he had no problem with his mortgage and car loan; however, it had a significant impact on continuing with his studies. It shows some household responsibilities have not been affected but impacted individuals on progress movements.

#### **4.4.2 The Adverse Effects of the COVID-19 on Individual Households and Expected Duration for Recovery to Normal Life**

Five of the respondents said it can take anything a year or two depending on when COVID-19 ends, while some others felt no hope is left, which depends on how soon they could get employment. Whilst another respondent who is unemployed noted that will also depend on when he finds another job and what will his earnings be by then and he is basing his Faith on God, which will be easier to recover from the impact of the unemployment. Some even noted that there is no hope of recovery as what has been lost cannot be recovered but if it starts coming right properly, it could take about three to four years. The respondents were suggesting it would be good if government could implement basic income grant, look at ways to subsidize education and increase social grants. Suggestion was government must analyse each area and then according to the findings assist the residents, it cannot be a one size fit all areas. The question on recovery can only be answered when unemployment is effectively won, and its effect put under control completely, up until then it is difficult to thumb suck such an estimated time of normality.

#### **4.5 The Search for a Sustainable Livelihood Structure for the South African Youth under COVID-19: The Case of Phoenix**

This section extensively appraises the impact of unemployment of the interviewed respondent youths in Phoenix, as it has been observed to have impacted not only the lives of the youths of Phoenix, but several youths across the Republic of South Africa. When looking at the issue of vulnerability upon the platform of a sustainable livelihood, it becomes sometimes imperative to examine the relationship between the term vulnerable and livelihood. Casale (2010) observes that different authors and corporate bodies, including development agencies, have defined the concept of vulnerability from different

perspectives based on the focus of the assignment or project to be executed. But environmental hazards, social stress and vicissitudes of economic crisis vary from community to community even within the same immediate environment partly because economic development elevate some families and individuals but miss others. It is for this reason that Casale (2010:2) is of the view that “Common use of the concept of vulnerability has, therefore, proved to be elusive partly because the objective of investigation determines how vulnerability is used and partly because of the multi-scalar and multi-actor content of vulnerability assessments.” However, it must also be pointed out that lack of uniformity in application of the concept is attributable to the differences between theory and practice. Development agencies and communities like Phoenix are applying it to a practical situation while writers attempt a portrait of the term from a theoretical framework.

Livelihood is often threatened by a number of challenges emanating from our environment, socio-political structures and economic system. This brings in the issue of vulnerability. A sustainable livelihood is one that is able to stand against all these threats, absorb shocks and adapt to environmental change (Mthethwa, 2020). Though income often comes to mind first when discussing livelihood, it has been observed that livelihood is broader than income (Mthethwa, 2020) and this is among the guiding principles of Phoenix's approach to the issue of livelihood vulnerability, particularly when applying it to the youth. In the absence of a direct means of livelihood in form of income through wage employment, self-employment or even underemployment, many youths in South Africa and the unemployed generally “look for access to resources by moving in with parents, relatives or friends” (Storme, 2019:7). In Phoenix, many youths out of jobs sustain their livelihood through this means and this has been on the increase under COVID-19. Indeed, a number of those interviewed, e.g. respondents E, F and G talk about how the family members, particularly the parents, constitute an asset by providing the finance for sustenance of the entire family.

This also informs the multidimensional approach to the issue in Phoenix discussed in Chapter Five. In respect of sustainable livelihood, a number of the respondents explain how leadership in Phoenix liaise with different municipal units, particularly those in charge of youth affairs, to coordinate the affairs of the society. They sometimes support grassroots enlightenment programmes as it is believed that this will help to sensitize youth in connection with sharpened initiatives for small-scale business. It is also believed this will create a platform to broaden their horizon in the aspect of creativity and innovation, especially for those interested in exploring the food processing and producing sector, ranging from

fishing to poultry and animal husbandry and gradually incorporating similar food projects. Studies on the theme before COVID-19 are of the view that skills in vocational aptitude and business life did not receive sufficient attention from most corporate bodies (Storme, 2019; Statistics South Africa, 2014; Grierson, 1996) and that “the provision of training services for disadvantaged youth has been too limited” (Bennel, 2000:13).

However, existing evidence have not indicated any significant improvement since the outbreak of the pandemic. These are, therefore, among the issues that have engaged the attention of different units of Phoenix local organizing committees which try to collaborate with organizers of youth programmes and similar agencies to create a platform that can sustain the provision of facilities for acquisition of vocational skills. Therefore, it must be pointed out that the Phoenix model or approach incorporates the involvement of government and non-governmental organizations and the full cooperation of the youth. Each of these is therefore, briefly explained below based on the responses of the participants during the fieldwork.

#### **4.5.1 Ways the government can assist in overcoming the challenges of unemployment**

Two respondents said they were confused, but said that maybe government can be more involved through appropriate policies that protect those employed so that they are not relieved of their jobs. Some said may be government can assist by writing off the arrears in the bills considering the loss of income caused by COVID-19 and increase the R350 grant in addition to extending its duration until the economy is favourable enough for more people to be gainfully employed. They argue that this will help immensely, noting that COVID-19 has ended on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2022, according to World Health Organisation (WHO) and that government must look at rates, taxes, electricity and water, as they are increasing rather than decreasing in these challenging times.

Rates were calculated according to the size of our homes, which were once payable up until the result of COVID-19 which left some of us unemployed whilst others had a cut in salaries. Government should do a survey house to house telephonically and find out the needs of each home and help those that need assistance according to the problems identified, in which each case may be different. Also, the respondents mentioned municipality should stop electricity estimation and give residents the accurate bills and further don't charge interest on arrears up until finances turn to normal again. The challenges are such that as explained in the next sub-titles, non-governmental organisations, the government and youth

themselves have a role to play in the search for solutions.

#### **4.5.2 Response of Non-Governmental Organizations under COVID-19**

The operation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) was also adversely affected by the pandemic in South Africa. NGOs are involved in different programmes in South Africa, including support for youth development programmes and management of new dynamics in gender relations. Others are support for health institutions in rural communities and food production and distribution as well as retail and small-scale businesses. Barnard (2020) observes that the effect of the COVID-19 on NGO operations was far-reaching and well-revealed through the role these organisations play in the lives of numerous South African citizens, particularly the youths and low-income earners. Yet there are enough reasons to accept that even the middle-class citizens and those that can be classified as rich still derive some benefit from the projects and operations of NGOs. Existing evidence reveals that over 220 000 non-governmental organisations are “registered with the Department of Social Development” and they joined hand with a number of “community-based organisations to perform crucial development, humanitarian and advocacy functions, and are an integral part of the fabric of our society” while “unfortunately, most NGOs are dependent on grant funding and individual donations to support their operations” (Barnard, 2020:2). But financial support for NGOs was considerably reduced as funders at the international level also found themselves in a precarious situation as the pandemic even tended to defile most of their strategies and logistics even after going back to the drawing board to restructure their policy frameworks. As for the NGOs, there was also need to have a second look at the drawing board but the resources to maintain the same level of approach to situations and communal projects that required their intervention was hardly available.

One thing is that COVID-19 came unexpectedly and therefore, unknowingly to both experts and the masses and hence it is also an occurrence that no one can precisely define its end. This compounded apprehension surrounding the fear about the unknown future. This equally compounded the COVID-19 induced crisis beclouding the aims and aspirations of NGOs in the country. The issue is that it was a scene where both the corporate body and individual hardly have enough to sustain themselves. As such the ability to reach out to others was seriously hampered by the prevailing trend. Nevertheless, NGOs were able to receive some support from a number of agencies and other constituted authorities. Barnard (2020:6) explained how much support was given to the NGOs by these

bodies as contained in the extract below:

*Several initiatives have emerged to support NGOs under these trying circumstances. CAF Southern Africa (CAFSA) has launched an emergency fund to support NGOs that provide essential services to the most marginalised communities in the country. Similarly, the Mergon Group has created an emergency Gap Fund to support NGOs that have lost significant funding in recent weeks, or that are experiencing an increase in demand for their services. Both initiatives are actively seeking public support to meet their funding objectives. CAFSA also manages emergency funding by the Oppenheimer Generations Foundation. This funding is offered on a once-off basis to small NGOs (budget of less than R5 million per annum) that deliver food to vulnerable groups. The National Lotteries Commission (NLC) has released R150 million as a relief measure to NGOs struggling to stay afloat during this time. Many traditional funders are also reviewing the impact of COVID-19 on their grantees, and offer additional support where possible.*

On March 23 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced a financial package known as ‘Solidarity Fund’ which tried to support a set of individuals and organizations whom, through their initiatives introduced some small-scale projects for national interest in line with the economic recovery measures introduced by the government to counter the hazards emanating from the pandemic. In the process, part of the support was a vehicle for the individuals and organizations involved. The available figures indicate that some NGOs benefitted from the package even though it was not specifically meant for them. In other words, those which benefitted are those which initiated one project or the other along that line (Persens, 2021; Barnard, 2020). It is also observed that “despite the negative impact of COVID-19 on the NGO sector, many organisations are operating during the lockdown, providing essential services, food and medical supplies to vulnerable communities across the country” and that “these interventions complement those of government and other stakeholders, and form an integral part of a collective national response to the COVID-19 pandemic” (Barnard, 2020:4). Pillay (2022:2) investigation indicates that “in the South African public health context, much of the funding used by NGOs (international and local organisations) comes from foreign donors” and that “currently, the largest donors are bilateral donors such as the US Presidential Emergency Fund for AIDS Response (PEPFAR) and the Global Fund” as well as “the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, UNITAID, and ELMA Philanthropies.”

A number of these NGOs make strenuous effort to embrace the entire country in their services and relief projects and programmes. Pillay (2022) and Barnard (2020) provide a lengthy, though not exhaustive, list of the NGOs in the country. Among them are CHOC Childhood Cancer Foundation, Community Chest National Emergency COVID-19

Health Fund, and Africa Muslims Agency to mention just a few. The focus of the first one is the health sector, partly through collaboration with health institutions. It provides fund for treatment of cancer, with particular emphasis on children. Teenagers are also given special consideration in any ailment involving cancer. The second NGO structures its projects to assist vulnerable communities in area of general health facilities as well as nutrition. This is done partly by providing health facilities for the people directly or through approved health institutions and partly through enlightenment programmes on health and nutrition. The third one, Africa Muslims Agency, is a religious body inspired by the need to sustain food security and good sanitary culture. Therefore, it has a vision of embracing the whole country to support vulnerable communities and individual families with food in addition to hygiene kits.

However, majority of them concentrate their effort on a single community, municipality or region. Among them is Angels' Care Centre which operates within the uMngeni municipality of KwaZulu-Natal with projects meant to assist young mothers and children, particularly those from poor background. It also extends assistance to families, either on account of poor source of income or a major challenge arising from certain loss of job or accommodation or any other unforeseen circumstances. Primarily, it supports beneficiaries with food and clothing in addition to household essentials, e.g. for cleaning and hygiene. Also, in this category is 'Child Welfare Durban & District' an NGO that started its activities in Durban but gradually embraced the surrounding communities including Phoenix following the outbreak of COVID-19. Its programmes and fund raising projects are solely meant to support children, particularly those at risk in terms of means of survival or whose life is in danger in one way or the other (Pillay, 2022; Barnard, 2020).

A number of the NGOs that concentrate on a single locality or community in their operation focused only on the health need of the people. The inability of the government to effectively respond to the health need of the entire South African society is reflected in the lapses in its effort to actualise the millennium development goals set for the sector (Pillay, 2022). It is largely for this reason many NGOs are involved in the sector. A list of some of those featuring in the health sector of the country is compiled by Pillay (2022:4) and consists of "ANOVA Health Institute; Aquity Innovations; AURUM Institute; Broad Reach Healthcare; Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI), South Africa; Centre for Communication Impact; Doctors without Borders; Foundation for Professional Development; Health Systems Trust; JPS Africa; Kheth'Impilo; Right to Care; SEAD Consulting; TB HIV Care; The Health Foundation; and Wits RHI." Those on this list

formed in 2020, at the peak of the COVID-19 what has become known as the Health Implementing Partners Group (HIP-G).

The NGOs involvement therefore, arises from the need to strengthen the health system of the country. Health strengthening in a country is believed to involve many indices and it embraces the nature of existing social institutions and the dynamics of their hygiene, health and nutrition culture. Also included is appropriate organisation and coordination of the work force in the health sector in line with accepted conventions and global best practices, e.g. by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and similar international agencies. Another index is the nature of health enlightenment programmes to refine grassroots health culture and redefine the dynamics of institutionalized health practices.

Under COVID-19, the NGOs remained accountable to a number of bodies as defined by law. In different provinces of the country, there are local boards that help to regulate the activities of NGOs. At the national level, there is the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC), a commission set up for this and other purposes. Therefore, all non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have to register with this body apart from their local boards. There is also the issue of accountability based on relationship with financial donors. Most of these donors are said to be based in foreign countries (Pillay, 2022; Sacks et al, 2019) and the non-governmental organisations must demonstrate effective management of funds disbursed by these agencies. This again is another form of accountability on the part of NGOs since they would be stranded in the absence of funding. Moreover, there are some other agencies involved on the issue of accountability with regard to the operations of NGOs. For instance, the National and Provincial Departments of Health provides guidelines and terms based on conventional global trend that regulate the activities of all agencies and organisations, including NGOs, featuring in the health sector.

Therefore, Local NGOs play some conspicuous role in the health sector. For instance, members of the Health Implementing Partners Group (HIP-G) mentioned above accepted “to address the health system challenges and improve coordination, collaboration and to provide effective support to the” Department of Health as a result of which “the group met to discuss how to strengthen their support to the Department” for the purpose of strengthening “the national health system and improving health outcomes” (cited in Pillay, 2022:6). Members of the group have tried to disseminate their ideas and fieldwork observations through the hosting of webinars. NGOs were indirectly participating in supporting a number of services and programmes in the sector. Among them are clinical

services, an aspect they try to facilitate by engaging a range of workers trained to handle communal health practices in rural areas and generally at the grassroots level. Some of the NGOs also assist communal health among rural dwellers by encouraging workers at that level through stipends in the form of funding arrangements that might supplement their monthly pay. As far as health practices, hygiene and nutrition in family households among the masses is concerned they were involved in different ways, ranging from training of some category of workers to participation in the implementation of certain guidelines that are germane to the effectiveness of established clinical procedures. These NGOs also create a platform for assisting patients in situations where some categories of patients are in critical situations and require support that relatives are not readily available to render. Moreover, their information network is designed to connect all key players and stakeholders in each community's health platform including patients. Among these stakeholders are the pharmaceutical agencies involved in the supply of drugs for medication. The NGOs devise reliable means of enhancing the supply system in relation to the number and interest of participants vis-à-vis the needs of patients and set-down standards by hospitals and laboratories. Overall, with this structure participating NGOs create appropriate channels for dissemination of information relevant to the requirement of the entire system and the different needs of patients, health institutions, laboratories, health workers and hosting communities under COVID-19 (Sanadgol et al, 2021).

Pillay (2022) observed that even before the onset of COVID-19, most NGOs have proven to be innovative and with a well-focused initiatives in responding to issues of national interest. The outputs from their innovative effort are employed in the health and related sectors, e.g. hygiene, nutrition and sanitary units of health inclined public agencies. Their observations and fieldwork reports are among those examined by the Department of Health from time to time for purpose of upgrading standards and refining clinical methods as a means of improving the sector. Thus, in Cape Town the Department of Health was into dialogue with an NGO in management of certain medications with particular focus on new developments in the administration of antiretroviral therapy identified by doctors through the platform of an NGO organized antiretroviral therapy (ART) adherence club. Their report was finally adopted by the Department of Health in Cape Town because laboratory analysis indicated that it could be replicated (Pillays, 2022; Sanadgol, 2021). Again, an NGO, ANOVA Health Institute, had expanded the horizon of its investigation and fieldwork to embrace a number of ailments, including HIV and treatment of the COVID-19 virus.

Its investigation was able to identify ways out of HIV AIDS complications with regard to the involvement of incurable homosexuals. Apart from making the outcome of their investigation available to the health sector through the Department of Health, the NGO was also involved in training health workers in certain communities to handle the problem and related issues. Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI) is another NGO in the sector that has collaborated with a number of health institutions apart from the Department of Health and has been operating since 2010. It has joined hands with others to handle the health hazards of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, it has a notable achievement to its credit through working as an intermediary between the Department of Health and global suppliers since 2010 “to reduce the prices of HIV, tuberculosis, malaria medicines, and childhood vaccines and thus “assisting the Department of Health to save US\$2 billion” (Pillay, 2022). It is an NGO with some international dimension and it has utilized this to the benefit of different units of the health sector in a number of communities. Some NGOs in the health and other sectors are involved in publications for the purpose of enlightenment and development of the sector through the dissemination of relevant ideas and information. Some are, therefore, involved in the sponsorship of journals, periodicals and pamphlets. ‘Health Systems Trust’ (HST) belongs to this category of NGOs. It has worked relentlessly in this dimension and even came out with publications of ideas that may be considered technical and useful for experts in the health sector. It was sponsoring two highly valid publications before COVID-19, namely the ‘*South African Health Review*’ and the ‘*District Barometer*.’ The first one examines comprehensively the intricacies of new ideas and discoveries in the health sector in relation to the dynamics of current health services and in the context of traditional response to medical services. It also embraces analysis of legislative responses to development in the health sector and the consequent impact on policy frameworks at both national and grassroots levels. The ‘*District Barometer*’ attempts a comparative analysis of situation reports and statistical figures from different localities or communities. This also enables it to provide a portrait of the ranking of districts in relation to national average performance. A routine data collection system is sometimes employed often in collaboration with the health information unit of each district (i.e. District Health Information System). This provides the publisher with robust data from different districts for illustration and analytic rating within each locality and in relation to national indicators. Even the data compilation framework employed in the health sector by each district was derived from a health system information programme developed by an NGO “in partnership with the Western Cape Department of Health and adopted by the National Department of Health and which is currently the only routinely available data in the

public health system used for both planning and monitoring public health sector activities” (Pillay, 2022:5). Therefore, NGOs in the health sector have been active partners of different public agencies in planning and some of the policy focus of the National Department of Health have benefitted in one way or the other from their inputs. At the same time, those that limit their activities to a particular locality have been able to come out with specific initiatives that help to address some peculiarities of such communities (Sanadgol, 2021).

The non-governmental organisations should utilise their experience to help the youths by introducing training in entrepreneurial and vocational skills and thus expose many to techniques involved and overcome challenges that may arise from time to time while investing or gradually expanding the business. A few youth said that though they are aware, however, the non-government organizations (NGOs) are already being burdened by the crisis of COVID-19, the society still expects them demonstrate more element of commitment to the role expected of them. People are now having severe challenges and trying to explore every avenue in search of sponsorship through NGOs or public funding unit. Three respondents said that some good Samaritans, churches and mosques seem to conceive this idea of supporting the youth but apparently lack the resources and thus resorted to providing groceries and some medications to help minimise the risks of COVID-19, particularly when it was at its peak. Some of the participants however, argued that many organisations and social institutions including NGOs are getting politicized and corruption are creeping into their leadership cadre and that it may be illusive to expect anything from them.

#### **4.5.2 Other ways the youths can get out of the challenges created by COVID-19 Without waiting for government’s intervention**

A respondent said he opened a small tuck-shop for his wife to run to assist in trying to make ends meet and that with this she can also take care of the children. Another unemployed respondent said if she were receiving the R350 grant she could use it to generate a small savoury business. Another respondent said she collects her R350 grant and plant Dhania and sells which only takes a month to grow to make some quick money for bread and milk. One respondent said during the loss of his job he started a delivery service for the ones who are not able to go and shop themselves as necessary small business, e.g., deliver bread and milk or other essentials. Another respondent said he uses his car for *uber* services and transports children to schools and now earns more than his salary. But

two unemployed youths said that they were able to get some financial support from relations and friends which they combine with menial jobs to survive for about six months before planning for a small-scale business.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

The discussion of the chapter was based on the data collected through interviewing the youth residing in Phoenix. The focus was on the pandemic's impact on youth livelihood vulnerability in the context of unemployment in Phoenix. Therefore, the current economic and employment challenges caused by COVID-19 among the youth of Phoenix are captured. In concluding this chapter, strategies that can be applied or implemented to improve the living conditions of the youths of Phoenix will be identified. South Africa's unemployment rate was already very high before COVID-19 due to various reasons which are mismatches between the kinds of jobs available and workers' skills, or large distances between population centres and where businesses are located. Respondents also raised the question of why youth unemployment is so high in South Africa.

The youths lack social networks which can effectively help to connect them to relevant information with regard to the pursuit of education, understanding of the labour market, job availability and job access. A massive proportion of youth who does not have employment, education, or training (NEET) live in households where no one is employed apart from those affected by COVID-19. Let us create jobs for ourselves and our generations to come. Until we are socio-economic conscious in our spending, some of our socioeconomic challenges will stay with us forever. Let us buy and propagate South Africa by starting with each of us to create job opportunities.

South African unemployment rate in 2022, changes in employment and unemployment resulted in the official unemployment rate decreasing by 0,6 of a percentage point from 34,5% in the first quarter of 2022 to 33,9% in the second quarter of 2022 – The unemployment rate according to the expanded definition of unemployment also decreased by 1,4 percentage.” Unemployment rate shows a decreasing in South Africa, which the country's official current unemployment rate, as provided by Stats SA's Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), decreased, albeit marginally, by 0.6 of a percentage point from 34.5% in the first quarter to 33.9% in the second quarter – down from an all-time high.<sup>29</sup> Sept 2022. However, South Africa as of October 2022, still has the highest unemployment rate among the 19 countries which are members of the G20. South Africa's unemployment rate stood at 34.6 percent, followed by Turkey unemployment rate

of 10.8 percent.12 Oct 2022

The Quarterly Labour Force Survey of the second quarter of 2022 indicated that 47,0% of South African women were economically inactive, which means that almost half of the working age women in South Africa are not part of the labour force compared to 35,6% of their male counterparts as of 23 Aug 2022. This is despite the fact that there was some improvement compared to the figures of 2012 which was 51,0%. The figures compiled for men also recorded some improvement from 37,0% in 2012 to 35,6% in 2022.

Chapter Four findings are based on data collected through interviewing youth residents in Phoenix. The focus was on the COVID-19 which impacted on youth unemployment and livelihood in Phoenix. The findings identify three elements that must work hand-in-hand in addressing the current challenges. They consist of the government, youths and the entire society all of which must collaborate as the government takes the lead in strategizing and tapping the initiatives and creativity of youths while the other two parties support fully the implementation of policies emanating from such strategic efforts.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

#### **5.1 SUMMARY**

The primary objective of the work is to examine livelihood vulnerability under COVID-19 as it applies to youth in the Phoenix community of Kwazulu-Natal. An objective assessment of what happens in Phoenix in the context of the wider South African society requires the incorporation of secondary objectives among which is the socio-economic structure of Phoenix in relation to the primary pre-occupation of its youth population. Others are an appraisal of structural unemployment among youth in Phoenix in relation to the pandemic and investigation of COVID-19-induced challenges in the labour market. To achieve these objectives, the literature review is supported by two theories. The first is the latent deprivation theory which defines and explores the benefit of gainful sources of income as well as the overall developmental impact on society as a check against vulnerability in relation to livelihood. The second is the “youth livelihood and empowerment theory of change.” This theory approaches the entire issue of change from the platform of vulnerability in relation to livelihood with particular emphasis on youth.

It captures the central themes of the literature in relation to sustainability of livelihood and with regard to the nature of employment and management of the labour market under COVID-19. The theory therefore, captures the concept of vulnerability in relation to change under COVID-19 in relation to the existing literature and whatever gaps therefore. The methodology and data collection approach has been structured to guide my focus with regard to the scholarly horizon of each sub-theme and topical issue in the literature.

Overall, interaction with data gathered through fieldwork and published works reveals that despite the enormous nature of the existing literature on COVID-19 and the labour market in South Africa, there exist a number of gaps that require further research. In the first place, the COVID-19 induced unemployment with regard to youth livelihood vulnerability is yet to be sufficiently explored even at the national level. Moreover, at the grassroots level, each locality has its own peculiarities that need scholarly attention as their understanding would be helpful in addressing the current challenges nationwide. This work is a response to these gaps as Phoenix is among these grassroots communities. The theories adopted for this study would be helpful in analysing the primary issues involved. Also, working on the current pandemic of COVID-19 has determined my area of interest as a researcher who has joined others on the field in the search for solutions in spite of the cost involved.

In Phoenix, the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the crisis in the labour market and the issue of youth livelihood vulnerability remains a key aspect of the entire scene. The literature review has embraced the entire of South Africa because the trend in Phoenix can hardly be analysed in isolation from what is obtainable in the entire country. Understanding of the lockdowns is helpful in pinpointing the socio-economic factors that made it even more difficult for society to handle the crisis. One of these factors is the increasing population without a corresponding increase in the rate of job creation. Constituted authorities may be doing their best but this has not translated into a conspicuous increase in existing basic social facilities and programmes that can cater for the rapidly increasing population of our youth. Moreover, the government is trying to create structures that can facilitate small-scale business. But this has not really yielded significant results. Small and medium-scale enterprises are known for their role in engaging both youth and adults in gainful employment, therefore giving hope to those who are unable to find job placement in the public sector. It is just as many other structures and policies designed to address the growing population of youth are not proving easy to manage in relation to expected results.

These are among the issues discussed in the existing literature as can be seen in the literature review. These prevailing socio-economic challenges created a leeway for COVID-19 to roar like an untamed lion and, at the early stage, could be said to be left unchained to roam every nook and cranny of our cities and even the rural communities. It caused psychological and emotional damage to the life and career of many youth and in Phoenix communal efforts to address such problems are still on but cannot really be said to have yielded significant results. Among them is new rules and regulation to guide the operation of different business initiatives, among which is the operation of shopping malls. Also included is a change in gender approach to the management of crisis, human resource management and youth enlightenment programmes. For instance, during the crisis that swept across most South African communities in the second half of 2021, women were among the key personalities in the handling of youth and restoration of peace and order as well as management of policy implementation in line with the demand of the masses (Dhayalan, 2021). The key names among these women were Sasha Danielle Kemrajh, Govender, Nazirah Bee Yasin and Iris Pillay. It was during this period that the Phoenix society through initiatives of grassroots leaders started to give more priority to enlightenment campaigns to make the rich, particularly adults with good investments think of assisting youth in self-employment and innovatory small-scale projects.

Therefore, in Chapter Three, the research methodology is structured to capture the Phoenix experience with a focus on employing it as a base for understanding some issues in the larger South African society. Largely for this reason, the fieldwork was concentrated on Phoenix and it involves the collection of facts and figures through interaction with members of this community, of which eight of the participants were selected for transcription. The target is the plight of youth during COVID-19 as it affects their vision and future expectations vis-à-vis their response to the management of the crisis associated with lockdowns and health failure of family members in contact with the virus. In the sampling, a total of 20 youth were selected to participate and among the issues considered in the gathering of data are credibility and validity. Understanding the trend in Phoenix is the focus of the procedure largely based on voluntary participation of the informants.

In carrying out this task and narrowing it down to Phoenix, the research method is largely qualitative in approach and only adopted some elements of the quantitative method where analytic accuracy of facts and figures, pragmatism, and perception of reality may be blurred without a blend of both methods. Secondly, some elements of the quantitative

method were adopted because of the established fact that in light of the complexity of social life, with regard to human nature, a single approach can hardly capture the reality of human society. Emphasis on the qualitative research method is considered appropriate in this context because it is fundamentally a descriptive form of research. Major studies in the humanities and social sciences have observed that qualitative field works can be used successfully in the description of organizations, small groups and communities.

In Chapter Four, the analysis of data captures the different viewpoints of participants and the trend of events in Phoenix in relation to what the youth passed through during lockdowns and other stages of the pandemic at its peak. Among these is the theme of crisis in the labour market in relation to difficulty in actualisation of youth ambition of self-reliance, as this has become the vision of many youths. The scene becomes more intricate and complicated as even the older members of the family, who could be of help in one way or the other to youth, have been cowed by the pandemic from different angles. These range from the collapse of many public projects and programmes to the folding up of most small and medium scale enterprises in addition to the inability of the government to respond to most of its primary responsibilities to the masses.

The family or household plays a key role as the smallest social unit in society. Therefore, the analysis tries to discuss the harm done at this level and the efforts made to ensure gradual recovery. This also embraces an analysis of what the government can do to assist the situation. Among the suggestions of participants is that even if the rate of creation of new jobs is slow there should be policies put in place to guarantee job security so that those already employed retain their jobs, as most of them have become breadwinners for their families. In places like Phoenix, many of them are also assets to grassroots development in a number of ways. Some participants also think that government can improve on its grant packages to the masses and also allow it to continue for some time. The chapter's analytic focus also examines how youth can assist themselves partly through cooperation with constituted authorities rather than resorting to riots and rampage when the economy is slow or experiencing one form of depression or the other. The above is a reflection of efforts made at the grassroots level with Phoenix as a case study.

In relation to the national level, it has been observed that job creation is linked to capital formation (Habanabakize, 2021; Maisonnave, 2013). This linkage and how it facilitates stability of the labour market vis-à-vis promotion of economic development are among the issues attracting controversies in analysis of relevant theories of employment/job

creation. Habanabakize (2021) identifies and discusses “the most known economic theory that highlights unemployment issues.” Among them is the Classical theory of job creation and employment. Other theories in this category attempt a correlation between job creation and domestic investment through capital formation. These include Harrod–Domar theory and that of John Keynes, also known as Keynesian theory as well as the capital formation theory of Talence. The classical theory does not believe in government intervention in the production process to facilitate job creation and economic development. Rather it is based on an economic system that is self-regulating. In other words, the theory argues that a gap, surplus or decline in one sector of the economy will in the short or long run create similar lapses in other sectors of the economy and therefore, a platform that will make the whole system to adjust itself. This means every sector is forced to readjust because of a problem in one sector due to the intricate interrelationships between all the sectors. The theory restricts government role to formulation and implementation of policies for the sustenance of peace and regulation of socio-political issues. Among these is effective control and regulation of social institutions, including religious bodies and other cultural groups.

But Keynesian theory is structured within the framework of government intervention in the activities of any sector of the economy to correct any flaw in order to create a platform for capital formation, job creation, increase in production and general economic stability. Since stable economy impacts on social and political life, fruitful economic intervention is expected to enhance the progress of social activities and the development of political institutions. The relationship between demand and employment attracts serious attention in Keynesian theory. The theory emphasizes that jobs are created when there is an increase in demand to expand production and the size of firms. It draws a relationship between the increase in employment and the volume of money in circulation vis-à-vis the purchasing power of individuals in the economy. The concept of skill is another key issue in the analytic framework of the Keynesian theory. The theory defines skill as the knowledge that makes an employee relevant to the need of the economy. But it explains that there can be a mismatch of skills in relation to the demand for labour. This means that at times jobs are available but the existing skills in the labour market do not match the requirement of the available jobs. Another element in the Keynesian theory is the nature and pattern of government expenditure. The theory argues that an increase in government expenditure enhances the purchasing power of individuals, promotes expansion in production and a proportionate increase in employment. Since the economy is made up of various sectors, there is also a need for government to identify the relevant sectors that such expenditures

should be channelled into (Habanabakize, 2021; Banda, 2016). The other element analysed in theory is the role of infrastructure in relation to the importance government attached to the sector in its financial commitment and otherwise. The theory states that good infrastructure, properly managed and expanded from time to time, partly through government funding, enables both public agencies and firms to expand production and create jobs through the expansion of economic activities.

Harrod–Domar theory places emphasis on the supply of capital to boost production, increase the purchasing power of the populace and expand the economy as means of sustaining employment and creating more job opportunities. It emphasizes the multiplier effect of any input in the form of expenditure or otherwise with regard to investment and production of goods. The theory links the creation of jobs to such multiplier effects. Finally, the capital formation theory of Talence combines some features of the other two theories to explain the creation of a platform for the expansion of economic activities and promotion of employment.

However, there is also the trade liberalization theory with its own principles of job creation and economic development. The basic focus of the theory is how to utilize the virtue of liberalization by applying it to an economic system in the context of trade and commerce. Liberalization is closely linked to the concept of democracy, with decisions based on the opinion of the majority and therefore, every individual allowed to practice what s/he has to benefit from any sector of the economy provided such action or project does not clash with the interest of other citizens and is therefore, in line with the laws of the land. This is in line with the evolution of democratic institutions since time immemorial which stems from the need for a level of government that can respond to the demand and aspirations of the grassroots populace in addition to tapping their initiatives and resources for national development. Since grassroots economic institutions complement the effort of higher levels of government and vice versa, it automatically follows that any necessary local reforms must strike a balance between the priorities of higher levels of government and those of each locality, except where both are harmonious. Where such reforms negate the interest of one party, it is often counterproductive. This was the situation in a number of countries even before the outbreak of COVID-19. But a number of concepts have been developed for an ideal situation so that they can be a guide for rectifying such structures and therefore, the practice of trade liberalization. Three of these are relevant to the trend within South Africa and its rural economy, particularly with regard to mobilization of young ones for communal development.

The first is the theory of grassroots democracy. It states that grassroots democratisation is the one key to the realisation of a responsive local developmental system. The theory emphasises popular democratic participation and according to some of its exponents, it emanates from Karl Marx's criticism of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries European bourgeois political institutions. It conceives democracy as a state of affairs in which all citizens, particularly at the village and town levels participate and are encouraged to participate in the formulation of major decisions affecting the community. The theory was widely embraced in a number of countries at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, at a time when many African countries were still under colonial control. Its dominance is such that traditional argument in some countries about the value of the local economy and job creation primarily revolves around its democratic quality in addition to the principle of efficiency. The theory was at one time or other, adhered to in different countries, including the U.S.A and Southern European countries like France and Italy. The theory, therefore, implies that trade liberalization requires a responsive local institutions system devoid of totalitarian tendencies associated with a non-democratic state because the local authorities merely represent the interest of the central government rather than that of the people. The basic issue emphasized by the theory is that trade liberalization creates a large market and, therefore, a favourable atmosphere for more investment and job creation. However, some scholars in the field are of the view that this theory still needs to be reviewed. This is because liberalization at a global level may favour some countries at the expense of others (Habanabakize, 2021). In particular, history has revealed that at a global level the theory of trade liberalization favours the advanced nations at the expense of developing countries. This is because the advanced nations produced manufactured goods which are in high demand compared to the raw materials and agricultural produce of developing countries.

## **5.2 FINDINGS**

Overall, a number of issues have emerged from a study of the Phoenix youth with regard to livelihood vulnerability and in relation to their experience under COVID-19. The first set of findings is about the general experience and coping methods of the youth. The second set is on the response of the community in collaboration with other constituted authorities at both grassroots and national levels upon a platform considered in this study as multidimensional in approach.

### **5.2.1 The Youth Experience and Coping Methods under COVID-19 as Livelihood Vulnerability**

As discussed in Chapter Four, many youths find themselves in odd situations. The loss of jobs as well as truncated career is a primary setback to even the most serious ones. This is combined with the challenges emanating from the immediate and sometimes extended family in connection with illness due to the virus infection. The youth believe that it will take years for them to recover what has been lost through the pandemic. According to them, this is because to be out of a job for a whole year or even two depending on others and incurring debts is on its own another crisis and when you are even able to secure a job, these has become gaps in your life that have to be filled and it is not easy to make up for them, more so when you have issues of house rent, water rates and electricity bills to attend to. Moreover, as you grow older, even as a youth your responsibilities increase. In other words, if you are married, you should expect a child or two within some years and therefore, an increase in family size and if you are single in a matter of years you will be thinking of getting married, especially in a society where marriage often counts as an achievement for youth. Some argue that “as if that is not enough now that things are said to be getting normal, the jobs are still not really available for even the hardworking ones.”

Some of the respondents explained that the impatient ones, particularly boys, resort to drunkenness, smoking and sometimes taking hard drugs, sometimes referred to in existing studies as negative coping, i.e. the use of medically unaccepted devices to address a challenge (Mukumbang, 2020). According to them, this has contributed to violence, including gender-based violence. Many participants during the fieldwork survey also said that feeding is poor and this is another source of ill-health and that yet the R350 COVID-19 grant is not getting to those who need it most, claiming that government is to blame for not ensuring proper monitoring of the payment of the grant.

Respondents had to cut down drastically to meet the budget at home, and their diet is no more the same because of the financial strain. Some residents argued that they could not eat the foods which they used to eat previously and had to make drastic changes. Yet they must eat healthily and try to stay fit, however, the situation does not allow it. Although there is a need to eat fresh fruits and vegetables that are recommended as healthy food, the budget does not allow for that. Some relied on the food parcels and did not get the R350 grant even after applying for it many times and blamed the government for not having a good monitoring system to know those who needed it more. However, it should be admitted that

the government is not finding it easy. Income is low whilst others have no income at all. The residents noted that they had to cut down on groceries and buy fewer items every month and not afford the things that would keep them healthy. At times they live by what they receive from good Samaritans. It has been challenging to pay for electricity, water and rates, with the money received from UIF; whatever little is left, they use it to buy food which is the bare minimum.

When it comes to coping methods, they, however, largely look up to the government for assistance in addition to support from different constituted authorities including the community leadership. But most of the respondents talk about initiatives in line with self-employment, starting with small-scale businesses like hairdressing and food vending.

### **5.2.2 Multidimensional approach in Phoenix to the challenge of youth livelihood vulnerability**

The communal projects and effort to address the situation is partly a response to the expectation of youth in relation to their demands. In the second half of 2019 when the COVID-19 pandemic erupted taking everyone unaware, Storme (2019) came up with a model of “multidimensional youth employability index” with regard to the issue of livelihood vulnerability for the post-apartheid South African youth. It is illustrated with a number of tables, diagrams and mathematical inductions. But this is just the theoretical perspective. Results are only realised when we are able to apply theories and concepts to practical situations. Storme (2019) has many concepts and issues in common with the practical model adopted in the Phoenix community. The essential difference, however, is that Storme (2019) defined it from the realm of theory and concept using relevant analytical frameworks and mathematical inductions while Phoenix community, facing a practical challenge, is only interested in the practical aspect and therefore applied it practically as one experimental model. For instance, the issue of employability is emphasised in both models and they conceive it as the possession of the appropriate aptitudes, physical and mental qualities, in addition to acquisition of relevant knowledge required to fit into any career and therefore the attributes to produce results when offered a job in that field. Both of them also recognise the role of the municipality in the organisational framework of grassroots communities in relation to involvement of local development agencies.

The Phoenix multidimensional approach engages four elements in search of solutions to the situation. These elements try to link the dynamics of grassroots institutions with

strategic programmes at the national level. The first of the elements is a sustainable food security framework. The second is the involvement of development agencies. The third is the search for new models of grassroots leadership while the fourth is adoption of new dynamics in gender roles. On the issue of parameters for sustaining food security, there is need to point out that Mthethwa (2020:1) has identified KwaZulu-Natal as one of the two “most vulnerable provinces where food policy has to be a top priority agenda” in the country. The other is Eastern Cape. The study also shows that on issues of food security, South Africa ranked 40 among 150 countries in addition to a number of challenges surrounding the standard of food quality and level of food affordability and distribution. The Phoenix community in the wider Durban area of KwaZulu-Natal is not an exception. In fact the data show that poverty is the major source of food insecurity in KwaZulu-Natal, including Phoenix (Mthethwa, 2020; Hendriks, 2013) and invariably a key instrument of livelihood vulnerability among youth with clear evidence that even before COVID-19, this province was a victim of a high level of poverty. This extends to Phoenix and by statistics arising from the high incidence of poverty, a total of 73.5% of children were affected by poor nutrition and a worsening incidence of food insecurity while 47% of people, mostly youth, live on income below the poverty line (Govender, 2017). For instance, in Phoenix, the unemployed youth only depend on friends and relatives, as mentioned above and few of them are engaged in menial jobs that entitle them to at best a stipend below the poverty line. In table 4.1 above, 40% of those interviewed are unemployed. Reliance on government grants by most of the poor and unemployed is said to be very pronounced in this area (Govender, 2017) even before COVID-19 and from the structure and distribution of the grant, the best the few beneficiaries may get from it on the average is still something below the poverty line. It is for this reason that leadership in Phoenix community has made various efforts to encourage food production through farming, fishing and investment in the food sector. Youth are also encouraged to accommodate the sector in any programme and projects designed to promote innovation and tap grassroots initiatives for communal and national development. It is significant to note that the two self-employed respondents in table 4.1 are in the food sector, while most Phoenix youth who lost their job due to the pandemic worked in fishing and food processing enterprises. It is one of the four experiments meant to address vulnerability and it is hoped would yield results in the long run.

The next is the involvement of development agencies in the production of goods and services and management of human resources with emphasis on youth development programmes. This is partly because the practical effect of ‘vulnerability’ as a phenomenon has been

of primary interest to both international and local development agencies in South Africa even though it has been observed that their empirical definition of the concept as it applies to South African rural communities is poor (Casale, 2010). These development agencies are looking at vulnerability in all its ramifications within their own perception and focus, e.g. vulnerability of the informal economy, livelihood vulnerability, health vulnerability and food and nutrition vulnerability as well as the nature of their inter-relationships. Before COVID-19, these agencies have applied the concept to rural South African communities, including Phoenix with an emphasis on improving people's welfare as a means of increasing life expectancy and reducing poverty as well as minimizing mortality rate, including infant mortality (Khambule, 2018). Under COVID-19, they are taking fresh steps though within the same framework (Dhayalan, 2021).

In Phoenix, the local development agencies (LDA) have specific projects for the locality and their contribution is, therefore, easier to assess compared to international agencies that mostly operate from the national level (Khambule, 2018). The LDA collaborate with grassroots organizing units in Phoenix to promote the development of small and medium-scale business and youth development programmes. Three of the respondents believe that their impact is being gradually felt in different sectors of production and most spheres of social life.

A number of international development agencies have featured in different sectors of the country. While it is true that their projects and activities are sometimes directly or indirectly felt at the grassroots level, it is often difficult to assess the specific benefit derived by each individual grassroots community from such projects. For instance, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is known for a number of such projects and programmes in South Africa. These are said to be tailored to “strengthen small- and medium-sized enterprises, create employment, improve learning and job skills, and promote basic education, combat gender-based violence” and develop the health sector (USAID, 2022:1). Under COVID-19, the agency is said to have collaborated with the “South African Department of Trade, Industry, and Competition (DTIC), and the Executive Director of International Trade Institute of Southern Africa (ITRISA)” (USAID, 2022).

It has also contributed to projects for addressing flooding and mudslides mishaps in different parts of the country. Before COVID-19, USAID was among the foreign donors in support of a project for assisting grassroots communities, particularly the disadvantaged ones, to

enable them to provide their youth with entrepreneurial and vocational training skills. The project was known as the Youth Enterprise Society (YES) and had 'local partners' from different rural communities. A 'local partner' has a leader and consists of "local business, community and youth leaders, educationalists, and local government officials" which YES provides with "handbooks and training materials as well as training for YES advisors" (Bennell, 2000:88). However, there are no facts and figures to demonstrate that Phoenix benefitted from the above projects before or during COVID-19. Neither the adults nor the youth has been able to point to any specific local development or initiative through the projects. The municipality has no documents on the projects with regard to Phoenix. Therefore, it can be confidently said that only very little filtered down from the top into the Phoenix community through these projects. The community has largely relied on the local development agencies.

Finally, it is believed that the adoption of new dynamics in gender roles would help to fine-tune the search for new models of grassroots leadership under COVID-19 (Dhayalan, 2021). Some of those interviewed also referred to it as another communal response to the challenge of youth livelihood vulnerability. The issue is that traditional culture among Indians was structured on a platform of patriarchal dominance (Oyebamiji 2021). This is reflected in leadership, their religion and socio-political institutions. For instance, the traditional Hindu religion plays a pivotal role in the evolution of South African Indian culture and leadership role. Yet, there was no female among the priests of the religion. But new developments since the beginning of this millennium created gender rivalry with considerable modification of the cultural institutions, including a gradual decline of the patriarchal dominance. Consequently, the modern Phoenix community now welcomes new dynamics in gender roles with an emphasis on leadership based on talent, ability and equality of opportunity rather than gender/ patriarchal privileges. Indeed, for this reason, women played a pivotal role in the crisis of July 2021 in Phoenix and this was well documented by the Phoenix media, including the press (Dhayalan, 2021). The positive impact of this on communal development is acting as a source of inspiration for the present generation of women including the new crop of women leaders in the area. Thus, expressing this inspiring role of women, Nazira Bee Yasin, a woman who featured prominently in the restoration of peace and order during the July 2021 unrest, said "I am proud to be part of a community where women and men do their part for peace" (Dhayalan, 2021:1).

Reflecting on the way forward in addressing such issues at the national level, Liberty

Mncube, a member of the advisory council to the President, emphasized the issue of what is referred to as ‘excessive market power’, a situation where an industry dominates a particular sector in production, marketing, sales and so on because of its accumulated resources advantage, thus preventing the growth of small-scale enterprises in the sector (cited in Posel, 2022). Thus, when such small-scale enterprises collapse, those engaged as workers with them become unemployed. The problem of ‘excessive market power’ was identified in the health sector, aviation industry and brewery as well as cigarette production. For instance, Liberty Mncube explained that over 40% of production in the brewery and cigarette production is under the control of a single firm. Narrowing it down, it was found that this phenomenon is even noticeable in “in many areas of business activity, including maize meal, bread, milk, poultry, beer, wheat flour, healthcare, aluminium, steel, bricks, cement and ticketing services.”

Identifying its flaws and counter-productive effects, Posel (2022:4) explains that “excessive market power increases the cost of goods and services for consumers, depresses wages, stunts investment, blocks entrepreneurship, retards innovation and also concentrates economic power, which monopolies and oligopolies use to win favourable policies and further entrench their dominance.” The article states that “at the same time, excessive market power creates profits that flow disproportionately to the affluent in society while the left-out majority of South Africans are more likely to be the victims of excessive market power and have the least ability to avoid its costs, a structure that exacerbates income inequality and inequality of economic opportunity.” These were among the issues discussed in an interaction section between Dori Posel, a scholar from the University of Witwatersrand, and three key players in the policy formulation of South Africa. They include Trudi Makhaya, economic advisor to the President of the country as well as Kenneth Creamer and Liberty Mncube, who are members of the Economic Advisory Council of the Presidential. The primary purpose of the interaction is to identify hindrances to job creation and new methods of managing the labour market as well as any challenges emanating from the issue of ‘excessive market power.’ Also included is how the informal economy can be supported and reformed by the government to contribute to the creation of jobs (Posel, 2022). The participants observed that “at the end of 2021, South Africa recorded its highest unemployment rate since the dawn of democracy, at 35.3%” and that “the figure has marginally dropped but there is still concern about how the country will tackle this issue” (Posel, 2022:3).

Part of the conclusion arrived at is that the government still needs to do more in

the development of human resources. For instance, in the aspect of basic education and technical skills, the article is of the view that there are a few gaps that need to be addressed. Among them is the absence of basic education to address the numerical requirement of certain technical skills, e.g. plumbing and related semi-skilled jobs in the building. The paper explains that thorough research along this line would create a platform for the provision of more facilities for basic education. This will invariably improve the standard of basic education, expand its horizon and inspire more youths to develop an interest in acquiring relevant skills under its umbrella. Citing India as an example, one of the discussants said that most developing countries create structures for the expansion of self-employment through these devices. The need to improve the quality of basic education in the country was given a second assessment and highly emphasized by those from the office of the President. They contend that South Africa is investing much in the educational sector in terms of funding. This, according to them, is in line with figures obtainable in most other countries as a percentage of national GDP, claiming that results have not been commensurate with the investment financially and otherwise. However, they admit that there are other factors inhibiting the growth of self-employment. One of them is the absence of an effective funding scheme for small-scale businesses (Posel, 2022).

Trudi Makhaya, one of the advisors to the President, believes that the private sector has not done enough in terms of honesty and transparency with regard to utilization of government policies and programmes. This includes funding through government support for the development of each sector in the interest of society. He argued that many companies are culpable in this respect and are giving the government serious concern when it comes to issues of trust in investment, funding and commerce. He also added that “if we’re going to rebuild trust, I would suggest that they have a lot more to do in terms of showing they have turned a” new leaf, “and understand the economic harm that has been done as we also have to strike a balance between transparency and due process, and accepting genuine mistakes which are not related to corruption (cited in Posel, 2022:9). He relates this with a public sector gradually becoming prone to demoralization. As a result of this, we have the good ones who may fall victim of one error or the other due to over-compliance. Therefore, among these categories are those too cautious to initiate innovatory and revolutionary projects partly because of the criticisms they may attract in the short run and partly because of the funding and other requirements for managing such initiatives until they are mature enough to yield results.

However, details of public survey in an article in the press give a picture of some

improvement in the employment sector since June 2022 (Leshoro, 2022). The writer explains a trend of improvement in the employment of workers based on figures of 2022 that show that “unemployment levels dropped by 0.6 percentage points” in the second quarter of the year, i.e. April to June (Leshoro, 2022:2). Figures from this survey show that “this is the fifth increase in employment since the 2020 national lockdown” and it “has brought the country’s official unemployment rate to 33.9% in the second quarter of 2022 from 34.5% in the first quarter such that the expanded unemployment rate is down to 44.1%” (Leshoro, 2022:3). This portrait was also in line with analytic figures on the labour market from Statistics South Africa which stated that there was an improvement in job creation and therefore, employment. According to Statistics South Africa, overall, over one million jobs new jobs were created between January and June 2022 (cited in Leshoro, 2022). The government is said to have employed the highest number of workers based on the data of this survey. The personal service sector which is expanding production in a number of services was able to match the government as it absorbed roughly the same number of people from the labour market. Two other sectors were also able to engage a good number of people. Social services engaged more or less the same number of people as the community sector in respect of their new approach to job creation. Both sectors employed 276 000 workers.

Construction, trade and finance employed 10 000, 169 000, and 128 000, respectively. An economist from the First National Bank (FNB), Thanda Sithole, said that this improvement in the second quarter of the year came with some element of surprise because it was least expected, especially considering natural disasters and social mishaps, among which was the flooding KwaZulu-Natal in addition to the loss of business confidence in many parts of the country combined with load shedding that was getting beyond control. But Azar Jammie, Director of Econometrix explained that there were various reasons for the upsurge and creation of many jobs in the community and social services sectors that were next to the government in labour engagement during the period. According to him, “A lot of it is a reflection of the economy opening up following the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in less social distancing and more interaction with service activities, such as people going to restaurants or on holiday and just generally employing more services than before” (cited in Leshoro, 2022:3). However, according to the writer “economists said employment was still between 3% and 5% below pre-COVID-19 levels and had disproportionately affected low-skilled workers” (cited in Leshoro, 2022:4). The data show that the improvement in the employment sector was not commensurate with economic recovery based on figures of GDP. The article also states that increase in the national GDP in the first quarter of 2022

was above the pre-COVID-19 period, though this was not uniform as some sectors lacked behind, with figures below what was recorded before the pandemic. Nevertheless, it is believed this element of improvement has helped to reduce tension as consumers are still on the drawing board in search of how to cope with the inflationary trend.

### **5.3 CONCLUSION**

The study of the Phoenix community has provided us with one opportunity to assess the entire scene of the harm done by COVID-19 from a micro-perspective. A micro-study enables us to have a detailed look at issues and events and there is, therefore, the tendency to make more objective inferences and arrive at more objective conclusions. Even the researcher is likely to have closer intimacy with informants or participants in terms of oral interview making it easier to gather more reliable facts and figures. The work has, therefore, provided a clear and analytic picture of the Phoenix community with regard to the pandemic and in relation to the response of youth vis-à-vis impact on their source of livelihood and quality of life.

This gives some insight into the larger South African society on the theme. For one thing, it is clear that South Africa, as of October 2022, still has the highest unemployment rate among the 19 countries which are members of the G20. South Africa's unemployment rate stood at 34.6 percent, followed by Turkey's unemployment rate of 10.8 percent. The setbacks created by COVID-19 have actually played a crucial role in this development. The study also shows that youth can do more in terms of assisting themselves. This they can do by being more innovative conscious and by enhancing their social networks, which can effectively help to connect them to relevant information with regard to the pursuit of education, understanding of the labour market, job availability and job access. As explained in Chapter Four, there are three elements that must work hand-in-hand in addressing the current challenges. Apart from the government, youths and the entire society need to collaborate with constituted authorities as the government takes the lead in strategizing and tapping the initiatives and creativity of youths while the other two parties fully support the implementation of policies emanating from such strategic efforts.

## 5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

As already explained in Chapter Four and the conclusion, the most reliable way out is cooperation and collaboration involving the community, constituted authorities, public agencies, youth and other stakeholders. For instance, some respondents emphasized that municipalities can do more in terms of cooperating with their subjects and understanding their plight. This, according to them, should include the management of grassroots communities and basic social amenities like water and electricity. A few participants said that they should stop electricity estimation and give residents accurate bills and should stop charging interest on arrears until the situation normalises.

From the viewpoints of the participants, it is evident that youth can embark on self-help projects individually and in small groups to promote self-employment and to counter the effects of crisis during a pandemic and economic depression. Among these respondents, one said he opened a small tuck shop for his wife to run to assist in trying to make ends meet which she still can be able to take care of the children. Some others said one thing or the other with regard to the issue of self-help projects. One explains how the conversion of his car for *uber* services now pays him more than a salary job, while another explains how he went into delivery services of essential items like bread and milk to people at their doorposts.

This implies that new methods and strategies can be adopted to promote youth empowerment skills as means of minimising youth livelihood vulnerability. Public agencies involved in youth development and management of skills creation need to devise means to integrate these new efforts and initiatives of youths explained above using Phoenix as a case study. At the same time, they can also help to create new platforms for inspiring youths to identify and uphold moral systems that can contribute to creating an aura of progress and virtue for innovation. International agencies interested in youth development vis-à-vis the management of grassroots institutions can be involved in the coordination of youth activities through government initiatives in collaboration with the relevant public agencies. Analysis of the Phoenix situation has shown that these can effectively collaborate with grassroots institutions to create new devices of empowering youths against livelihood vulnerability while addressing grassroots challenges that tend to mitigate against youth progress, particularly in the area of self-employment.

As explained above, results are only realised when we are able to apply theories and

concepts to practical situations. Many theories have been formulated in addition to the adoption of various models over the years on youth livelihood vulnerability in relation to your empowerment. Among them is the model of the “multidimensional youth employability index” cited above and its related theories illustrated in Storme (2019). The present study recommends the need to put these theories into practice. In other words, there is a need to invest more in the implementation of already existing theories and models and give less attention to the search for more theories and models. This is partly derived from the experience of Phoenix, which adopted a multidimensional approach that engages four elements, as explained above, in search of solutions to its situation. These elements are a sustainable food security framework, involvement of development agencies, search for new models of grassroots leadership, and adoption of new dynamics in gender roles.

They are adopted to sustain a platform that supports youth empowerment in relation to the issue of livelihood vulnerability in addition to linking the dynamics of grassroots institutions in the area with strategic programmes at the national level. However, there are still a number of gaps in the literature that require the attention of researchers. One of them is an analysis of the link between national projects and programmes and those initiated by local organising communities at the grassroots level in relation to livelihood vulnerability. The other is the nature of government policies that can enable youth in rural communities to benefit from the projects and programmes of international development agencies in South Africa.

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## Appendix I: Ethical Clearance

07 December 2022

**Sarojini Govender**  
**(216076052) School of**  
**Social Sciences Howard**  
**College Campus**

Dear S Govender,

**Protocol reference number:** HSSREC/00004975/2022

**Project title:** Youth livelihood vulnerability in the era of coronavirus: The case of Phoenix in the greater Durbanarea

**Degree:** Masters

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 02 November 2022 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

This approval is valid until 07 December 2023.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

 C is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

## Appendix II-Informed Consent Document

Dear Participant,

My name is Sarojini Govender (216076052). I am a master's candidate studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College / Pietermaritzburg Campus. The title of my research is: Youth Livelihood Vulnerability in the Era of COVID-19: The Case of Phoenix in the Greater Durban Area.

The aim of the study is to assess the various impacts and adverse effects of Corona virus pandemic on employments amongst youths of Phoenix a residential suburb in Durban, KwaZulu Natal, Province of South Africa. I am interested in interviewing you so as to share your experiences and observations on the subject matter.

Please note that:

- The information that you provide will be used for scholarly research only.
- Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have a choice to participate, not to participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- Your views in this interview will be presented anonymously. Neither your name nor identity will be disclosed in any form in the study.
- The telephone interview will take about (20 – 30 Minutes).
- The record as well as other items associated with the interview will be held in a password-protected file accessible only to myself and my supervisors. After a period of 5 years, in line with the rules of the university, it will be disposed by shredding and burning.
- If you agree to participate please sign the declaration attached to this statement (a separate sheet will be provided for signatures).

I can be contacted at: School of Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus, Durban. Email: [216076052@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:216076052@stu.ukzn.ac.za) Cell: 0835021009, 0845329712

My supervisor is Dr Mabuyi Gumede who is located at the School of Tourism, Howard College Campus, Durban of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Contact details: email [Gumede1@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Gumede1@ukzn.ac.za) Phone number: 079 900 8227

My co-supervisor is ..... who is located at the School of Social Sciences, Howard College Campus/ Howard College Campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal? Contact details: email ..... Phone number: .....

The Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee contact details are as follows, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Research Office, Email: HSSREC@UKZN.AC.ZA Phone number 031 2603587/4557/8350.

**Thank you for your contribution to this research.**

DECLARATION

I..... (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire. I understand the intention of the research. I hereby agree to participate.

I consent / do not consent to have this interview recorded (if applicable)

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

**Appendix III - Questionnaire**

**YOUTH LIVELIHOOD VULNERABILITY IN THE ERA OF COVID-19: THE  
CASE OF PHOENIX IN THE GREATER DURBAN AREA**

**BY**

**Sarojini Govender**

**216076052**

**Section A: Socio-economic stratifications of residents of Phoenix and their current employment conditions**

1. Gender .....
2. Marital Status  
.....
3. Household Size  
.....
4. Employment status .....
5. Number of household members generating income .....
6. Total sources of income per member  
.....
7. Average Income per month .....

**Section B: COVID-19 pandemic impact on employment amongst the youths**

8. Can you describe your knowledge of the current challenges of COVID-19 pandemic across the world?  
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.....
9. Can you explain how serious this challenge is to you, and your household in South Africa?  
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10.

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11. If you believe it is a challenge for households in South Africa, describe your experience of the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused your family .....

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12. Describe the level of job loss that you or any member of your household have experienced during this pandemic?.....

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13. Has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on your job or income? If yes, Explain how the pandemic have led to the reduction in your income?

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14. How do you value in monetary terms, the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on your household?

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**Section C: Current economic and employment challenges caused by Corona Virus pandemic amongst youths**

15. With the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, how difficult has it been for your family to meet your dietary needs in the last 3 months?

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16. How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on your meeting your financial obligations like your mortgage and car loans?

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17. Please state any other ways the pandemic has taken a toll on your finance and hampered

your ability to meet your financial obligations?

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**Section D: Strategies that can be evolved to improve the condition of phoenix youth residents during and after the COVID-19 pandemic**

18. In view of the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to you, how long do you project it will take for you to recover to normal life after the war against pandemic is won?

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19. How do you think the government can assist residents in your area including you to overcome the challenges?

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20. How do you think other residents can get out of the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic without waiting for government

intervention?

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21. Suggest how non-governmental organizations can assist residents overcome some of the identified challenges?

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## COUNCILLOR

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### Appendix IV-Gate Keeper's Letter

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

Enquiries:

28/09/2022

Sarojini Govender Student  
No: 216076052 School of  
Social Science

University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard Durban, South Africa

**RE: Permission to Conduct Research in Phoenix, Durban, South Africa is hereby granted.**

Qualification: Masters in Social Science Industrial, organisational and labour studies (IOLS) at University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard).

Permission is hereby granted for data collection to be carried in Phoenix, Durban, South Africa in respect of youth unemployment.

**The research is titled: Youth livelihood vulnerability in the era of COVID-19: The case of Phoenix, in the greater Durban area**

A copy of the ethical clearance certificate should be sent to my office. It is expected that all data pertaining to Phoenix, Durban, South Africa shall be treated confidentially and you are required to abide by sound ethical principles at all times. It is also your responsibility to seek informed consent from the participants and maintain social distance when and if upon interviews.

**Permission to contact interviews and use data granted by:**

Surname, name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature : \_\_\_\_\_

Position (Optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

