

**UNLOCKING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL POTENTIALS OF
UNEMPLOYED YOUNG GRADUATES: IMPLICATIONS FOR
COMMUNICATION, EDUCATION AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION
IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

by

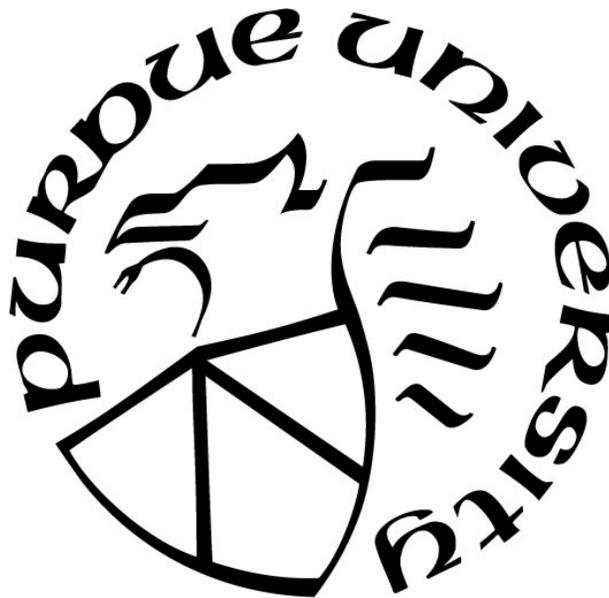
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To the scholarship and practice of Youth Empowerment in Developing Countries. Also,
to graduate students pursuing doctoral studies in their mid-fifties.

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ABSTRACT

In Sierra Leone unemployed young college graduates explored entrepreneurship as alternatives to formal employment. Qualitative approaches were followed to understand their motivations and the entrepreneurial environment in which they operated. The sample for this study included forty-two unemployed graduates in two regional districts of Sierra Leon and ten key informants as resource persons. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the graduates through individual interviews in the city of Freetown, Western district and focus groups in the city of Bo, Southern district. Telephone interviews were conducted with the ten key informants/resources persons. Using the integrated theoretical frameworks of Azjen's Theory of Planned Behavior and the Shapero-Sokol Entrepreneurial Event Model the study identified the underlying factors of desirability and feasibility of entrepreneurship with insights into the entry-level experiences in setting up a venture. The data were analyzed using the theoretical thematic approach and open coding techniques to identify patterns and trends. The findings were then triangulated and validated. Desirability of entrepreneurship was found to be generally high, but feasibility was generally low and difficult to explore. The inability to secure start-up capital and a generally weak support system for entry level entrepreneurs accounted for the barriers to successful entrepreneurship. Two descriptive models, each on desirability and feasibility, were developed from the findings. They explain the processes involved in the transmission from entrepreneurial intentions to actions. The findings of this study would contribute to advocacy campaigns for the facilitation of entrepreneurship for unemployed young graduates aspiring for self-employment, inform educational programs about the gaps in entrepreneurial proficiencies, and advice policy interventions to scale-up support for young adults to enable them to create businesses for self-employment in a developing country context. The study suggests collaborative engagements to synergize the actions between communicators, educators and policy actors to facilitate entrepreneurship for unemployed graduates.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The focus of this study is on youth empowerment in Sierra Leone, and this chapter is a background to the study starting with a brief description of the country profile on youth intervention; and presents the problem and purpose of the study. The central theme is on youth entrepreneurship in a situation of high unemployment, and the group of interest is unemployed young graduates in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone Country Profile and the National Youth Commission

Since the end of the ten-year civil war in 2002, Sierra Leone has continued to enjoy political stability, peace, and smooth transitions in its democratic dispensations, but remains to be one of the world's poorest countries with diverse socio-economic challenges including declining levels in economic performance, high levels of poverty, persistent increase in infant and maternal mortality rates, and declining levels in life expectancy (UNDP 2018). Among the issues highlighted in the UNDP (2019) evaluation report for the period of 2015-2019, limited financial resources remained to be one of Sierra Leone's major challenges that undermined its capacity to implement development projects. For example, the Youth Empowerment and Employment Programs (YEEP) experienced a decline of over eighty percent in the number of youths trained in business skills in 2017 from its initial output in 2014. As a leading labor-intensive sector in the country, agriculture continues to occupy a dominant position in economic growth and is projected to significantly impact on poverty reduction if its employment capacity is appropriately enhanced to facilitate growth in the private sector through the promotion of investments in agricultural activities (World Bank, 2019). Like the other sectors that drive economic growth, agriculture is yet to realize its potentials for employment especially of the youth population.

Sierra Leone is still recovering from the setbacks of a decade-long (1991-2002) civil war (Chege, Michael. 2002) in which thousands of children were conscripted as combatants (Denov, M., 2010). After the end of the war in 2002 the government and its international development partners pursued numerous program interventions to facilitate the socio-economic recovery process of the country. Among the many challenges faced by the national government was the

implementation of policy actions to reduce the high level of unemployment in the country. The priority objective was to stimulate growth in job opportunities especially for young adults, a group that was highly marginalized and therefore expected to benefit from the dividends of employment creating interventions (Cubitt, P Christine., 2011). To facilitate the process, in 2009 the government of Sierra Leone established the National Youth Commission (NAYCOM, 2009) with the specific mandate to leverage youth-focused interventions by creating a platform to sensitize and support policy actions and program interventions in collaboration with partner-organizations to empower youths by enabling them to utilize their potentials for national development. The 2012 Review of the Sierra Leone National Youth Policy (NAYCOM, 2012) defined youths as individuals between the ages of 15-35 years. This age group constituted about 34 percent of the population who were facing major challenges such as unemployment, inappropriate training for jobs markets, and the lack of access to quality education. The National Youth Commission therefore pursued a two-pronged approach covering Youth Development and Youth Employment in executing its mandate to facilitate the training of youths for their effective participation in the labor force of the country. The seriousness of youth unemployment in Sierra Leone was highlighted in the Final Report of the National Youth Commission (NAYCOM, 2012, page 26):

The majority of youth labor force is not productively and gainfully employed, which represents a waste of the country's human resource base needed for development. Many young people whose education and life skills training were interrupted by the civil war migrated from rural areas to urban centers with little or no employable skill, thus adding to the employment pressures in urban areas. The lack of productive employment for youth is not only an economic problem but is also a threat to social and political stability. Majority of combatants in the civil war were perceived to be unemployed and disaffected young men and out-of-school boys with no employable skills. Their pre-civil war socio-economic distress has been attributed to gross economic mismanagement that long predated the war. Contemporary youth unemployment has been assessed by the United Nations Peace-building Commission as presenting a serious threat to peace and stability in Sierra Leone. The challenges of youth employment therefore must be addressed as an integral part of the National Employment Policy and of the strategy of NAYCOM.

Addressing this problem was the central objective of the National Youth Commission. The Graduate Internship Program of the commission was the strategy designed to identify and support unemployed graduates by facilitating job-skills training through recruitment in a four-

month paid-internship program with potential employers in the country. Although the internship program did not guarantee employment, it however anticipated that the skills acquired through the program would increase their prospects for employment. While searching for employment, many of the graduates that were enrolled in the NAYCOM internship program had indicated their intentions to become entrepreneurs and were pursuing different entrepreneurial interests and engagements but were stuck at different levels in the start-up phase.

Scaling up the discourse in youth entrepreneurship continues to gain momentum for policy actions in African countries. As recent as November 2019, Nigeria hosted a Policy Dialogue Series on promoting entrepreneurship for youths through research and evidence-based policy actions (Fate Foundation, 2019). Key stakeholders, including young entrepreneurs, government agencies, members of the private sector, academic institutions and media representatives, convened to consultatively discuss and determine the best-practices for collaborative actions in resource mobilization and approaches to capacity enhancements to maximize growth in entrepreneurship and increase its multiplier effects on job creation, innovation and wealth. Such platforms underscore the crucial roles of policy-focused dialogues as instruments to effectively scaleup the responses of the entrepreneurial environment to the needs of young entrepreneurs.

Descriptions of Entrepreneurship

Scholarship and policy development in entrepreneurship are not new phenomena in the search for knowledge in addressing contemporary problems. Many studies have been done to connect theory with practice in order to understand the real-world applications of theoretical thoughts in entrepreneurship and their practical implications for the improvement of life especially in developing countries where unemployment levels of young adults are heightening with concerns for social problems. Africa Renewal, a United Nations magazine on peace and development in Africa recognized the potentials of young people in entrepreneurial activities and therefore supported small-business initiatives by providing loans to create employment opportunities for young adults (Africa Renewal, 2009) to rebuild their lives after war. The initiative mirrored the advocacy for entrepreneurial engagement to empower the participation of young adults in business start-ups through education, skills development, and support services for job creation and socioeconomic advancements (The UNDP, 2014). Governments and

development partners were therefore searching to understand how entrepreneurship can be promoted to leverage the composite attributes of social, economic, cultural and political benefits to the advantage of young adults as active participants in national development goals.

As a planned behavior with predetermined goals, the existing spectrum of definitions and descriptions of entrepreneurship conceptualized the phenomenon in diverse ways spanning its theoretical and operational perspectives relating to business motivations and intentions, and the execution of the planned behavior itself. While the theoretical sphere is dominated by descriptions and explanations of how entrepreneurial intentions are developed, the operational domain however yearns for a shift to extend the discourse into describing and explaining entrepreneurial behaviors under different circumstances. The shift from “intention” to “action” involves an interplay of factors within the entrepreneurial environment that makes the transition possible, easy, difficult, or sometime impossible for new business ventures to take-off, strive, and survive. Europe is a major leader in this area of shaping and influencing the entrepreneurial environment to support the transformation of business intentions into actions through the facilitation of policies that minimize or negate the barriers to success. In its Green-paper on Entrepreneurship the European Commission (2003) catalogued the successes it achieved in revolutionizing its markets and how it improved the social wellbeing of its member states. It emphasized that entrepreneurship was the strategic force behind the expansion of their markets and therefore provided strong convictions that the existence of friendly and supportive environments was critical for entrepreneurs to effectively function and succeed. It defined entrepreneurship as a mindset that encompasses a person’s motivation, capability, creativity, and the choices that are made in identifying an opportunity to start an ownership-motivated business venture.

The United States is another country that exemplifies flagship for promoting entrepreneurship. It conceptualizes entrepreneurship as a drive to promote socio-economic growth, and to facilitate the creation of employment opportunities. Attesting to this the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) acknowledged entrepreneurship as the backbone of the U.S economy; and that the successive improvements in the overall economy and employment rates were attributable to the strong entrepreneurial environments it nurtured (Global Entrepreneurship Report, 2017). The report characterized the United States of America and Europe as front runners on the platforms of economic growth because they play leadership roles in setting the

stage for successful entrepreneurship. Different organizations and agencies are involved in helping less-developed countries to realize these benefits by replicating similar models of support for entrepreneurship to address their urgent needs for job creation and economic growth.

The above two conceptualizations of entrepreneurship relating to a person's mind-set to start an ownership-motivated business venture, and a nation's drive to promote socio-economic growth and employment opportunities therefore set the scope of this study. Implied from its Entrepreneurial Spirit Index is the GEM conceptualization of entrepreneurship as a complex phenomenon for which policy frameworks and decisive-actions exist as tools to mitigate the challenges, constraints and threats in facilitating entrepreneurship. This study therefore situated its arguments within the GEM Entrepreneurial Spirit Index that reflects the entrepreneurial frameworks and policy environments in which entrepreneurial decisions and actions take place under different circumstances. The objective was therefore to highlight the challenges, constraints, and barriers that prevailed in the entrepreneurial environment of Sierra Leone in the context of its social, cultural, political and economic situation as experienced by young graduates who intended to become entrepreneurs.

The Research Problem

Transitioning from entrepreneurial intention to entrepreneurial actions involves an encounter with diverse experiences that manifest either as facilitators, or as barriers on the path to achieving entrepreneurial success. But the literature on entrepreneurship is overwhelmingly an accumulation of cognitive studies that are focused on the antecedents of entrepreneurial intentions with little, or sometimes no, iteration of the post-intention factors that affect the actualization of the expected entrepreneurial behavior. This limitation is reechoed to a great extent by Sniehotta, et al. (2005) who posited that intentions are easy to form but embarking on the pursuit of action remains the most enduring challenge to overcome. They drew a strong distinction between action-planning which links goal-directed behaviors to environmental cues such as when to act, where to act, and how to act as different from coping-planning which they explained as barrier-focused self-regulatory strategies in overcoming challenges. Clearly, they implied that every planned behavior must overcome its unique challenges to achieve the desired goal. Their argument on the intention-action relationship has significant implications for entrepreneurial intentions and actions in which nascent entrepreneurs sometimes even quit

pursuing their entrepreneurial intentions after the start-up activities are launched. Azjen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior posits an indisputable assertion that intention is the most immediate predictor of behavior, and his work has been accredited as a launching pad for a wide range of behavioral studies across different disciplines. Kautonen et, al (2013) tested the psychometric constructs of attitude, subjective norms, and planned behavior control; and they confirmed that intention is the most immediate predictor of behavior. Many other scholars have also subscribed to the argument but with a caveat that intentions do not independently predict actions because not every intention is translated into a planned behavior. Similarly, in navigating the entrepreneurial intention-behavior gap to examine the mediating relationships Shirokova et al (2016, page 396) assert that:

Although recently entrepreneurship scholars draw attention to the intention-behavior gap in the start-up processes, to the best of our knowledge we are the first to provide a comprehensive study of the essential moderators in this research stream.

This assertion bolsters the claim by Kautonen et al. (2013) and Schlaegel and Koenig (2014) that inquiries to explore, understand, and interpret the influence of environmental factors on the transformation of entrepreneurial intentions into entrepreneurial actions have been limited. In other words, the moderating relationships in the gap between entrepreneurial intention and entrepreneurial behavior are under-studied relative to inquiries about the formation of entrepreneurial intentions. Numerous calls have therefore, been made on scholars for empirical studies to shift focus toward explaining the moderating factors that prevail in the intention-behavior gap of entrepreneurship, and how they influence the entrepreneurial processes in transforming business intentions to actions (Fayolle & Linn, 2014; Zahra & Wright, 2011). Considering the diverse contexts in which people experience different situations, inexhaustible opportunities therefore exist for studies to understand the contextual moderators that prevail in different entrepreneurial environments and how people experience them in operationalizing start-up ventures.

On one hand, entrepreneurship is espoused as a major driver of job creation and economic growth; an ownership mind-set to achieve financial independence and social status; coupled with acknowledgments that African countries have the most positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship as a good career choice (GEM 2017/2018). Other claims are that, students who are exposed to entrepreneurial education generally had higher likelihoods to start their own

business ventures (Tucker & Selcuk, 2009; Zamfir, Lungu, & Mocanu, 2013). And, that upon graduation, their acquired knowledge and learnt skills are to serve as cognitive moderators and motivators that induce entrepreneurial drives and behaviors for the purposes of self-employment and other relevant social changes (ILO, 2013). Nevertheless, African countries are generally among those with the least favorable entrepreneurial environments such as unfavorable regulatory frameworks, poor opportunities, and therefore the lowest perception about opportunities for new business ventures (GEM 2017/2018).

These assertions and claims about entrepreneurship in poor African countries were therefore significant to generate empirical curiosity and interest to scrutinize the entrepreneurial environment of Sierra Leone in West Africa. The aim was to understand the challenges and limitations of young graduates who have had exposures to entrepreneurial education and were presumed to be prospective entrepreneurs transforming their entrepreneurial intentions to actions.

The Purpose and Goal of the Study

In response to the calls for inquiry, this study was designed as a qualitative research study to explore, understand, and interpret the meanings and relationships that existed in the entrepreneurial environment of Sierra Leone as experienced by young graduates as prospective entrepreneurs transforming their entrepreneurial intentions into actions. The goal was therefore:

- i) to identify and describe the underlying entrepreneurial motivations of young graduates engaged in business activities (desirability factors),
- ii) to understand and describe the challenges and constraints that hindered entrepreneurial engagement by young graduates and how they mitigated them (feasibility factors).

Given the above purpose and goal, this study was undertaken to identify, describe and interpret the desirability and feasibility of entrepreneurial behaviors by unemployed young graduates in Sierra Leone. In that light, the study took full cognizance of the Schlaegel & Koenig (2014) integrated model of factors that influence attitudinal and behavioral beliefs about entrepreneurship, and the predictability of entrepreneurial behaviors from the associated factors

of desirability and feasibility of performing and controlling the outcomes of entrepreneurship. A lot of work was done in the area of entrepreneurial intentions as immediate predictors of entrepreneurial behaviors but great needs existed to explore the real challenges of engagement in entrepreneurial behaviors especially because the model was not optimized to reflect the extreme circumstances in the processes of transitioning from intentions to actual entrepreneurial behaviors which happened to be the locus of the continuum where unemployed young graduates of Sierra Leone were striving to succeed as prospective and nascent entrepreneurs.

Since the recognition, identification, navigation, articulation, and utilization of environmental opportunities and resources are crucial for entrepreneurial actions (Gough and Langevang 2016), this research conceptualized the environment as a medium of facilitation that was replete with resources and opportunities that provided the critical support to stimulate the enactment of entrepreneurial activities. In the next chapter the existing literature on entrepreneurship is examined in relation to the research problem.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter a range of issues is covered to understand and articulate the dimensions of entrepreneurship that are relevant for the study. Starting with the theoretical framework to explain the variables in the formation of entrepreneurial intentions and behaviors, this chapter contains descriptions of the conceptualizations of the scholarship and its operationalizations as a phenomenon of real life engagements in which people routinely deal with solution-seeking and problem-solving challenges to improve their lives. It highlights the deliverables of entrepreneurship as drivers of human development bordering on the justification of the investments that governments and agencies are making to optimize entrepreneurship to keep it buoyant as a priority area for national development.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

Scholarship in entrepreneurship is growing but the literature covered in this study is concerned with three fundamental constituencies of the field. First, is an exploration of the theoretical framework and models that explain the attitude-behavior link that is elucidated in Azjen's 1991 *Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)* which defines *Attitude*; *Social Norm*; and *Planned Behavior Control* as precursors of intention and planned behavior. In explaining the theory Azjen made fundamental claims that behaviors are preceded by the formation of an intention as the immediate precursor of the behavior, that the intention itself is contingent on beliefs and values associated with the outcome of the behavior, that external forces influence the performance of the action, and that the ability to perform the action is a key determinant. Studies in entrepreneurial behaviors follow this framework put forward by Azjen's TBP which is exemplified in the Shapero-Sokol's 1982 *Entrepreneurial Events Model (EEM)*. Rooted in the fundamental antecedents of Azjen's theory the EEM argues along the same behavioral characteristics of entrepreneurship in postulating the Entrepreneurial Event Model. Congruent with the antecedents of intention and behavior the EEM postulates that entrepreneurial intentions and behaviors are preceded by *Desirability* and *Feasibility* as determinants that correspond with the theoretical dictions of *Attitude*, *Subjective norm*, and *Perceived behavior control*. Empirical evidences have therefore espoused this union between TPB and EEM as integral to

understanding entrepreneurship as a behavior. The EEM variables or determinants however demonstrate greater explanatory powers of the phenomenon of entrepreneurial behaviors than the TPB. Similar to other behaviors, entrepreneurship is triggered by antecedents and motivators, and a performance of the behavior is dependent on the prevailing environmental factors and conditions that either facilitate or mitigate the actions.

This study is therefore rooted in the integrated model of the Azjen's 1991 Theory of Planned Behavior Theory (TPB) and the Shapero-Sokol 1982 Entrepreneurial Events Model (EEM) each of which is explained below followed by a depiction of the integrated model in which this study is anchored.

The Theory of Planned Behavior in Entrepreneurship

Azjen's 1991 assertion that intention is the most immediate predictor of behavior and that behaviors do not occur without the intention to achieve a goal holds true for entrepreneurial behaviors. The theory identifies three antecedents to the formation of an intention (see Figure 1). Behaviors are targeted to achieve outcomes that are evaluated as favorable to the individual – meaning that an individual's belief about the outcome of a behavior (*behavioral belief*) determines the favorability to pursue the action. A positive *attitude* toward the behavior is therefore reflective of the individual's awareness of the outcome as a favorable one. Where an outcome was perceived to be favorable, a positive attitude was developed leading to an intention to enact the behavior. It constitutes the motivating force that underlies the formation of intention, as well as the decision to embark on a predetermined course of action because the outcome is evaluated as favorable.

The second antecedent relates to behaviors that are normally perceived to meet approval or endorsement of other people (*Social norm/normative social belief*) who are close to the individual and therefore have influence over the individual's actions. It is reflective of the normative beliefs and values that are held by other people who are considered important (friends, family, relatives, etc.), and therefore influence the actions of other people thus creating social pressure on someone else to perform certain behaviors. Intentions are also therefore nurtured from such subjective norms because people tend to conform to outside influences in the performance of certain behaviors. Figure 1 below depicts the theory of planned behavior.

The third antecedent of intention (i.e., *perceived behavior control belief*) explains how intentions are formed entirely on the basis of an individual’s perceived ability to enact, control, regulate, or mitigate the outcome of planned behaviors. It also reflects a measure of the individual’s power to take advantage of opportunities in the execution of a behavior to achieve an anticipated outcome, as well as the power to restrain from performing the behavior. It explains the belief about people’s ability to perform a behavior, as well as perceiving the behavior to be within their sphere of control in terms of making independent decisions to act or not to act. According to Ajzen, the stronger the attitudinal, normative, and control beliefs, the stronger the intention, and therefore the stronger the likelihood that the behavior will be performed.

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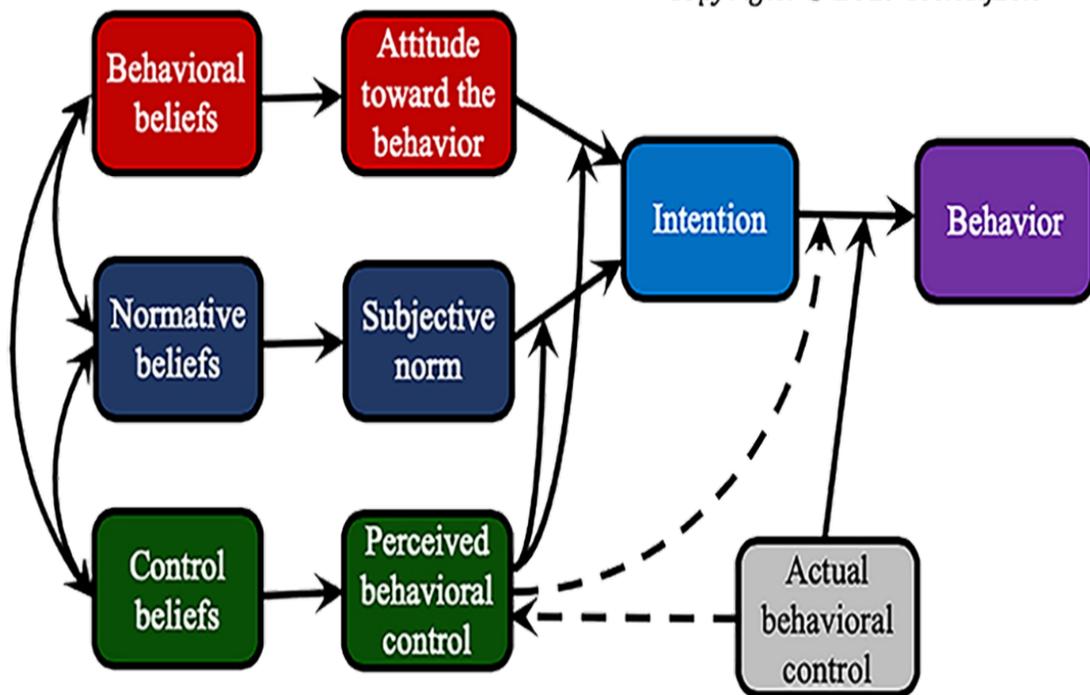


Figure 1: The Theory of Planned Behavior

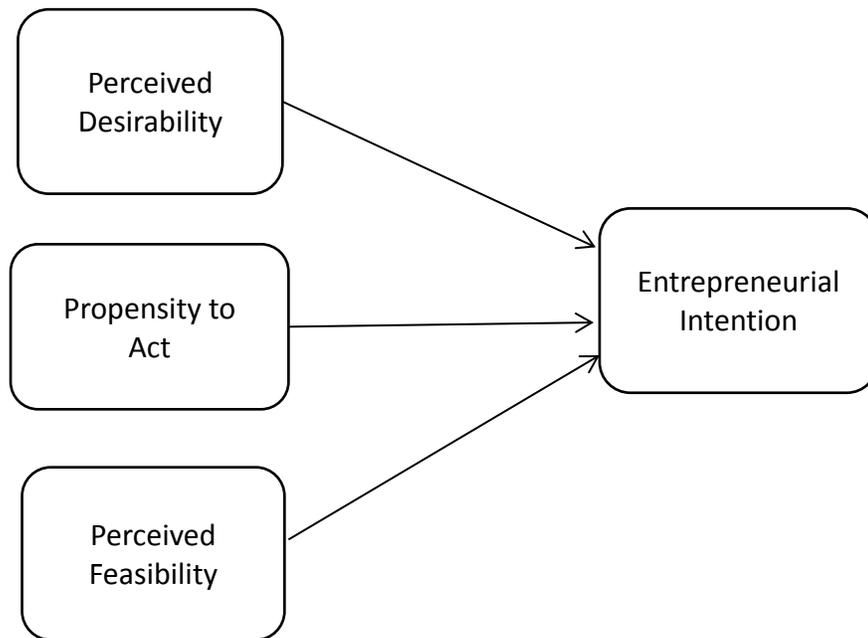
The third antecedent of intention (i.e., *perceived behavior control belief*) explains how intentions are formed entirely on the basis of an individual’s perceived ability to enact, control, regulate, or mitigate the outcome of planned behaviors. It also reflects a measure of the

individual's power to take advantage of opportunities in the execution of a behavior to achieve an anticipated outcome, as well as the power to restrain from performing the behavior. It explains the belief about people's ability to perform a behavior, as well as perceiving the behavior to be within their sphere of control in terms of making independent decisions to act or not to act. According to Ajzen, the stronger the attitudinal, normative, and control beliefs, the stronger the intention, and therefore the stronger the likelihood that the behavior will be performed. Because the TPB provides explanations of the impact of distal and proximate determinants on intentions and the prediction of behaviors, studies in entrepreneurial behaviors cannot be fully explained or understood if they are not premised on the framework of Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior (TPB) as the dominant model that depicts the initiation of entrepreneurial behaviors.

Scholarships in planned behavior have supported Ajzen's theory as valid in predicting behavior as a function of salient information, social cues, and beliefs. A significant attribute of the model is seen in the cognitive framework that follows a *process approach* in the formation of intention by perceiving, storing, retrieving, responding, and evaluating information to influence the prediction of behaviors (Robert Engle, et. al 2010) across different disciplines including entrepreneurial behaviors.

The second theoretical model that guided this study was the Shapero-Sokol (1982) model, otherwise known as the *Entrepreneurial Events Model* (EEM) that specifically identifies the determinants of entrepreneurial intentions and actions to explain the sociological variances that accounts for some people being more entrepreneurial than others (see Figure 2). The EEM demonstrates this strength by explaining entrepreneurial events hinging on the influence of environmental moderators such as culture, economic and social determinants of entrepreneurial behaviors (Shapero & Sokot, 1982). The predictors or determinant include *Perceived Desirability* (PD); *Propensity to Act* (PTA), and *Perceived Feasibility* (PF) explained below.

Figure 2 The Entrepreneurial Event Model (EEM)



Source: Adapted from the Traditional EEM in Schlaegel and Koenig (2014)

Perceived desirability relates to the factors that attract an individual to form an intention about entrepreneurial activities. The desirability framework is linked to actions motivated by beliefs about the anticipated benefits associated with entrepreneurial actions thus leading to the intent and subsequent performance of activities to start a business venture. It is a pointer to the goal-relatedness of desired behaviors driven by the favorability of results derived by performing the particular behavior in question.

The Propensity to Act (PTA) reflects the personal disposition and drive to act on decisions based on the conscious choices the individual makes about the intention. Ideally, it is anticipated that decision-making is followed by actions but it is however possible for an outcome to be desirable and feasible but the person's propensity to act may be lacking. Therefore, the model presents the propensity to act as a personality-trait which is a variable that is influenced by individual orientations to take control of events (*locus of control*) through the enactment of actions to take advantage of available opportunities.

Perceived feasibility is explained in the model as the cognitive ability of the prospective entrepreneur to recognize the environment as a pool of useable resources, and to therefore launch an exploration to scan the environment for available resources that will enable the shift from entrepreneurial intention into action. According to the model, perceived feasibility does not only provide insight into the formation of a business intention, or raise questions about the possibility to undertake a business venture. It is the determinant that actually invokes the demonstration of actions that are expected to transform the intention into action. The construct of perceived feasibility in the EEM model reflects the scanning for opportunities that are available in the entrepreneurial environment to enable or empower prospective entrepreneurs to take actions. It involves the abilities of would-be entrepreneurs to identify, explore, mobilize, and utilize available opportunities and resources to jump-start the desired entrepreneurial actions to actualize the goal.

Integration of the Theories of Planned Behavior and Entrepreneurial Events

The explanations of the TPB and EEM models highlight their overlapping relationships and unifying attributes that integrate and accord them the robust hegemony they exert in studies of entrepreneurial behaviors. *Perceived desirability* in EEM matches *attitude* in Ajzen's TPB because they both share common paths to the factors that attract people into entrepreneurship, or the behavioral beliefs and values people hold about becoming an entrepreneur. Also, *Perceived feasibility* in EEM is comparable with *Perceived Behavior Control* in the TPB because they harmonize the description of factors that support or facilitate entrepreneurial behaviors in conjunction with the levels of confidence that people have about their abilities or efficacies to initiate a business venture. Both models also intersect in their respective meanings of the *Social norms* that influence desirability and feasibility of the behavior as influenced by their social orientations. The integrated model of the Shapero-Sokol EEM and Ajzen's TPB is therefore built upon the cognitive abilities to perceive and to enact desired entrepreneurial behaviors which is why it is bestowed the empirical power in providing appropriate frameworks that explain why people vary in their entrepreneurial intents; and how they experience and assess the pursuit of entrepreneurship in different environmental contexts.

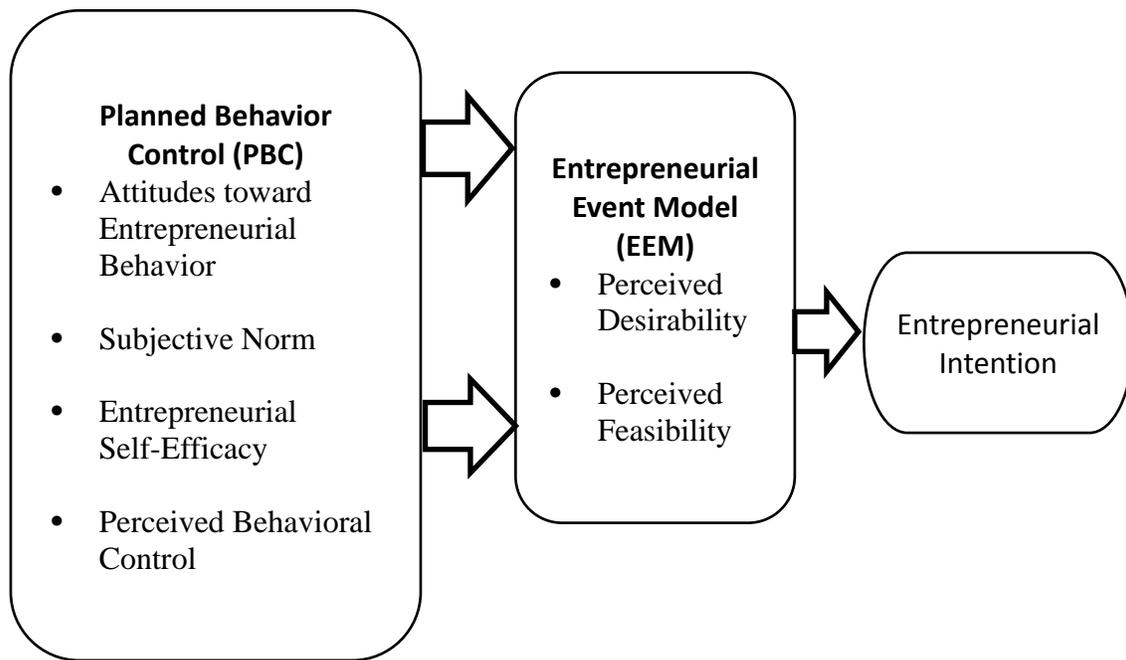
Contextualizing Entrepreneurial Actions

Schlaegel and Koenig (2014) confirm that contextual factors moderate planned behaviors in the process of transforming entrepreneurial intentions to actions, and that the theoretical models that explain the relationships between the determinants also therefore vary based on socio-cultural and economic contexts. This infers that pluralized patterns of complex relationships exist between many factors operating in entrepreneurial settings and the attempts to explore, understand, and explain the complexity of the settings different models have been developed on the multitude of patterns of relationship between the moderators. In a meta-analysis of theoretical models and determinants of entrepreneurial intent Schlaegel and Koenig (2014) studied data from 30 countries collected over two decades and found that 42 studies used at least two of the three variables of the TPB (*attitude, social norm, and perceived behavior control*) while 12 used the two main determinants of the EEM model (*perceived desirability and perceived feasibility*) in different combination patterns. In addition, various combinations of the variables of the two models were found in 98 of the studies. Discovering that a collection of models exists in explaining the contextual relationships in different environmental settings that moderate individual perceptions, attitudes, and intentions they concluded that the variables of TPB indirectly influence entrepreneurial intents and behavior, but those of EEM directly predict actual entrepreneurial intents. Although EEM is espoused as the dominant model for studies of entrepreneurial intents, the study however concluded that EEM cannot fully explain the phenomenon of entrepreneurship without TPB.

The result of the study was a groundbreaking response. It subscribed to the advocacy for scaling-up the use of integrated theoretical models upon which the two determinants of EEM (*Perceived desirability; Perceived feasibility*) were juxtaposed in combination with the three antecedents of TPB (*Attitude; Social norms; and Planned Behavior Control*) to demonstrate that the two models carried stronger predictive power in explaining the phenomenon of entrepreneurial intents and behaviors under different environmental contexts. Supporting Schlaegel and Koenig's assertion that Entrepreneurial Intentions (EI) cannot be fully explained or understood in exclusion of the TPB, Iakovleva & Kolvereid, (2009) integrated the two models to investigate whether different definitions of entrepreneurial intent make any difference with the two models. Using data from 528 university students with entrepreneurial intentions of becoming self-employed by starting their own business in three countries, the study confirmed that TPB

and EEM are compatible for self-employment intentions and can therefore be successfully integrated into one model. They assert that the intention to become self-employed is a derivative of *desirability* and *feasibility*. Their model depicts self-employment as a derivative of desirability culminating as a function of *attitude* and *subjective norm*, while *feasibility* is a function of *subjective norm* and *perceived behavioural control* to execute the actions toward self-employment. They concluded that the integrated model is successful in situations where (i) attitude and subjective norms determine desirability, (ii) where subjective norm and perceived behavioral control determine feasibility, and (iii) where desirability and feasibility determine intentions (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: The Integrated Model of Entrepreneurial Intent



Adapted from Zeinab Zaremohzzabieh, et. al. (2019)

These studies conclusively espouse and recommend that research in entrepreneurial behavior should consider integrating selected components of Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TBP) and the Shapero-Sokol Entrepreneurial Event Model (EEM) because the integration offers the best options for generating antecedents, determinants, and predictors into a conceptual framework with the strongest explanatory powers to understand why people vary in

entrepreneurial intents, and how they experience the pursuit and measurement of their entrepreneurial achievements in relation to environmental contexts. Because enough empirical evidence exists to exemplify the successful integration of the TPB and EEM models, this study is grounded in the integrated model of entrepreneurial intention through the lens of these two theories.

Conceptualizations of Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is understood and defined in diverse ways that represent its applicability in different situations in which it is perceived to address specific problems. The following conceptualizations of entrepreneurship are proffered in the contexts that relate with the research problem of this study.

Entrepreneurship as Scholarship

Entrepreneurship has been studied for centuries during which its disciplinary boundaries were unclear to distinguish it from other fields of business studies until Shane and Venkatraman (2000) proposed a distinction that defined the entrepreneurship as a scholarly inquiry to answer questions relating to how, by whom, and with what effects are business opportunities discovered, evaluated, and exploited to create future goods and services. This definition conceptualizes entrepreneurship to include the interaction with an environment that is perceived to be replete with entrepreneurial resources driven by the objective to explore the creation of business venture or an organization by discovering, evaluating, and exploiting opportunities. At the center of this conceptualization is the focus on creating a venture through resource-driven interactions with the environment which means that thinking about entrepreneurship (intentions) is not a sufficient prediction rather it involves the search to understand how prospective entrepreneurs explore their environments to determine the appropriate actions to take in exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities and when such actions are more likely to yield the best dividends.

Entrepreneurship as an Educational Intervention

Among the many agencies and programs advocating for the promotion of entrepreneurship for young people, the UNDP Youth Development Strategy (UNDP, 2014)

reechoes ILO's (2013) conceptualization of entrepreneurship as a critical empowerment to enable young people to actively participate in the development of their communities through skills training for self-employment and to eventually increase job opportunities. The introduction of entrepreneurial education in tertiary institutions like universities is in tune with this strategy of empowerment for job entry. Entrepreneurial awareness, knowledge, and skills acquisition are believed to influence entrepreneurial orientation, intentions, and decision-making as springboards for action (Solesvik, M., 2013; Graevenitz, G. et al. 2010). As a variable of PBC entrepreneurship education enhances cognition and decision-making about entrepreneurial careers because it increases knowledge and awareness about the benefits of business and the opportunities that are available (Liñán, et. al., 2011). The empowering capacity of entrepreneurial education, as acclaimed in the discourse of strategies and tools for developing countries therefore has great potential for increasing the participation of youths in economic development. With the concerns about the exploding population of youths around the world, and the growing trends in youth unemployment in poor countries, the need for entrepreneurial education and skills development cannot be over-emphasized for development communication experts to identify and communicate strategic options to enable young graduates in making the transition into entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship as a Business-minded Motivation

Many studies conceptualize entrepreneurship in ways that embrace explanations of why and how people venture into uncertainties to create change. Robichaud, McGraw, & Alain, Roger (2001) define entrepreneurship as a business-minded motivation to create ownership through goal-setting and achievement patterns of behavior in the business arena. Entrepreneurial motivations are understood as strong motivating forces which Kirzner's 1997 *Entrepreneurial theory* explains in connection with prevailing market environments as repertoires of information that influences entrepreneurial intentions and decisions to act. Market information, in Kirzner's *Entrepreneurial theory*, provides knowledge that triggers speculative actions that inspire individuals to discover and identify emerging opportunities for profit-making ventures. From Kirzner's analysis of the entrepreneurial discovery process and its speculative actions, an entrepreneurial mind-set is the building block for actions that converge to make a necessary change to solve a perceived problem. Kirzner therefore explains the entrepreneurial business-

mindset to constitute salient qualities such as alertness, boldness, open-mindedness, and curiosity about making enquiries to increase awareness and potentially enhance the execution of profitable actions. It pushes people to strive to understand the uncertainties and challenges that are inherent in making informed decisions and actions based on market trends. Because entrepreneurs are sensitive to resource constraints, they often explore resource opportunities and innovatively converge them into feasible market niches.

Entrepreneurship in demonstrating Resilience

Entrepreneurs are believed to demonstrate resilience in situations where individuals may have made some attempts with unsuccessful business trials but remain tenacious about their intentions to achieve entrepreneurial goals. In this sense, Clarke and Holt (2017) conceptualize entrepreneurship as a model of thought that utilizes metaphors in expressing and framing the heroic nature of entrepreneurs in pursuing complex goals and objectives amidst challenges. As a sense-making process in surviving the perils of war, jobless young graduates (*some of whom may have been children during the war*) may be tactically invoking their heroic identities of a survivor into entrepreneurial pursuits as they strive to navigate the complexity and uncertainties of business ventures. Fighting or surviving a war and starting a business venture may therefore be synonymous in many ways. Entrepreneurial metaphors of heroic identities, as claimed by Clarke and Holt, are therefore used by youths to describe difficult phenomenon in the struggles to chart a business venture through stormy circumstances such as in identifying and mobilizing hard-to-get support and resources especially for young adults of poor family backgrounds. This could be likened to the Sierra Leone context in which graduates struggled through the pursuit of university education, and later confronted with joblessness but demonstrating and affirming their confidence and abilities through entrepreneurial pursuits. In this study, resilience in entrepreneurship was conceptualized as personal strength in demonstrating and maintaining confidence about one's ability expended in the pursuits of entrepreneurial goals by not giving up until a goal is achieved.

Entrepreneurship as a Network

Entry into entrepreneurship can be challenging and sometimes frustrating. Navis and Ozbek (2016) argue that every venture is unique in its nature and requirements, and that the ability to realize opportunities and resources is not an adequate motivation for entry and success in entrepreneurship even though it is critical. Instead, the level of confidence that an individual has from previous experiences and skills or relying on the experiences of successful actors in the desired field of entrepreneurship also have implications for decision-making to pursue a specified venture over another. Although they imply that in order to try out new entrepreneurial activities, a synergy must exist between the requirements of a specific business venture and the kind of experiences the individual has acquired from previous engagements in the prevailing environment. In this study however, the author believes that the condition can be leveraged by networking with experienced entrepreneurs exhibiting evidence of success and, or by consultation with those willing to serve as business angels to guide young entrepreneurs as they plow through the turbulence of entrepreneurship. Although Navis and Ozbek affirm that young entrepreneurs stand good chances to immensely benefit from the evidence of success when they offer learning opportunities, they however warned young entrepreneurs to be watchful about the vices of successful and experienced entrepreneurs because they may get overconfident, expressing belief of superiority, narcissism, and biases. On the perspectives of the learning opportunities available in one's environment, their study presumes that existing evidence of success is part of an entrepreneur's repertoire of opportunities and resources if identified as an essential motivator for entry and success in entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship as Policy Instrument

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO, 2019) is the specialized agency in the United Nations systems that provides assistance to poor countries in the areas of policy development and support services to promote entrepreneurship through the establishment of Small-to-Medium Enterprises (SMEs) for self-employment and economic competitiveness. The World Bank and its multilateral agencies adopt other models through financial and technical support services to assist developing countries invest in alleviating the constraints to private sector growth such as the creation of enabling environments for

entrepreneurship to thrive (World Bank reports, 2012). The International Labor Organization (ILO) also provides services to poor countries on models that conceptualize entrepreneurship as an enabling environment that supports entrepreneurial behaviors through learning, executing, and advancing the skills of young people to realize a change of attitude from the tradition of job-for-life to one with a portfolio of career in ownership, independence, and improvements in livelihood (ILO, 2013). The levels of commitment by international development agencies and their collaborative partnerships with governments in developing countries subscribe to advance the argument that entrepreneurship has a greater chance to survive and succeed if enhanced by creating enabling environments to actualize behavioral intentions in entrepreneurship.

Evident in these conceptualizations is the common strand that underscores entrepreneurship as a learned behavior, and that it responds to environmental stimulus and cues driven by the cognitive abilities of prospective entrepreneurs to explore opportunities with a desire or mentality of owning and operating a business. More specifically, the ILO orientation to entrepreneurship clearly explicates the marriage between the two perspectives of an enabling environment and the behavioral processes involved in actualizing the intention. On one hand, the enabling environment provides a description of contextual, situational, or circumstantial variables in terms of economic, social or cultural factors that affect entrepreneurial behaviors in time and place while the behavioral processes describe the ability to perceive, navigate, and identify opportunities as resources for entrepreneurial actions. In other words, a relationship exists between enabling environments as a stimulus; and the resulting behavioral outcomes that shape entrepreneurial behaviors in different settings. In instances where such opportunities and resources exist it is also crucial for the individual to properly articulate and align the variables of knowledge and skills, the ownership mentality, the desire to make a change, and the ability to recognize and act on opportunities in one's environment because they constitute the cognitive and behavioral aspects that are crucial in transitioning from intentions to actions in the process of starting a business venture (Gough & Langevang, 2016). This further implies that an environment that is replete with entrepreneurial resources is more likely to invoke or stimulate entrepreneurial behaviors than an environment that is constrained by the lack thereof.

The existing theories and models in the study of entrepreneurial intents and their determinants are overwhelmingly focused on identifying salient determinants of intention

leaving a largely unexplored terrain between entrepreneurial intentions and behaviors which is highlighted in the next section.

Entrepreneurship in Agriculture

Agribusiness (The Balance Small Business, 2019) is one of the most commonly discussed avenues for employment opportunities in small-to-medium scale enterprises in developing economies. Agribusiness offers a wide latitude of involvement in farm-related market operations ranging from production, processing, on-farm support services, value addition, to marketing of food supplies, transportation, machinery and equipment. With trends in global projections of population growth and the declining trend in food security, the agriculture sector is acclaimed to carry great potentials for entrepreneurial activities. Entrepreneurial decisions take place within defined environmental contexts that influence intentions and actions relative to the sector of focus. Much as the same generic approach to understanding entrepreneurial behaviors can be used in agricultural entrepreneurship, Arafat et al (2018) however warn that agricultural entrepreneurs must be mindful of the peculiarities of the specific sector in question to understand how the phenomenon relates with the realities of the field of study. This is important because different sectors respond differently to the same conditions of the environment in which they coexist. Agriculture is a specialized field of study and has unique attributes to consider in taking investment decisions and action. In a study of the intention-action gap Arafat and colleagues used the 2013 GM data from 69 countries and identified two moderators including cognitive and social capital to explain how they influence early-stage entrepreneurial activities in agriculture. Unlike many other fields in which entrepreneurship shows remarkable successes, agriculture is very susceptible to many disruptive environmental changes and uncertainties that negatively impact on the income potentials especially in new ventures (Arafat et al, 2018). Resources and capabilities are critical for agricultural entrepreneurship to adjust and keep pace with sudden changes in market trends such as consumer preferences which sometimes evolve rapidly. For instance, sudden variations like value addition, and changes in the physical environment such as climatic changes make adjustments practically impossible for farm operations to respond promptly because the resources and capabilities needed to accommodate such adjustments are immobile to take advantage of new opportunities. Constraints like these pose complex decision-making challenges in considering new ventures in agribusiness.

Involvement in agricultural business is not like the common decisions to make about business models such as buying and selling of merchandise. Grande (2011) used the theoretical frameworks of resource-based view (RBV) and dynamic capabilities (DC) to explain the critical role of resources and the ability of entrepreneurs to identify, mobilize, and develop resources to enable them to diversify and optimize their potentials to exploit market opportunities. It involves critical considerations to avoid threats and shocks in the business environment especially when resources cannot be easily translocated to new ventures when the opportunities arise. Using case studies of three agribusinesses in farm products (meat, jelly and cheese) Grande concluded that entrepreneurship is a complex challenge involving dynamic processes when viewed from the perspectives of re-evaluating resources with respect to changes in the business environment, and the level of competence required to manage limited resources under changing circumstances. Knowledge of, and experience with, critical resources such as farm policies and state support service, public financing, expertise from family and relatives, adjacent local resources, and support from innovation programs are very crucial according to Grande. The study also identified some of the specific characteristics of agricultural entrepreneurship that are immensely relevant for entrepreneurial considerations. This includes: *i*) its innate uncertainty in biological processes, *ii*) structural changes, *iii*) vulnerability to the regulatory environment, *iv*) growing markets with high demand for diversification, and *v*) the lack of financial support for new ventures. While affirming that resource constraints are not only a disadvantage, the study suggests that they could also become an inspiration to explore adjacent local resources where entrepreneurial attitudes of persistence and creativity are induced. The study also concluded with propositions to help alleviate some of these resource-related constraints through the creative use and integration of available resources to compensate for resource limitation, promoting university education to generate ideas for performance optimization, fostering positive professional attitudes, enhancing appropriate networking and strategic alliances, and good market orientation for efficient penetration. These propositions subscribe to the appeal that, unlike other entrepreneurial ventures, agricultural entrepreneurship needs to be treated and enhanced differently because it has unique peculiarities and features such as its complex resource configurations and vulnerability to variations in environmental conditions which set it apart from other economic activities. Promoting a supportive policy environment and facilitative

interventions that enable start-up ventures in agricultural entrepreneurship to succeed will therefore mitigate fear and doubts about agricultural entrepreneurship to thrive.

Fear, Doubt, and Aversion in Entrepreneurship

Fear, doubts, and aversion collectively play a deterministic role in entrepreneurship where intentions are formed to initiate potentially viable venture but are not translated into activities because of fear of failure. Claiming that the intention-action dynamic is regulated by volition, Van Gelderen et al. (2015) conducted a longitudinal study of entrepreneurial opinions, attitudes and behaviors in Finland to examine two action-related constructs of volition identified as emotions and self-control. They used these two variables to explain how people exercise willpower in sustaining their commitment to overcome the intention-action challenges toward achieving their entrepreneurial goals. They further classified emotion into action-related emotions and avoidance-oriented emotions. The action-related emotions of doubt, fear, and aversion are identified as mitigating factors that adversely impact on the execution of entrepreneurial actions. Self-control is defined as a person's disposition and capacity to dispense personal volition in exercising willpower that counteracts avoidance-oriented emotions which may otherwise result in procrastination, hesitance, and the aversion of feasible tasks that may appear tedious. In a multiple path analyses of these variables they found that self-control is not a motivator, has no significant correlation with intention, and is therefore not a direct predictor of entrepreneurial actions. For action-aversion, or avoidance-oriented emotions, they found that hesitance, indecision, postponement, and procrastination are strongly related to doubts and uncertainty, which invariably hinder the intention-action process. They however posit a caveat that even though self-control is not a motivator, people who have it are usually tenacious in displaying capacity to suppress and overcome doubts, fear, and avoidance of entrepreneurial actions. They also affirm that people with self-control are more likely to act on their motivations and intention by dispensing their efforts and time in the entrepreneurial engagements of their decisions. They are therefore less likely to submit to the adverse effects of doubts, fear, and action aversion, and are thus more likely to transform their entrepreneurial intentions to actions. Van Gelderen et al. 2015) therefore conclude that the possession of volitional capacity is a strong requirement for the realization of entrepreneurial outcomes.

This study therefore presumes that fear and doubts arise from anticipated constraints associated with the likelihood of failure and abandonment if the venture is to be initiated at a time when the constraints seem insurmountable. Fear and doubt may also be associated with the experiences of failure when nascent entrepreneurs may have started and abandoned viable ventures due to challenging environments.

The Entrepreneurial Environment

Literature abounds in the explanation of the role of contextual variables in moderating the transformation of entrepreneurial intentions into actions. Using the 2012/2014 data on Global University Entrepreneurship Spirit Students Survey (GUESSS) on students from 34 countries and 759 universities, Shirokova et.al. (2016) undertook a study to examine the effects of personality trait, contextual factors, and environmental characteristics on the relationships between intention and behavior. They assert that young people (students in this instance) are more attracted to entrepreneurship at a relatively younger age when career plans and choices are made. They argue that time-lag is a crucial factor because distal measures between intention and action are not effective predictors of behavior because unforeseen events can cause significant changes in intention with the passage of time. In examining the effects of individual and environmental characteristics on start-up activities they classified personality traits as attributes of age, gender, family entrepreneurial background, university entrepreneurial environment, and the overall level of societal uncertainty avoidance. Environmental characteristics included access to capital, formal and informal institutions, and entrepreneurial education. All of these variables differ with respect to regional and local contexts. Regional context was explained to reflect disparities in the level of economic development, availability of capital, and government regulations. Local context included physical infrastructure, entrepreneurial support services, and university support mechanisms such as incubators.

The scope of engagement in start-up activities is also a strong variable or milestone that indicates progress in entrepreneurial achievement, and entrepreneurs usually establish their own timelines, and stages of operation on which they report progress over time. Using the proportion of entrepreneurial activities as the dependent variable, Shirokova and colleagues further hypothesized that entrepreneurship can be measured in terms of the volume of start-up activities that are undertaken over a given period along the entrepreneurial process. They claim that

differences in the level of entrepreneurial activities are therefore contingent on the moderators characterizing the environmental context (the independent variables) including availability of financial capital, entrepreneurial support institutions and services, exposure to entrepreneurship, levels of economic development activities in the area, government regulations that favor start-up, and university support programs like technology transfer services and incubators. In other words, the more favorable and supportive the environmental context, the more the likelihood that the proportion of entrepreneurial activities executed is higher, and the narrower the gap between intention and action. Because a myriad of interrelated environmental factors moderate the amount of entrepreneurial activities that are executed at any given time, the dynamics of those relationships must be understood to explain their impacts on entrepreneurship.

The Intention-Action Gap

In the preceding sections strong arguments have been made that the transition from intention to action is mediated by complex relationships between predictors that influence the process either as facilitators that accelerate, or inhibitors that constrain the intention-action transformation. A lot of credence has also been given to intention as a pivotal step toward planned behavior, and that no matter how strong the intention is, it is not a sufficient condition for a behavior to occur. All these claims point to the fact that intentions only reflect an expression of desire to undertake future actions toward a planned goal and that intentions are invariably influenced, directly or indirectly, by prevailing conditions, circumstances and factors. Potentially, intentions may shift to actions, or they may end up in postponement of actions until favorable conditions prevail, or they may get abandoned before or after initiating the action (Van Gelderen, Kautonen, & Fink, 2015). While any of these directions (action, postponement or abandonment) may depend on the post-intention circumstances that support or hinder the actions, the element of fear of failure and doubts about success are also believed to have negative influences on start-up ventures.

The literature on intention-action gap, though not exhaustive, provides a broad outlook to the theories, conceptualizations, and issues relating to the impacts of the operating environment on entrepreneurial activities. The research questions of this study, relating to the intention-action gap, are presented in the next section.

The Research Questions

Every structured inquiry in human situations begins with a sense of curiosity for collecting information to understand why certain things happen in particular ways; and to know how people's lives are affected by the outcomes. In view of the issues discussed, the following is presented to provide a roadmap to understanding and providing answers to the issues raised in the problem statement. As a theory-driven inquiry, the questions reflect theoretical constructs and variables that explain the role of theory in understanding problematic situations (Tracy, Sarah J. 2013, p.144) such as the desirability and feasibility of entrepreneurship.

Research Question 1: What underlying factors contribute to the perceptions of desirability to engage in entrepreneurship?

Research Question 2: What underlying factors contribute to the perception of feasibility and success of engaging in entrepreneurship?

Research Question 3: How does the entrepreneurial environment affect entrepreneurship?

CHAPTER 3: THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter contains explanations of the procedures that were followed in collecting the data for this study. In the following sections three procedural elaborations are made starting with an overview of the theoretical attributes of the methodology, followed by descriptions of the two procedures used in collecting the data, and finally an explanation of the approach to the data analysis. This sequel captured the entire process of gathering, organizing, processing, and presenting the data for this study.

Theoretical and Methodological Overview

Drawn from the perspectives of sense-making about practical naturalist situations in which people experience, construct, and communicate meanings, a qualitative research tradition was adopted to understand and interpret complex problem situation (Tracy, Sarah J. 2013, p.2-5, Creswell, 2014, p.5-6). Due to the complexity of the phenomenon of entrepreneurship, an interpretive-constructivist approach, in the qualitative research domain, was deemed suitable because it offered flexible procedures that enabled the investigation to benefit from *local-groundedness* through self-immersion to understand and describe the nature (*ontology*) of the reality of entrepreneurship (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014, p.11). Consistent with the qualitative research tradition of inquiry, this study was further guided by the paradigm of pragmatism. As a pragmatic endeavor, it sought to identify and develop a pluralistic and balanced approach to utilizing existing opportunities for the design and implementation of best-practice strategies in communicating workable solutions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzle, 2004) to improve entrepreneurship. Guided by these perspectives, and given that the phenomenon of entrepreneurship is contextual, the inquiry adopted a needs-driven technique in discovering the phenomenon (*epistemology*) and how it is embedded in constituting meaning (*axiology*) as a lived experience.

In the qualitative research tradition, multi-methods lend themselves to situational adaptation in planning the inquiry, collecting the data, and in analyzing the findings due to its dynamic attributes of procedural combinations to connect with natural settings (Denzin, Norman K. & Lincoln, Yvonna S., 1998, p 3-4). On this ground, the study adopted the qualitative

methods of face-to-face and telephone interview techniques that were complemented by triangulating the findings across identical groups of participants in two different cities to achieve an in-depth understanding and a validated interpretation of the findings. Triangulating the findings was further extended to include resource persons as local experts that were knowledgeable about the entrepreneurial phenomenon of Sierra Leone.

Role of the Researcher, Self-reflexivity and Immersion

The desire to undertake this study was triggered by the researcher's curiosity to generate knowledge about a phenomenon (Tracy, Sarah J. 2013, p.2-5) that was observed in Sierra Leone as a real life practical situation that warranted empirical investigation, driven by scholarly interest, to understand and explain the narrated experiences of how unemployed graduates make sense of their worldview (Berg, Bruce L, 1989; pages 15-16; Patton, Michael Q. 2015, p.3; Tracy, Sarah J. 2013, p.2; Denzin, Norman K. & Lincoln, Yvonna S., 1998, p.3) of entrepreneurship.

Evocativeness, subjectivity, and biases are often raised as major concerns about the validity and trustworthiness of qualitative research findings due to the likelihood of misrepresentation of research findings that is possible when preexisting knowledge about the situation tend to influence the process and the results. These tendencies may arise from vertical monopoly (Miles, Huberman and Saldana 2014, p.294) and self-reflexivity (Tracy, Sarah J. 2013, p.2) that inject the researcher's past experiences, opinions, and points of view to influence the collection and interpretations of data especially in instances where the researcher worked alone in the field. Notwithstanding the fact that the researcher (myself), as a research instrument in this study, is a native of Sierra Leone whose background was helpful for smooth adaptation to the field situation and the cultural milieu of the country, there was heightened consciousness and sensitivity that controlled and suppressed subjectivity. Steps were therefore taken to systematically neutralize and numb any form of biases and undue influences that might blur a fresh insight into the phenomenon (ibid, p.12). As a native of Sierra Leone initiating interest in this study was spurred by the evident increase in the number of unemployed young graduates which raised the researcher's curiosity to empirically investigate the phenomenon to understand and explain the relationship between unemployment and entrepreneurship. The process was therefore approached as a learning experience to create new knowledge. This warranted probing

to gain deeper understanding of the prevailing circumstances as experienced by participants. Openness and receptivity to new information accorded superiority to participant's knowledge and experience. This completely displaced any presuppositions or conjectures of the researcher. Every step was taken to preserve the integrity of the findings and no compromises were made in reporting the findings. All the information reported in this study were the responses of the participants.

Immersion and engagement with the data started from the data collection site. The interview sessions provided the platform on which in-depth familiarization with the data corpus was achieved. This was enhanced through curious engagements in conversations, listening openly and keenly, and making following-ups with probing questions to facilitate clarity in the meaning-focused elicitations of information. Incorporated in the immersion process was also the ongoing recursive engagements with the data. The emerging (*emic*) data-points were pre-qualified, associated, further reexamined and aligned with the theory-driven (*epic*) questions which Tracy (2013, p.184) refers to as iterative analysis. This was done by revisiting and listening to the audio recordings of each of the twenty-three individual interviews and the four focus groups at least three times to gain congruence in the coding of the data. In each of the listening episodes, notes (memos) were made of the salient data-points that emerged from participants' responses. The immersion and familiarization processes were holistic in taking account of all the salient nodes and identifying the spot-lights of the data that connected with the research questions. The findings were triangulated across individual experiences and the synergies identified in the responses were validate through another level of supplemental triangulation with the responses from key informants/resource persons. Member check was also done with three of the key informants. In the next section, the identification and description of the sample is provided.

Identification and Description of Participants

The participants in this study were unemployed young university graduates in the West African country of Sierra Leone who were attempting to create small business ventures to transform their entrepreneurial intentions into action. The National Youth Commission of Sierra Leone maintained a database of unemployed graduates in the country who were classified as

young adults between the ages of 18-35 years who were actively searching for jobs but also exploring the opportunities to pursue entrepreneurial goals. According to the program manager and the data analyst, the commission had registered over 2,000 unemployed graduate applicants in its database by end of 2018. The database comprised demographic information including age, sex, institution and discipline of study, year of graduation, city of permanent residence, and employment status at the time. As the national gatekeeper of this information, prior contacts were made through telephone calls and email correspondences to seek and obtain approval from the Commissioner who is the Chief Executive Officer. Written approval was formally obtained from the Commission as required by the Purdue University IRB protocol.

Participants Distribution and Recruitment

The capital city of Sierra Leone is Freetown which is the seat of government as well as the regional headquarters of the Western region. The country has three additional regional headquarters each in the Northern, Southern, and Eastern regions with sub-offices of the youth commission in the regional headquarter towns. Each regional sub-office provided the same type of services in job placement of the unemployed young graduates. Participants for this study were however drawn only from two of the four regional headquarters which included Freetown city in the Western region and Bo city in the Southern region. Individual interviews were conducted with twenty-two volunteers in the capital city of Freetown in the Western region, and four focus-group sessions with twenty-five volunteers organized into four focus groups in Bo city in the Southern region. Altogether, forty-seven volunteers were recruited as participants with almost equal numbers of men and women from each city.

From the 2017/2018 database of unemployed young graduates who were registered with the Graduate Internship program of the youth commission, random phone calls were made to inform interns about the interview and to invite them to a scheduled debriefing meeting with the researcher. Flyers/posters were displayed on bulletin boards at the offices of the Commission for general notification about the interviews. A total of 47 volunteers expressed interest in participating in the study and were recruited for the interviews (see Table 1).

A day before the commencement of the individual interviews the participants were invited to a general session in the conference room of the National Youth Commission at its headquarters in Freetown. In a roundtable session the researcher introduced himself and the

research purpose, followed by the volunteers introducing themselves and their respective disciplines of study. Participants were also informed that the interviews were going to be audio recorded and that their consents were required. At the end of the individual introductions the participants were asked to select the date and time-slots for their availability to participate in the individual interviews. A schedule was developed accordingly. In a familiarization session to further build rapport with the participants, they took turns in asking questions. The key questions that were asked centered around access to opportunities for entrepreneurship, discussions on the employment situation in the country, and job prospects in the future. These proceeded in a relatively informal fashion during which rapport was built with the researcher as the focal respondent to their questions.

The Environment, Logistics, and Procedure of Data Collection

Interview logistics (Tracy, Sarah J. 2013, p.160) was a very important consideration for the quality of the interview. The location was generally supportive, quiet, and free of disruptions and distractions. The National Youth Commission offered its office premise for the interviews. In Freetown (Western region) the individual interviews were held in the air-conditioned office of the Program Manager located in a quiet and less trafficked area of the facility. Lighting was adequate, sitting arrangement was ideal and comfortable, bottled water was available and offered to each participant. Participants were encouraged to stop the interviews in case they needed to take short-breaks. The environment was appropriately supportive, and participants were in relaxed moods throughout the interview.

Description of Approach and Techniques

Upon entry in the interview room, each interview started by offering a seat. This was followed by a short statement to welcome and appreciate each participant for volunteering and for being on time. Then protocol of introduction came next in which the researcher introduced himself as a student, stated his name, and explained that the research was to fulfill an academic requirement for my graduation. Participants were informed about the details of the interview protocols (Appendix 2: Guide A), the conversational style of interactive communication that it adopted, and a statement of assurance to the participants that the process was simple, honest,

informal and pleasant (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). Each participant self-introduced themselves, and after short interludes the first set of questions was asked concerning participants' understanding of entrepreneurship and the role of an entrepreneur. The explanations that emerged were accounts of their perceptions, their motivations, their efficacy to execute entrepreneurial activities, and how other people may have influenced their entrepreneurial intentions as significant-others. In the ensuing explanations, participants spoke a great deal on factors relating to the desirability of entrepreneurship. These explanations constituted the factors listed in analysis Appendix 1, Table 3 pertaining to the desirability of entrepreneurship in response to RQ1. The next set of questions reflected the feasibility of entrepreneurship which also emerged from explanations of participants' experiences with engagements in activities to pursue entrepreneurial events. These constituted the factors that directly facilitated the performance of entrepreneurial events, as well as those that enhanced the performance of entrepreneurial behaviors which also included barriers that inhibit entrepreneurial activities.

At the end of every interview, each participant was thanked for volunteering. Participants were then invited to ask questions on issues or concerns that they considered important which the interview might not have covered or did not adequately cover. Questions were asked and the researcher made clarifications where necessary.

Pretesting of Questions

In summer of 2017 Purdue University hosted the Mandela-Washington Fellowship program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State under the Young African Leadership Initiative (YALI) to train young entrepreneurs from different countries across Africa. During their stay on Purdue campus the group was requested to serve as respondents for pretesting the interview questions. Participants were given copies of the questionnaire to answer, and the feedback obtained from the exercise was very useful and therefore incorporated into the final questionnaire. Also, in Spring of 2018 the Purdue University School of Agriculture hosted a conference on Scaling-Up of Agricultural Technology. This conference brought together many international experts and executives of organizations working on different programs and projects in Africa. Copies of the questionnaires were also given to some of the delegates who were also young entrepreneurs at the conference. Privileged discussions were held with them. Their

comments and feedbacks provided further insights into the situation which also helped to align to questions.

Planning the Fieldwork

After approval was granted for this study with the Chief Executive of the National Youth Commission, a trip was made to Sierra Leone in November/December 2018 to conduct fieldwork. Preliminary meetings were held with the management staff of the Commission which provided the avenue for face-to-face dialogue and the building of rapport with staff members of the commission. The research mission was fully discussed to explain the purpose and goal of the study as an academic exercise to fulfill graduation requirements. The population of interest, the scope of information needed, the proposed methods of data collection, and the kind of local collaboration requested to facilitate the process, were fully discussed to legitimize the study. Permission was granted, and the Program Manager of the Commission was assigned as the focal-person to provide access to the commission's database as well as to facilitate planning meetings with graduate interns at the time.

In the ensuing roundtable discussions, the Program Manager underscored the seriousness of the problems of high unemployment in the youth population of the country as a major concern that the commission was addressing through its Graduate Internship Program (GIP). The GIP was launched in 2012 with the objective to assist graduates by providing them with work experience as a stepping-stone to the job markets. The program manager reiterated the seriousness of unemployment across the country and pointed out that even university graduates remained unemployed for between one to two years after obtaining their college education.

In these meetings a selection was made of the two regional cities for the study. Freetown, the capital city of the country in the Western region which had the highest opportunities for employment, was selected. Bo city, being the second largest city in the country and much farther away from Freetown than the Northern city of Makeni, was also selected. Participants in this study were selected from these two regions.

Data Collection Techniques

This study was conducted through open-ended, narrative-seeking, and dialogic questioning that iteratively probed the aspects of what, why, and how the participants perceived, constructed, and interpreted the meaning and understanding of the contextual factors that affected their interests, motivations, and engagement (Molina-Azorín et al., 2012) in entrepreneurship. Two approaches were used in the dialogic relationships to collect data for this study.

Individual Interviews with College Graduates

Before the interviews started every participant was again reminded that the interview was going to be audio recorded and that their consent was required. They were also advised that the interview was voluntary and that they were at liberty to decline if they did not wish to participate. Verbal consent was given and there were no objections to their participation. The questions were semi-structured, open-ended with follow-up probes, and non-leading (Tracy, Sarah J. 2013, p.144) to enhance deeper understanding of the issues. This process involved face-to-face interaction and direct talks with the participants, asking questions, paying attention to their emotional states, listening attentively, and probing to gain clarity and understanding of the entrepreneurial phenomenon from an insider's perspective (Murchison, 2010). As a rule of thumb, this naturalistic approach, driven by commitment and orientation to the tradition of exploring, understanding and interpreting participants' lived-experiences in entrepreneurship was followed in all the interviews. The ensuing conversational partnership (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, p.2-7) provided depth, rather than breadth, as the participants unveiled the social construction of their realities in narrating their entrepreneurial experience. The co-constructed relationship was established, and participants were comfortable in expressing their emotions about their unemployment and their passions for entrepreneurial success. Throughout the interviews, open dialogues were maintained, and the participants spoke about their motivations, aspirations, and experiences in the pursuit of entrepreneurial activities. They elaborated the challenges and barriers they faced and the actions they were taking to cope with the challenges. Facial expressions and body languages of excitements, curiosity, and acknowledgements were common with the participants in indicating their interests and curiosity to say more –as well as those of

the researcher to encourage further elicitation of details on the subject. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. This approach, with focus on issues that spoke to the research questions, was maintained throughout the entire interview process.

Participants asked questions to gain clarity when needed and the researcher also rephrased and restated the questions with analogies to make the questions more relatable. In some instances, such as in assessing their confidence to succeed with their entrepreneurial venture, hypothetical questions (Tracy, Sarah J. 2013, p.147) were sometimes asked so that participants would create mental pictures and imagine themselves to be engaged in the entrepreneurial actions. Where participants responded to a behavioral or action question (Tracy, Sarah J. 2013, p.148) about their engagement, they were encouraged to elaborate on the fact-related experiences with highlights on tangible outcomes. Instances like these included participant's actions toward obtaining capital for their ventures as well in citing the kinds of business activities they had undertaken in the past. Where clarifications or elaborations were necessary after a participant had finished talking, follow-up questions were asked to gain in-depth understanding on salient points.

The interview guide was structured into sections that reflected the research questions. Each section was comprised of primary questions followed by secondary questions to probe deeper into the issues (Appendix 2). The questions were phrased as simple and jargon-free (Tracy, Sarah J. 2013, p.144) sentences that were easy to understand.

The Focus-group Sessions with College Graduates

Four focus-group sessions were conducted in Bo city which is the second largest city in Sierra Leone located in the Southern region about three-hours away from Freetown where the individual interviews were conducted. In mid-December 2018, during field work, a trip was made to Bo city. The participants were also young graduate interns who had registered with the Graduate Internship Program of the commission. Because this was a business-related investigation to understand the conceptualization, motivation, rationales, and experiences of entrepreneurship, focus groups were also used as another approach to face-to-face collection of data (Blackburn and Stokes, 2012) to triangulate the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1989) with those of the individual interviews that were conducted in Freetown. Four focus group interview sessions were held in Bo city each with a membership of between 3-7 participants with the

researcher as moderator (Tracy, Sarah J. 2013, p.167-169). Three of these sessions were held at the regional office of the National Youth Commission in Bo city. One of the sessions was conducted at night in the home of one of the participants. This location was agreed upon at the convenience of the three participants who could not fit in the daytime schedule at the regional office. The other three focus group sessions held at the regional office of the National Youth Commission in Bo city were conducted in its training room. Seating arrangement was adequate, and lighting was optimal. The room was however a bit cramped but reasonably comfortable and convenient. Air conditioning was lacking, and electricity supply in the area was not available at the time. However, arrangement was made for a private portable generator and fuel was purchased by the researcher. The ceiling fans were then turned on and the room condition was made much more habitable.

A general session was held in the reception area of the regional office and the members were again informed about the details of interview including the purpose, the protocols, the format, and recording of the sessions. The group members were then ushered into the room and each was individually seated in a semi-circular fashion with the research moderator sitting in a position facing everyone. All members were conveniently seated and comfortably interacting and chatting with each other and the moderator. The participants shared homogenous backgrounds and they interacted in discussing, validating, extending, and supporting their experiences in articulating their experiences. The group-effects were outstanding in stimulating insightful self-disclosures that showcased their unique personal experiences with entrepreneurship. Synergies in individual experiences emerged which reinforced similar meanings across the members. This created an opportunity through which the shared experiences on the phenomenon supplemented themselves which also provided an opportunity for triangulation of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1989).

The same interview guide (Appendix 2: Guide A) was used to explain and clarify the research questions covering the same questions on desirability and feasibility of entrepreneurship. Each session commenced with a welcome statement by the researcher, followed by self-introduction of members including their names and their areas of study. The primary questions of the interview were asked, followed by probing and follow-up questions. All questions were asked in a discourse-generating tone, and members raised their hands to share their views, opinions, and experiences relating to the questions and the participants took turns to

respond or contribute. Since the members were sharing their unique personal experiences there were no contentious responses. Everyone had a chance to participate freely. Throughout the focus group discussion open dialogues were maintained. On the average, the focus group sessions lasted close to one hour each and the responses were mostly a reiteration of similar experiences of personal motivations, aspirations, and issues that affected their engagement in entrepreneurship. These focus group responses were also transcribed.

The visit to Bo city lasted for one week in December 2018 during which the researcher also attended a two-day retreat that was organized by the Youth Commission to review their strategic plan. Many government and nongovernmental agencies participated in the review, and the strategic sessions were specifically focused on empowering youths through the creation and promotion of access to opportunities for training and productive engagements in the workforce. From the different presentations of the delegates, the retreat provided further insights into the issues, challenges, and prospects of empowering young adults into gainful engagements.

Individual Interview with Key Informants/Resource Persons

Preliminary analysis of data obtained from the unemployed young graduates revealed considerable levels of consistency in the responses to the theoretical variables of desirability and feasibility. This necessitated a second wave of data collection to validate the findings through triangulation with a different, but relevant category of respondents. The key informants (Resource persons) in this study were persons identified through the National Youth Commission as individuals with technical and professional knowledge and experiences in providing services relating to the development of entrepreneurship in Sierra Leone. They constitute the stakeholder group in the advocacy network to promote entrepreneurship in the country and were drawn from three sources including university faculty members who are knowledgeable of the curriculum for entrepreneurial education, bank executives with experiences in the administration of business loans, and local consultants who provide technical and expert support in advising government and other agencies on policy matters relating to the development of entrepreneurship in Sierra Leone. Some of these key informants had also worked in managerial and technical capacities with focus on youth development interventions in Sierra Leone. These resource persons had worked in their respective capacities for many years and had acquired knowledge, expertise, and competence in analyzing the entrepreneurial environment, resources, and opportunities. As

resource persons they were key stakeholders and gate-keepers of critical information on the prevailing entrepreneurial environment in the country. A different questionnaire (Appendix 2: Guide C) was prepared to interview the resource persons while also bordering on the same two variables of *desirability* and *feasibility* in the entrepreneurial events model (EEM).

The Program Manager of the National Youth Commission identified the resource persons and provided their telephone contacts. The researcher then made telephone calls to the resource persons, provided them with a background to the study, sought their consent to participate, and agreed on the different timeslots for their availability. After the modalities were agreed upon, the telephone interviews were conducted by the researcher through phone calls placed from the USA to the resource persons' individual cellphones at the scheduled times.

Due to logistical constraints such as poor connectivity on the international phone lines, as well as the busy engagements of some of the resource persons, a few adjustments and postponements were made in the schedules to accommodate the inconveniences that emerged. When the phone calls were successfully placed, the same protocols and courtesies were observed in welcoming, appreciating, and thanking the resource persons for their willingness and availability to participate. The phone interviews took place in quiet environments, the questions were semi-structured and probing, the engagements were very conversational and eliciting, and each lasted between twenty-five to thirty minutes.

Recording and Transcription of Interview

All the personal interviews and focus group discussions were audio recorded. Upon review of all the clips they were electronically transcribed into word documents through online commercial transcription with a company called Tamie. Due to distinctive linguistic and phonological variations between American and Sierra Leonean idiosyncrasies of pronunciations, the voice recognition software did not accurately transcribe the audio. Many transcription errors were detected including omissions and misspelling of words. Since the interviewer is a native of Sierra Leone, West Africa, the downloaded word documents were edited for accuracy.

The above section was a description of how the data for this study were collected. The next section contains explanations of the processes through which the data were analyzed for interpretation.

Data Analysis

This section contains the description of the process of data analysis. This process involved a continuous and systematic condensation of data (Rubin and Rubin 2012, p 190) to crystallize the information through selection, focusing, and simplifying the information to make it stronger (Miles, Huberman and Saldana 2014, p.12). The data analysis started by gaining first-hand insights into the semantic and latent meanings of the data which involved an exploration of the transcripts to grasp the explicit (semantic) meanings of participants' responses, and eventually shifting focus to the underlying conceptualizations (latent) of participants' ideas (Moir & Delahunt, 2017).

Next, a step-by-step description of the information was done, and the data were organized to show the connections and alignments for chunking the data. Chunking the information helped to explain, interpret, and discuss the data from which the conclusions from the data were drawn (Creswell, 2014, p.162). This process eventually crystalized the participants' responses which ultimately matched the findings with the variables (desirability and feasibility) of the entrepreneurial event model (EEM) of the study.

As mentioned throughout this study, the experiences of unemployed young graduates in the phenomenon of entrepreneurship were examined to test the two models in answering the research questions. A thematic approach to data analysis was therefore adopted. The entire process was not linear. Rather, it involved a recursive back and forth engagement with the data to draw meaningful conclusions.

The Thematic Approach to Data analysis

A thematic approach was used to extract essential meanings for description in the data (Miles, Huberman and Saldana 2014, p.8), and was the most suitable approach applicable to the social sciences that allowed for great flexibility since this approach is not specifically pegged to any epistemological or theoretical perspective (Braun & Clarke 2006). Adopting the deductive or top-down approach that is consistent with theory-driven studies, a problem-based iterative analysis (Tracy, Sarah J., 2013, p.184) was followed by revisiting the data multiple times to extract and connect the findings with the theoretical variables of the study. Central in this process was to detection, describe, and explain the patterns that existed within and across the data to

make sense of participant responses for accurate interpretation and reporting. First, key words, phrases and expressions were identified from the data corpus and were used to cluster the responses into segments at the intermediate level. The segments were then reorganized and compared. This process illuminated the patterns and regularities that existed in the data. This crystallized and strengthened the information to further understand the data for accurate explanation of the experiences (Tracy, Sarah J. (2013, p.9) of young graduates in transforming their entrepreneurial intentions into actions within the Sierra Leone context. The data were then coded and condensed into phrases (e.g., self-employment) by identifying the recurrent concepts and topical markers into themes that represented the meanings of the responses. The emerging themes were then sorted and harmonized to summarize the theoretical themes of desirability and feasibility of entrepreneurship.

The Coding Technique and Frame

The top-bottom deductive approach, also known as the theoretical thematic approach (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) was used because this study was theory-driven, and the top-bottom approach is traditionally associated with testing existing theories by operationalizing their variables in different contexts. The coding commenced with another round of listening sessions of each of the audio recordings to take confirmatory notes for selecting the salient statements that corresponded to the research questions. The coding was done by assigning symbolic meanings in the form of short phrases to the chunk of identical pieces of information. For example, codes like “I don’t have a job so I want to start my own business”, “there are no jobs so if I do business I can support myself” and “I don’t have to look for job if I have my own business” were all chunked under the theme of self-employment and job security. In other words, if a pattern, fashion or phrase emerged consistently such as in relation to motivation for undertaking entrepreneurship, it suggested a format. The phrase was then sorted out, organized, categorized, and presented in the themes. This process of condensing codes into themes made it possible to determine the qualitative weights and significance of the explanations, interpretations, and meanings (Lindlof and Taylor, 2017). This was done to capture and interpret the meanings and essence of the patterns. In some instances, the themes were researcher-generated and in other cases they were In-Vivo themes identified from phrases used by the participants.

A data analysis matrix was then used (Data Analysis Table 3 & 4) to display the transformed data. The salience of the statements was determined by expressions of how valuable they meant to the participants as well as by the frequency with which they emerged in the data.

Open-coding technique was used. In this process the data was examined to identify the patterns. The emerging patterns suggested the format of data condensation into a conceptual framework that provided the tool in determining the matrix used to organize and display the data. Coding and condensing the data into themes therefore involved selecting, chunking, paraphrasing, and abstracting the information to depict recurring patterns that spoke to the research questions (Miles, Huberman and Saldana 2014, p.12-13).

The coding frame reflected two key questions: Why do you want to become an entrepreneur? And What makes it easy or difficult for you to become an entrepreneur? Answers to these two key questions were respectively presented in Analysis Table 3 and Table 4 depicting their integrated attributes in revealing entrepreneurship as a planned behavior that depended on the influence by contextual factors. Taking the research questions one at a time, the statements that underscored salience for the theoretical variables of *Desirability* and *Feasibility* were selected, categorized, and respectively presented in the section for findings and interpretation.

The Theoretical Framework and Contexts of the Findings

In reporting the findings of this study, the key characteristic of the thematic approach that guided the process was the alignment of the two theoretical variables of desirability and feasibility with the local context of the findings (Patton 2015, p.67) which involved mapping and connecting the different perceptions of the participants with the theory. Being a naturalistic and context-sensitive inquiry, the parameters and scope of the inquiry were determined by making sense of the critical elements in the complex interrelationships of mediating factors and how they emerged and connected with the explanatory variables of the theory. (Patton 2015 p.69). Therefore, highlighting and explaining the totality of the relationships between the critical factors and their impacts on performing the entrepreneurial activities involved a holistic approach as suggested by the GEM (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2017/2018) to enable the construction of a framework of the factors that significantly influenced the entrepreneurial motivations and execution of the activities. A holistic approach was therefore taken in contextualizing the entrepreneurial environment which captured a constellation of factors that

explained the social, cultural, political, and economic contexts in which participants experienced entrepreneurship in Sierra Leone. In that light, the theoretical and situational contexts were clearly captured in the explanations of entry-level experiences and the nuances underlying the complexity of the phenomenon as a unified whole that is greater than the sum of its parts (Patton 2015, p.67).

In the participants' narratives, the desirability of entrepreneurial events was a demonstrated construct that was portrayed in performing a systematic set of activities by either a one-time, part-time, or full-time repetitive entrepreneur which the paradigm defined as the *unit of interest* (Shapiro & Sokol, 1982). The desirability of a unit of interest was therefore narrated by participants in their explanations of "what brought about the entrepreneurial action?" and "why that particular action was undertaken and not any other action?" The choice of a unit of interest was therefore understood by understanding the influences of the social, cultural, and environmental factors on the choice of action. The multitude of reasons provided by participants was considered in interpreting the findings on engagements in business activities, the circumstances that triggered the consideration of entrepreneurship as a probable action, and the aspirations that participants had for becoming entrepreneurs.

Feasibility, on the other hand, was examined from answers relating to elements in the environment and their supportive attributes that empowered the pursuit of entrepreneurship. Taking desirability and the circumstantial stimuli into context, environmental supportiveness was captured from explanations on "why are some people more entrepreneurial than others" even though they operate in the same environment. Because, among the many possible factors that supported or impeded entrepreneurial actions, the paradigm argued that the availability of financial support was the most critical factor that predicted the initiation of entrepreneurial actions, and that efforts to acquire financial support was fundamentally predicated on affirming the nexus between desirability and feasibility. This study therefore paid considerable attention to participants' explanations of the factors, conditions, and circumstances that determined their ability to meet the challenges in achieving their entrepreneurial motivations or goals.

The Situational Framework and Contexts of the findings

Bordering on the tradition of phenomenology in communication studies (Craig, 2007, p. 79-81) this inquiry was a close examination of the situational contexts that were described in the

participants' experiences through dialogic interactions to understand the meanings of entrepreneurship. Conversational partnerships were established with participants, and the information obtained reflected the practical situations in which they experienced entrepreneurship and the impacts on entrepreneurial motivations and goals. Through the dialogic engagements different constructs and themes were identified and explained in connection with their entrepreneurial motivations, inspirations, and drives. Situational moderators also included the challenges and barriers to the pursuit of entrepreneurship. These were also identified and explained.

Determination of Saturation point in the Findings

In analyzing and interpreting the data considerable attention was given to the trends in discovering similarities and variations in the patterns of responses from which a determination was made about how far the process was stretched. All audio and video sources were transcribed. Open coding was conducted on all of the transcriptions. Subsequent analysis of open codes into their theoretical themes continued until no new themes were identified. This thematic saturation was reached in approximately 50 percent of the transcriptions. At this point the emerging responses were observed to be markedly similar, thus suggesting that a *saturation point* was reached beyond which a continuation in data analysis was practically unproductive because new information or pattern was not likely to be discovered (Lowe, et. al. 2018; Vogts, et. al. 2012, p.286 & 351).

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Overview

In this chapter the findings of the study are presented in subsections representing the themes that were generated from the data and the appertaining responses to the research questions. This includes information collected from individual interviews, focus group sessions, and from interviews with key informants/resource persons. The findings covered a range of factors that influenced or determined desirability and feasibility of entrepreneurship.

Under desirability there were two broad categories of determinants. The first category, Thematic Category I, included the antecedents to entrepreneurial intentions which were the circumstances, conditions, practices, and learnt skills that influenced the formation of desirability for entrepreneurship. These antecedent experiences occurred at childhood from experiences with family/community business practices and from the exposure to entrepreneurship courses in college. These exposures were found to have had considerable influence on the formation of desirability for entrepreneurship. The second category, Theme Category II, referred to the motivators of entrepreneurial behaviors that represented future projections of the participants in connection with five themes. These were Self-employment and Job security, Earning capacity and Financial independence, Independence in decision Making, Job Creation and Reduction of unemployment in local communities, and Facilitation of technology markets. These included descriptions of medium and long term reasons and visions for pursuing entrepreneurship.

Under feasibility, the determinants were described to represent factors of the prevailing environment that supported or inhibited entrepreneurship. The descriptions included attributes of environment that posed as challenges and barriers that impeded entrepreneurial actions and how the young graduates were navigating the phenomenon. Four factors were identified to have influenced the feasibility of entrepreneurship. These included Access to Business Capital, Networking Relationships, Entrepreneurial Education, and Business Plans/Planning.

The interpretations of the findings took cognizance of the maxims of the interpretive paradigm and tradition of constructivism of the realities of the participants (Tracy, 2013) to provide a holistic understanding of participants' viewpoints and how they constructed and reproduced the meanings of desirability and feasibility of entrepreneurship to make sense of their

situations. A hermeneutic approach was also deemed to be important to augment the interpretations by imagining the contextual motivations and experiences of the participations (Tracy, 2013).

Arrangement of the Findings

The inquiry was conducted around three research questions that were raised about desirability, feasibility, and the characteristics of environment in which the participants experience the pursuit of entrepreneurship. Each question generated a collection of themes that are presented in Tables 3 and 4 under the three categories of responses including individual interviews with graduates, focus group sessions with graduates, and telephone interviews with key informants as resource persons. Attached to each Research Question, the themes and their corresponding findings were captioned under these three categories of responses.

Findings on Research Question 1

Research Question 1: What underlying factors contribute to the perceptions of desirability to engage in entrepreneurship?

This question identified the factors, circumstances, and determinants that explained the desirability of entrepreneurship from participants' perspectives.

Antecedent Factors Contributing to Desirability of Entrepreneurship

The explanation of entrepreneurship reflected a nurturing process that was enacted by the events, circumstances and learning activities that occurred in the participants' early lives at childhood and early adulthood. These were explained as instances in which entrepreneurship materialized to influence the formation of indelible perceptions about entrepreneurship as a survival mechanism of the family. It marked the turning point in their orientations to appreciate small business activities as valuable engagements from which participants said their families raised income to provide their needs.

Family and community level antecedents

Participants said they grew up in families and communities in which a lot of business activities took place that significantly influenced the formation of positive attitudes and useful skills that set the pace for entrepreneurship. The desires for engagement in business were profoundly rooted in the exposures and experiences they received from the petty trade activities in which their family and communities were involved. The small business practices were the budding sites that served as eye openers to entrepreneurship from where they acknowledged and appreciated small businesses as avenues for survival especially in difficult times. Generally, the participants' inspirations for self-employed business ownership were nurtured at that level, and they would invoke those survival instincts in times of dire needs such as the one they were experiencing in their present situations of unemployment. They normally engaged in sporadic retailing of items when business opportunities arose. In college they supported themselves by engaging in such retail practices to buy books, pamphlets, and personal items. They did the same after they graduated from college since they did not have jobs. As unemployed persons they constantly explored their communities to identify and take advantage of opportunities for small business engagements. Those exploratory experiences systematically reinforced the desirability of entrepreneurship for self-employment and independence. Below were some of the experiences participants shared.

Keyma was in the business of making local soap and had this to share:

Soap is one of the common items people use daily. So, when I was in high school, I asked my dad to give me some money to start my own business in making and selling locally produced soap. He did. So, I started making and selling soap as a child long before I went to college.

In agreement with the above, another participant said:

Since childhood I was introduced to doing business by my family. After I lost my adopted dad our family was going through hard-times. My adopted mother embarked on doing petty trade in our community and that was how she provided for the family and supported my education.

One of the participant, **Abrah**, who said he worked with a small business owner in his local community as a sales agent, explained that during his engagement he understudied the business operation and was able to set up his own small business outlet. Below was what he said:

Before I enrolled in college, I was a sales agent for a lady who was doing telecoms business on a small scale in my community. She inspired me a great deal. I saved some money from working for her and was able to start a similar venture while I was in college. In college I also provided telecom services on a smaller scale. That was how I sustained myself in college. I made some money but did not make any savings because the money was used to pay part of my college fees and to meet other basic needs.

In these accounts, entrepreneurship provided safety-nets to upkeep families in times of hardship and inspired family members to engage in small business activities, not only with perseverance to overcome transient challenges, but with projections to successfully develop their business ventures into bigger and more enterprising engagements. One of the focus group participants shared that she picked up business skills from her mother and that she now owned a small business outlet in her hometown. She said she intended to thrust into an educational enterprise and would therefore be building a school to provide services in early childhood learning. She shared with her group that she and her husband had already secured two acres of land for that purpose and had planted over two thousand seedlings of oil palm for business.

College Courses in Entrepreneurship

The second antecedent that influenced desirability was college courses in entrepreneurship. Fewer than half of the twenty-five participants (N=25) in the focus groups said they took college classes or modules in entrepreneurship, which they acknowledged increased their understanding of the critical issues and considerations underlying entrepreneurship. Participants who said they took college courses in entrepreneurship were relatively more informed, knowledgeable, and articulate in discussing the technical details involved in entrepreneurship such as understanding the market environments and managing risk. But irrespective of whether they took college courses in entrepreneurship or not, the participants fluently discussed the functions and practice of entrepreneurship for self-employment, wealth creation for financial independence, the creation of job opportunities, and building social capital to influence decision-making in their communities. Although academic qualifications was believed to be helpful in understanding some of the critical factors for entrepreneurial success, most of the participants shared a contrary view. Their perception was that academic qualification was not a necessary requirement for entrepreneurship because practically, they said people in

their communities were succeeding in doing business without academic credentials or qualifications. For instance, one of the participants said the following:

I did not take a class in entrepreneurship when I was in college. In fact, I had no understanding of the meaning of entrepreneurship, and it was not part of my repertoire of phrases until I completed college and started to pursue my passion for helping to solve problems of my community. This was when I realized that problem-solving is also considered as being entrepreneurial. My interest in entrepreneurship has ever been to assist women farmers, and I have registered an organization to help facilitate the process.

The view that success in business was not predicated on the exposure to college courses was common among graduates who did not take such classes in college. This view however was different for graduates like **Kokoma** who said he took classes in entrepreneurship that helped him to understand the basics of business investment such as planning and staying focused on his goal. He said the classes helped to sustain his vision for entrepreneurship.

Benda, a graduate in agriculture, also said he had developed strong appreciation for the potentials of community empowerment through entrepreneurship in technology markets. He said he took classes in entrepreneurship and supported his claim by sharing a good level of understanding about the opportunities for growth in technology markets for small communities, and ended by saying that he was working on developing a venture in that line of business.

The two antecedents of family/community level business activities and the exposure to college courses in entrepreneurship came up as strong foundations in which the desirability of entrepreneurship was rooted as a means for survival in times of hardship, and the reinforcement of desirability that came through college courses.

Irrespective of whether participants took college courses in entrepreneurship or not, all of them, however, fluently discussed the functions and benefits of entrepreneurship connecting it with the motivation for self-employment, wealth creation for financial independence, the creation of job opportunities for other people, and building social capital to influence decision-making in their communities.

Post-antecedent Motivations of Desirability

The motivations for entrepreneurship expressed by participants were in synchrony with the bigger pictures that they aspired to attain in the medium-to-long term. The following were the anticipations that participants shared as their vision for entrepreneurship that motivated them sustain the desirability of entrepreneurship.

Self-employment and Job security

Self-employment and job creation were defined and explained by the participants as engagement in business activities on either a fulltime or part-time basis with the primary objective of creating an income stream to independently support their livelihoods. Self-employment and job security were cited by all the (N=47) participants in explaining the desirability for entrepreneurship. In Sierra Leone high unemployment in the youth population is one of the most frequently discussed issues across many policy interventions that aim to contribute to social and political stability toward the country's ongoing search for sustainable peace after the involvement of youths in its eleven years of civil war. The search for employment opportunities by young graduates explained why entrepreneurship resonated with self-employment and job security as the most dominant motivation underlying desirability. The general claim by participants was that every year hundreds of students graduate from the universities and go without jobs for an average period of two years. The same was shared by the resource persons in this study. During those periods of unemployment almost all of the participants reported that they survived on unspecified sources of support for their daily living. None of them had secured employment since they graduated from college, and lacked no reliable means of income to support themselves. As a result, they continued to live on the goodwill support-network of family members and friends. They expressed that the perils of unemployment instilled great senses of insecurity in them as they continued to depend on other people. This, they lamented, was seriously hurting their self-esteem. As university graduates, they said the society placed high expectations on them to be independent in taking care of their wellbeing as adults. Those expectations however remained impalpable and apparently far-fetched because the capabilities were undermined by the high level of unemployment in the country. None of them was sure about getting employed and weaned-off the dependence on handouts. That situation

represented a rising threat to their social and economic wellbeing which left them with no other option than to explore entrepreneurial actions. Their predispositions to entrepreneurial skills within their families and communities, their engagements in small business activities while they were in college, reinforced by the college course they took in entrepreneurship, became the remedy in those extended periods of post-graduation unemployment.

One of the participants, **Jatt**, a graduate in Business Information and Technology, said she grew up doing petty trade at the family-level and took classes in entrepreneurship as a required core module for her degree. She said she had long conceptualized entrepreneurship as a demonstration of initiative, creativity, and independence because it challenged and emboldened her resolve to pursue a life-changing vision of independence. Jatt said she was partially self-employed in catering and decoration and was pursuing her dream and passion for self-employment and job security. Jatt disclosed that her visit to two neighboring West African countries (Ghana and Nigeria) greatly influenced her inspiration for entrepreneurship. During that visits she said she experienced how young adults took advantage of entrepreneurial activities such as in packaging of fruits for improved marketing. Since then, Jatt said she never stopped pushing beyond her limits. In sharing her experience, she said:

My inspiration for business was greatly renewed when I visited Ghana and Nigeria where I saw youths operating their own business enterprises in packaging. After they shared their stories with me, I challenged myself to do more. As a college student I started a catering service using social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook to create my clientele. I prepared meals from home and used my car to drop-off food orders to my customers at their different offices.

Jatt said she continued doing her mobile catering service throughout the period of the 2017 Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone when colleges were suspended. After graduation from college she was working hard to develop the business and maintain self-employment, but it was very difficult for her to rebrand and elevate her venture to the level she desired.

Unlike **Jatt** who took classes in entrepreneurship, **Brigg**, a graduate in History and Sociology did not take any class in business studies or entrepreneurship but also expressed a strong desire in becoming an entrepreneur. She shared her perceptions of entrepreneurship as follows:

I understand entrepreneurship as a process of developing a business venture by producing and selling goods and services that people need. For me, entrepreneurship is a way of demonstrating my interest, talent and passion for hair dressing and treatment. I want to set up my own business because that is where

my talent and strength lie for me to be self-employed. I have done hair dressing since childhood and throughout my years in college. That was how I financially supported myself.

Amy, a graduate in Social Work and a certificate in business studies, had also remained jobless for over a year since she graduated. She said her younger sister owned a sewing business. Amy also said she desired entrepreneurship for self-employment and cited her younger sister and aunt as examples of business owners who inspired her into entrepreneurship. She said,

My sister is a business-woman, self-employed, makes a lot of money, and is financially independent and self-reliant. She is also helping other young girls in our community by training them in the skills of tailoring to enable them gain independence. Similarly, my aunt is also in the business of food supply and she too is financially independent and self-reliant. Me too, I want to be an entrepreneur, be independent, and help other young women as my sister and aunt are doing in our community.

Amy's knowledge in entrepreneurship and the business ventures of her family members significantly enlightened her about self-employment and job security. She spoke about the risks involved in sole proprietorship and her understanding of the challenges in starting a business. Amy explained the events involved in setting up a self-employed business such as identifying a suitable venture, selecting an appropriate location for the business, and getting the required capital to start. After college her plan was to find a job, raise capital, and start a business venture in retailing of cosmetics and beauty supplies because she was already doing the same on short-term credit to other students when she was in college. On holidays Amy said she would receive small quantities of food supplies from her aunt at wholesale prices and would retail them and earn money. To meet her basic financial needs, Amy had to do part-time business engagements throughout her college life. Her desire for entrepreneurship was primarily focused on becoming self-employed and helping to bring other young women into entrepreneurship and self-employment.

Other views were also shared to subscribe to job security within the family. Some participants in the group sessions mentioned that, unlike paid employments, their family members would inherit their self-employed businesses. This further underscored their desires for business ownership, not only for themselves, but to facilitate job security within their family. A member in one of the focus groups said:

As an entrepreneur, I can be self-employed and my children can inherit my business when I retire.

The knowledge that entrepreneurship provided self-employment or be undertaken as part-time engagement to supplement paid-income was very strong among the participants who said they would undertake entrepreneurship even if they became fully employed.

Earning capacity and Financial independence

Typically, all the participants were from family backgrounds that struggled with hardship from insufficient financial resources and weak support throughout their stay in college. In explaining their desires for entrepreneurship as a wealth creating venture the participants spoke extensively of the benefits of the financial powers it would accord them and how financial power is used to influence public decisions and actions. Earning capacity and financial independence were expressed as strong motivators for entrepreneurship. All the participants said they were experiencing financial hardship and felt depression about it. On these notes, participants' responses to the questions on desirability of entrepreneurship reflected a transition out of poverty.

In a rather casual tone, one of the participants mentioned that philanthropism was something he would do if he became success in entrepreneurship. When asked why, he said his community was benefiting from the interventions of social service (e.g., farming inputs, education, health, water and sanitation, road infrastructure, etc.) that were sponsored through international charity programs, and that if he gained financial empowerment, he would support charity to give back to society.

Independence in decision Making

All the participants shared the views about entrepreneurs as their own bosses with unrestrained authority to exercise power in business decisions without reference for approval. Independence in decision making was also another contextualization of entrepreneurship as the power to exercise free-will in working with their own initiatives. They said they would experiment with their business ideas and learn from their own experiences. At least three

participants alluded to this as a motivation and, when mentioned in the focus groups, it was generally endorsed by members. For example, one of the focus group members said:

As an entrepreneur I feel empowered to take steps in my business actions and can do a lot on my own without depending on other people.

Mariya, was an intern in an agency that was provided support to farmers for Food Security. She did not take any class in entrepreneurship in college but had entrepreneurial desires for agricultural business and said she was already engaged in activities to start a venture in farming: She had this to share:

I developed interest in agricultural entrepreneurship after completing college. This was after I realized that farming had great potentials for self-employment and to contribute to the national economy. Me and my friend often discussed other forms of employment that were comparable alternatives to office-based jobs. We imagined ourselves been self-employed, functioning as independence business owners, making decisions on our own, and building our capacity to employ other people in our community.

Mariya said she was interested in becoming a big groundnut farmer, and when asked why she preferred groundnut farming she giggled into laughter...saying:

Almost every household in this country uses groundnut, and groundnut farming is a popular farming activity in which women are engaged. So, by investing in groundnut farming I will also be supporting women farmers to increase their earnings from farming. Above all, I will also earn income.

On every account of desirability, all the participants expressed high levels of motivation to becoming entrepreneurs for various reasons connected to empowerment and independence.

Job Creation and Reduction of unemployment in local communities

In their different explanations of entrepreneurial desirability, the participants reflected the rising levels of youth unemployment in their local communities as a serious concern that signaled looming threats. They themselves as unemployed young graduates identified with that situation since their chances for employment were perceived as blurry and appalling. In view of the poor opportunities for employment, the desirability of entrepreneurship was also associated with its inherent attributes and capacity of increasing job opportunities in local communities. For instance, when asked about the source of her inspiration, **Brigg** disclosed that her friend's mother was a model hair dresser in her home town, and whenever she visited her friend she would often

observe her friend's mother at work, and asked her questions. She said her friend's mother started her hair dressing business on a very small scale and developed it into a reputable business venture in her local community where young adult women were employed. According to Brigg, her other two friends Precy and Mehfo, also inspired her by the successes they were making in their beauty salon shops. Brigg said her friend Mehfo dropped out of school due to teenage pregnancy but was able to turn her life around through entrepreneurship. She was therefore also encouraged by the progress her friends were making in employing young girls. She said she believed she would succeed in doing likewise. Below was what she said:

As an unemployed graduate if I am successful in owning a hair dressing saloon, I will not only be self-employed but will also provide training to young girls in my community to become hair dressers, and to also become financially independent. Teenage pregnancy is very rampant among vulnerable girls of poor family backgrounds in my community and it is attributed to high financial dependency on men. I want to give back to my community by training young girls to earn their own income rather than depending on men and getting unwanted pregnancies.

Participants with qualifications in agriculture shared the same desirability of entrepreneurship as an opportunity to create employment for other young people in their communities if they became entrepreneurs. At least three other participants in the focus groups similarly said entrepreneurs create more job opportunities for people to work and improve their lives. All the graduates in agriculture were emphatic in their beliefs that entrepreneurship would stimulate, transform, and expand local economies which consequently would improve the earning powers and quality of life in local communities. Their aspirations to become entrepreneurs were strongly associated with the belief that it would empower them to transform their lives and those of their farming communities.

Facilitation of technology markets

Facilitation of technology markets was another desire that was expressed for entrepreneurship, meaning that entrepreneurs create access to technologies that improve the quality and efficiency of services. Although the facilitation of technology markets was not a popular conceptualization of desirability of entrepreneurship with the participants, it was however strongly expressed as an important stimulus for graduates in information technology, accounting, and agriculture. Emerging from their responses to the desirability of

entrepreneurship were descriptions that featured the growing potentials for growth in technology markets in communities that were not adequately benefiting from new technologies. Among other motivations like self-employment, financial independence, and the creation of employment opportunities for other people, **Kokoma**, a graduate in Business Administration and Information Technology said he had skills in hardware and software technology that he would like to use to extend technology to his underserved hometown community. **Kokoma** said his strongest motivation for entrepreneurship was its unmatched capacity to exploit the tremendous potentials for growth in technology markets especially in rural communities. Similarly, **Benda** was a graduate in agricultural engineering and had a certificate in information technology, but was also unemployed for close to two years before he took up part-time teaching in two high schools. He expressed strong motivations for entrepreneurship with the same desirability to extend the reach of improved technology to farmers. He said:

I am interested in agricultural research to better understand the problems of farmers in my local community. I am interested in finding and applying solutions that are sustainable. My entrepreneurial motivation is toward agricultural research in providing solutions to the problems of farmers in the areas of transportation, mechanized farming, and technological innovations.

Benda's perception of entrepreneurship was to solve problems by identifying, researching, and proving lasting solutions to the challenges of farming communities. In corroborating the aspirations of other graduates who said they desired to expand technology markets in less served areas, Benda's cohort recognized that technology markets offer great potentials for business agricultural business ventures and for improving agricultural outputs in their local communities. This included business ventures focused on value-addition through processing, branding, and marketing of agricultural produce in which young graduates would become owners of small businesses to facilitate technological innovations and to diversify the economies of local communities.

Desirability in the Focus Groups

Similar with the individual interviews, all participants in the focus groups were graduates in different fields of study including sociology, banking and finance, accounting, business administration, development studies, information and communication technology, peace and conflict studies, and agriculture. Participants openly shared their inclinations toward

entrepreneurial initiatives. Generally, the responses from focus groups echoed and reinforced the same finding as those from the individual interviews. Their conceptualizations, interests, motivations, intentions, and the steps they were taking to actualize entrepreneurship corroborated those of the participants in the individual interviews.

Like those in the individual interviews, members in the focus groups also described entrepreneurs as initiators of business for self-employment, job creators, risks takers in providing goods and services for people, and creators of wealth to attain financial independence. A popular view that resonated with the participants was that even employed people were not paid enough to satisfactorily meet the basic needs of their families. Perceiving business as a means of supplemental earnings, they envisioned that they too would still do business even if they found employment. Other views corroborated in the focus groups were that entrepreneurs were self-employed innovative people who valued and enjoyed the power of independent decision-making, that they use their ideas and knowledge to solve problems, that they do not rely on other people to manage their affairs, time, or resources, that entrepreneurs benefit their communities through job creation; and their families would inherit their business and enjoy the same benefits. One of the participants in the focus group made this point which the other supported:

If I am employed, my children will not inherit my job or profession but would inherit our family business for a lifetime.

There were no empirically significant variations in the responses obtained from individual interviews and those from the focus groups. The homogeneity in their responses was a significant marker that underscored the desirability of entrepreneurship as a uniform pattern across the respondents in the two regions that the study covered. The high level of corroboration in responses between the two approaches of the study (individual interviews and focus groups) demonstrated the enduring attributes of entrepreneurship in delivering social, economic and political benefits but more so for its power in providing contingency remedies and long-term solutions to the challenges of unemployment and financial hardship.

Desirability from Key Informants' Interviews

Resources also had a lot to share on desirability as they saw it from their perspective on why unemployed graduates desired to become entrepreneurs. Popular views existed among resource persons for supporting entrepreneurship in the country. Two of the resource persons

acknowledged support for the action of the Commission on Tertiary Education to upgrade their curriculum with entrepreneurship education in tertiary institutions. One of the resource persons asserted this:

The inclusion of entrepreneurship education in tertiary institutions demonstrates government's recognition of the significance of entrepreneurship in enhancing self-employment. By immersing university students in entrepreneurship education they would acquire the competence and encouragement to do business for self-employment.

This assertion connoted the belief that entrepreneurial education has the inherent capacity to incentivize and facilitate self-employment, and that it could become a bedrock for expansion in the private sector, which is notably supposed to reduce the employment burdens on governments. Another strong perspective shared by resource persons in support of desirability was its role in national development. One of the policy experts in entrepreneurship said:

The potentials for sustained growth in the private sector, and the accompanying impacts on national development, would undoubtedly be realized when self-employed businesses prosper. Agriculture, for instance, provides the greatest opportunities for unemployed youths to be self-employed. The agriculture sector has significantly transitioned from traditional subsistence farming to commercial farming for business and this has opened the door for young graduates to create their own jobs.

Citing agriculture as a sector with great potentials for national development was a claim that recognized the vast potentials for agribusiness as a flourishing avenue for self-employment by young graduates, as well as for employing the country's large population of unskilled young adults if agribusiness was to be integrated in the entrepreneurial education programs of educational institutions. In pitching the relevance of entrepreneurial education for all disciplines in educational pursuit, one of the resource persons said irrespective of whether a person was employed or not, people of all works of life would normally engage in small business ventures to make extra money especially in situations where job earnings are insufficient. He said:

Employed people do business as part-time engagements for extra income while unemployed people undertake business ventures as self-employment. For instance, teachers in this country organize remedial teaching classes after school and on weekends. This as well is business. People are paying for those service.

Most of the resource persons said they had either been involved in business ventures for themselves, or they had assisted other people to succeed in doing business. All the resource persons expressed strong support for entrepreneurial engagements by unemployed young

graduates because the employment opportunities in the country were scarce and not improving. They all supported the inclusion of entrepreneurial education in the curriculum at all levels of schooling because it would enhance orientation to business engagements by influencing the mind-set of young adults to appreciate the value of their education as an entrepreneurial asset for problem-solving.

Summary on Entrepreneurial Desirability

Questions asked elicited answers including the antecedents and motivations that determined entrepreneurial desirability as premises for entrepreneurial actions. In the preceding sections seven themes were identified to be associated with entrepreneurial desirability. Two of them related to the immersion and grooming in business skills education at the family and community level as coping systems to provide relief in situations of financial limitations and hardships. These were reinforced by college-based educational programs in business studies and entrepreneurship. These two antecedents (i.e., family immersion and college courses) were explained to have substantially influenced the participants' entry into entrepreneurship whenever deemed necessary. The other five themes were explained as drivers and motivators that pulled participants into striving for long term entrepreneurial ambitions for self-employment. These two levels that explained desirability of entrepreneurship for immediate and long term need formed the bases of favorability for entrepreneurship.

Resource persons' perspectives on entrepreneurial desirability were mostly consistent with those of the unemployed graduates in respect of the long-term motivations, but much less on the family and community level antecedents that exposed graduates to entrepreneurial desires at their early ages. Nevertheless, resource persons deliberated extensively on the college level education in entrepreneurship to stimulate entrepreneurial desires in young college graduates, and the role it plays as deliverer of economic and social goals for national development through the expansion of the private sector. Resource persons also highlighted the capacity for the creation of employment in serving as buffer to relieve the burden on government as the sole creator of jobs in the country. RQ2 on feasibility is covered in the next section.

Findings on Research Question 2

Research Question 2: What underlying factors contribute to the perception of feasibility and success of engaging in entrepreneurship?

Answers to this question identified the factors and situations that determined feasibility of entrepreneurship either positively as a facilitator, or negatively as impediments that posed as barriers to success in entrepreneurship. The following were the findings.

Feasibility from Individual Interviews

Feasibility of entrepreneurship was approached as an assessment of the totality of the supportiveness of the entrepreneurial environment. Participants gave a constitutive account of the accessibility of available resources and how they pursued actions to make entrepreneurship possible. The details of participants' experiences also included descriptions of the challenges and barriers that impeded their actions. The study captured the exploratory experiences that constituted the themes presented Table 4.

The factors earlier identified in RQ1 as antecedents of desirability presented in Table 3 occurred at the tip of the entrepreneurial exploration where business activities were initiated. A spectrum of factors affecting feasibility was conceptualized and labelled in this study as the *entrepreneurial iceberg* that participants experienced as they explored the gap between intention and action. Shapero and Sokol (1982) explain that space to include following five steps in the transition: *Initiative taking, Consolidation of resources to accomplish objectives, Managing the initiative to achieve the goal, Exercising Relative autonomy and freedom to allocate resources,* and the *Taking of Risk*. Consistent with these key steps of feasibility, participants described their actions in reflection of their efficacies to undertake the events The following were the findings and interpretations.

Access to Business Capital

In sharing her experiences with acquiring business capital, **Jatt**, for instance, emphasized that the most dominant barrier holding her back was the lack of capital. She said she possessed skills in decoration and events planning and was doing everything possible to develop a venture in this line of business. She recognized that new business ventures were difficult to take-off and she

was taking strategic steps to network with people for financial assistance as well as in acquiring business contracts. Jatt said she had, sometime in the past, asked her siblings to assist her with a loan so she could buy and sell decorative supplies. She got promises for a substantial amount, but those promises never materialized. She was disappointed, she lamented. In refocusing her business vision Jatt embarked on an alternative line of business in catering services for which she started to again network with other people who could help her secure catering contracts. From her exploratory experiences **Jatt** shared the following:

I maintained an open mind in identifying business opportunities. The modules I took in entrepreneurship were very helpful because they enlightened me about scanning my environment and exploring available resources to determine the best business options and approaches. My level of confidence to succeed in financing my business ideas grew significantly after those classes.

Some of the key proficiencies **Jatt** said she learnt about scanning her business environment were vital resource that enabled her to identify target markets, understand the existing business potentials, and in identifying suitable locations for a business venture. She said:

Although I believe I had some good marketing skills that helped me, my biggest obstacle was to afford a suitable facility for my catering service. I could not rent a restaurant in a strategic location because I did not have the investment capital. I was hoping my family would assist me with a business loan for my initial interest in decoration and event planning, but I did not get the funds. Presently I am applying for employment and hope I will raise some money.

Meanwhile, Jatt said she was into catering services which she did for some time. Recognizing that she could not easily succeed by herself, Jatt said she was networking with her friends and other affiliates in the catering business to help her get service contracts for weddings and other social events. She added that:

Whenever I was awarded a catering contract, I mobilized my associates to team-up with me in providing the services.

Jatt's account is a typical experience that exemplified the challenging situations that most young graduates said they faced in Sierra Leone. Jatt expressed a strong desire for entrepreneurship and claimed to understand the type of business she wanted to do. She said she did petty businesses to support herself through college which was why she valued entrepreneurship for the financial independence it accorded. She explored different forms of business in case one business activity was not feasible. The level of resilience Jatt claimed to have demonstrated in making her business ideas work was a powerful commitment to pursue her business desires. She finally

reiterated that the greatest limitation that hindered her entrepreneurial desire was the lack of access to business capital.

Another exploratory account that threw light on feasibility was **Amy's** explanation. In her statement she pointed out the desperate efforts she made to raise funds. She said:

I have made desperate attempts to raise capital. My friend came to my aid by putting up some amount of money to start, but we soon realized that the fund was insufficient. The lack of capital was therefore the most important limitation for me, but I plan to save some money from my internship allowance. My preferred line of business is in cosmetic supplies and I know it is a big challenge to raise capital. So, I am willing to go into partnership. I also believe I need further training in business development which I hope to acquire through networking with successful entrepreneurs.

Similarly, **Abrah** expressed strong desires to scale-up the telecom services in his local community by diversifying the stream of business to include other needed services that were not immediately available in his community. Abrah said that line of business also needed reliable financing, but he was facing financial challenges that he described as insurmountable in the following statement:

It is important to have business knowledge and understand the different factors and strategies that operate in the business environment. Nevertheless, the lack of finance is the biggest limitation to becoming an entrepreneur. After college my new vision was to develop the venture and expand my services. I knew this required a new level of financing which I did not have. The lack of funds to expand my venture became a disincentive because my chance for getting business capital was very slim and almost impossible. I therefore deferred my plans until I work to raise some capital for the investment.

In a desperate determination to secure bank loan for his business aspiration in agriculture **Benda**, another participant, thought he had a plausible idea to overcome the huddles of collateral security. He said:

After college I thought about obtaining a business loan from the bank and my opinion was that I could turn over my college diploma to a bank to serve as assurance or security for a business loan. But I later realized that my certificate did not have any monetary value. Instead, the bank insisted on an asset like a house with commercial value, and I did not have it.

Benda was smiling at this point, making fun of himself and inducing laughter in the interview session. He said it was ridiculous when he later learnt that college certificates had no monetary value to serve as security for bank loans. Benda lamented the underutilized potentials for

investment in the agriculture sector and how the funding agencies in the country were not supporting young adults to do agribusiness.

Garvey was a graduate in Business Administration and Management who also took classes in entrepreneurship. He said he was interested in the commercialization of cocoa and coffee beans as his line of business because his late dad was a farmer and he could assist farmers to improve the commercial values of their produce if he succeeds. Garvey gave a good description of a business proposal, spoke eloquently about entrepreneurship, and explained the constraints involved in doing business especially relating to the acquisition of resources. When Garvey was asked if he had taken any steps toward realizing his business intention he said:

I have discussed my business idea with my older brother. He applauded the idea and acknowledged that it was viable but concluded with concerns for financing.

When Garvey was asked about the role of banks as funding sources he said:

I have not contacted any of the banks because it is a waste of time. The requirements for obtaining loan are not achievable. I have therefore resorted to finding a job to start raising some capital if possible. When I was in college I wrote a business proposal for processing of cocoa and coffee beans in this country as my class project. I have the idea, and I do have a business plan, but I have not launched out the venture because of financial limitation and the banks are firm on collateral security.

All the participants spoke about the need for finance to start their ventures but the relevance of a business plan as a strategic instrument for acquiring partnership or loans was not perceived as a strong need.

Financial constraints or the lack of access to capital was a common denominator that was dominant in the narratives on feasibility. The acquisition of venture capital was the most insurmountable challenge the participants experienced, but they were also very resilient in their search to identify different streams of financial support for their proposed entrepreneurial events.

Networking Relationships

Recognizing that networking relationships and collaborations with successful business people are resourceful for success in entrepreneurship, some participants explored the experience. For instance, **Amy** explained how she was following a successful businessman [name unknown] on social media because he held inspiring and enlightening talks about micro-

financing for small business. She said she learnt a lot from his mentoring programs on local TV, radio talks, and online services. Amy concluded by saying:

I even applied to join his program, but I was not successful.

A graduate in agriculture also explained his experience with a prominent agribusiness supplier (Mr. Kamau) when he asked for an internship opportunity. He said:

I asked for an opportunity to serve as an unpaid-intern in Mr. Kamau's business, but I was not successful. There was a lot I could have learned from his enterprise, but after I was turned down I became so discouraged that I did not contact him again. I later found out that he had some problems with our college internship coordinator. Even after I graduated was still hesitant to ask him because I think he will reject me again knowing that I was a student during that period that he had the conflict with the internship coordinator.

Mariya, the intern in food security, said she was learning a lot from her assignment and believed that her motivation to become a groundnut farmer got stronger with her internship assignment.

After a short pause Mariya continued:

Knowing that this agency [name withheld] supported farmers, I discussed my business ideas with my supervisor in anticipation that some form of support was available to get me started. But I was told the agency was experiencing resource constraints in supplying seeds to farmers. I however remain confident about my plans because I have already acquired a piece of land and the youths in my community are ready to form the workforce. My dad is willing to assist me when he gets some money.

Mariya said she was encouraged by a member of her church who was succeeding in a similar venture in processing, packaging, and selling peanut butter.

My church member started on a small scale and her venture is growing. She is employing youths in the area [Northern region] and she inspired me a lot. I am very motivated to become a farmer but agricultural businesses are expensive ventures and my greatest challenge is the lack of finance.

These accounts of self-facilitated attempts to enact feasibility were indicators that young graduates were striving to make connections with extant resources to support their entrepreneurial actions such as the exploration of mentoring opportunities and partnerships to overcome some of the common barriers to entrepreneurship. From all the experiences shared, the entrepreneurial environment posed serious challenges and limitations to the enactment of entrepreneurial actions. Many of the same experiences emerged from participants in the focus groups.

Entrepreneurial Education

The statements pertaining to entrepreneurial education were also perceived to underwrite feasibility. The knowledge and skills acquired from exposures to college courses were reportedly disclosed to have increased the levels of confidence and nurtured participants' entrepreneurial visions. Although the participants who took courses in business-related studies were observed to be savvy in explaining the attributes of entrepreneurship, those who did not take such classes, nevertheless, also strongly expressed their ability to succeed in business activities. This was evident in the following statement by a member in one of the focus groups who posited that her college education did not connect her to entrepreneurship, but her determination was comparable to those who took college courses in entrepreneurship:

As a graduate in Liberal Arts I did not take a class in entrepreneurship when I was in college. In fact, I had no understanding of the meaning of entrepreneurship, and it was not part of my repertoire of phrases until I completed college and started to pursue my passion for helping to solve problems of my community. This was when I realized that problem-solving was also considered entrepreneurial because it had everything to do with initiatives. My interest in entrepreneurship is therefore to assist women farmers, and I have registered an organization to help facilitate the process. I know it is possible and I am determined.

Similar expressions were made in asserting that success in entrepreneurship was not contingent on taking college courses. For instance, Brigg, another graduate in the liberal arts, was also strong in asserting that her entrepreneurial ideas were not fostered through college education. She said she did not take a single course in business related studies, but she was similarly inspired and determined to own a business in hair addressing in her hometown. Her aim was to train and enable young girls to gain financial independence which she believed would help to minimize the incidence of teenage pregnancies in her hometown community.

In a post interview discussion with the participants, some reinforced their claims that the entrepreneurship courses they took in college were very enlightening for business prospecting, but two other participants who had not taken college courses in entrepreneurship admonished that their statements were not to derogate the significance of entrepreneurship education for success in business ventures. Rather, they reiterated that they were making the point that, although entrepreneurship education was a stimulus for some people, there were other strong drivers that influenced entrepreneurial intentions. They cited many successful businessmen in the country who did not go to college, let alone talk about taking college classes.

Business Plans/Planning

Business plans are very instrumental in the operations of a business venture, but when participants in the individual interviews and focus groups were asked about their business plans, the common responses were that they did not have one. The common statements proffered by participants were:

Although I am taking steps to set up my business, I don't have a fully developed business plan.

When asked about a business plan, another participant said:

I have not taken any steps toward obtaining a loan from the bank or any financial establishment. Although I do not yet have a documented business plan, I am confident that I will succeed if I get the necessary financial support. I have promises from friends, but they require me to come up with some money before they support me. I therefore have a three-year projection to personally raise money toward setting up my venture.

Zyke was a graduate in accounting and said he realized the growing need for training in accounting software applications and wanted to set up a training service since he knew employers who needed such competences for their accounting technicians. He said the potentials for business in financial services training was huge and he had had conversations with some of his college mates with similar beliefs in the prospects for business in accounting technology to succeed. However, the greatest limitation he faced was the start-up capital for which he said he was looking for business partnership:

I have not approached any bank for a loan because the requirement for collateral security is uncompromising. I understand the need for a business plan to acquire loans, but I don't have one at this time.

In one of the focus groups a participant however admonished his group by drawing attention to the significance of having a good business plan when he said:

Although the location, type and size of a business are important considerations, a well-developed business plan is a very strategic tool for success because it organizes the business ideas in a logical form that explains the intentions and operations of the business with clear projections of success.

Although good business plans were identified as critical resources in determining the feasibility of entrepreneurial events, they were the least mentioned item among all of the required tools mentioned for good practice of entrepreneurship.

Feasibility from Focus Group Sessions

Similar views were heard from the groups in highlighting the key factors of feasibility. Members in the focus groups also made efforts by taking actions to increase their chances of success. They also contextualized feasibility to be contingent on the *feasibility facilitators* in the entrepreneurial environment and their influence.

An important point that was noted from the experiences shared by all the participants was no significant differences existed between the experiences shared in the individual interviews and those of the focus groups. The views and experiences corroborated across the responses obtained from the two approaches. However, in the discussion with one group, the members shed light on personal savings as a forceful momentum of feasibility. They asserted that, no matter how meagre it may be, the tenacity in restraining spending money to save toward investment in business ventures was a major demonstration of determination to enact feasibility. This suggested that feasibility, connoting availability of finance, could be nurtured personally by making small savings to supplement external sources. Participants who held that view in underscoring self-enhancement of feasibility shared their experiences but one of them made a more compelling contribution, saying:

I was adopted in a family since childhood and introduced to business by my adopted parents. After I lost my adopted dad our family was going through hard-times. With the little income she had, my adopted mother was determined to embark on doing petty trade in our community and that was how she provided for the family and supported my education. Since then, I developed strong appreciation for entrepreneurship because I realized how the power in saving small amounts of income made the big difference in our lives. In short, I was inspired by my adopted family to appreciate that perseverance and integrity can help grow a small business initiative into a bigger business venture. I am therefore confident about succeeding with small amounts of personal savings to invigorate my business initiative.

In supporting the claim that small amounts of personal income could make big differences if the determination was strong, another member in the group shared her experience as follows:

I grew up in a setting where most poor families used their meagre financial resources to undertake some form of business activity to survive. My mother was a small-business woman as well, and she passed those skills to me. I therefore started doing my own business with a very small amount of money. I was in high school and have maintained the tradition of small-business engagement throughout my college life. Without waiting to access big money I have been selling small wares and household items to earn my own income and this became

a form of survival for me. Starting off with a small amount, I now own a small business outlet [store] in town. I experienced this as an entrepreneurial strength that was nurtured since I was a teenager.

These examples of resilience in saving to start small business activities were strong experiences that nurtured beliefs and confidence that small savings could become powerful forces in the enhancement of financial feasibility.

Resilient Savings

The views on resilient savings through restrictive spending of meagre resources was mentioned a few times as an ideal, but was not a common opinion among participants. This was partly perceived as an impossibility since the participants were just barely surviving on the support of family and friends. Personal saving was of course an ideal for starting business but not when prospective entrepreneurs lack dependable source of income.

Feasibility from Resource Persons/Key Informants' Interviews

Resource persons generally held the view that the potentials of entrepreneurship as a problem-solver were huge, but the realization was constrained by many factors, and that unemployed graduates who intended to be self-employed through entrepreneurship were typically encountering the same challenges and limitations that other potential entrepreneurs normally experienced. In the context of unemployed young graduates with entrepreneurial ambitions, resource persons also conceptualized feasibility of entrepreneurship as the availability of opportunities that support or facilitate the pursuit of entrepreneurial activities by minimizing or eliminating the constraints and barriers that prevent viable entrepreneurial ventures from reaching their full potentials. Given their backgrounds, resource persons shared wider, in-depth, and technical perspectives on the feasibility of entrepreneurship than was observed with the young graduate participants. All the resource persons attributed the problem to a historically weak support system for youth entrepreneurship which, they suggested, needed to be overhauled with innovative approaches such as building effective business incubators and post-training start-up kits for prospective entrepreneurs to jump-start their business initiatives. One of the resource persons claimed that:

The challenges are huge, and youths aspiring to become entrepreneurs are more inclined to follow the sole business models that are highly risky. The corporate mentality of partnership building is not strong among youths. There is therefore great need to help youths in exploring the partnership option of business modeling since the challenges are huge, the opportunities are few, support systems are not consistent and are mostly short-lived with dubious schemes.

The following were the responses of the bank executives in respect to obtaining business loans from the banks:

Bank loans were available because that is how we generate profit. But the loans we give are mostly in the forms of short-term credit facilities like salary advances and overdrafts. Temporary and revolving loans are usually extended to customers whose monthly salaries are paid directly to the banks. There are strict requirements that such loans must however be co-signed by employers to guarantee that salary payments and terminal benefits would be made directly into the bank account of the employee before they qualify for such loans.

This indicates that, for anyone to qualify for such loans, the applicant must be employed. In the case of unemployed young graduate, the employment-based loan with the banks was prohibitive.

A senior bank executive said:

Long term business loans were based on track records and the demonstrated ability of the business venture to prepay the loans. The qualifying judgments would be made from the performance of existing business venture such as cash-flows, forecast of profit, existing liabilities, assets of the business, and the overhead costs of running the business.

Implicitly, unemployed young graduates do not also qualify for such loans because none of them had a business venture with such performance track records. Another bank manager said:

Depending on the type of business and the amount of loan that would be requested, a form of collateral security such as landed assets (e.g., Real estate properties and lands) was required especially if the loan was assessed to be of high risk. This is because in the event of default to loan repayments such collateral items would be used as last resort to recover the loan. We however feel very constrained and uncomfortable to confiscate people's assets when they default. It is not a good practice especially in environments with unfavorable business climates. Besides that, we are also aware that this requirement is not helping the situation of young business people.

Similarly, the young graduates claimed that the items for collateral security required by the banks were not achievable as their families did not have assets of such commercial values to offer.

Competitive business plans were said to be a major requirement that college graduates were not able to produce. A former bank manager, now working in the non-profit sector, shared the following:

Competitive business plans were strong requirements for bank loans because such instruments are used by the banks to gain evaluative insights into the proposed operations of the venture. Business plans provide detail explanations from which the viability and profitability of the business venture are evaluated. Business plans help to minimize risk. In addition, pre-financing facilities were however available for new business ventures, but such ventures would be required to demonstrate ability to repay, and most of these graduates cannot even produce a good business plan.

All the participants said they did not have competitive business plans, which amounted to the fact that they were highly risky borrowers with no clear roadmaps to demonstrate their abilities to repay bank loans. They were therefore not considered as suitable borrowers of bank loans. A bank executive had this to share:

Unlike corporate businesses, sole proprietorships or one-man businesses were given limited loan facilities because of the high risks associated with such operations. Generally, young graduates who intend to start businesses usually propose sole proprietorships which is not a favorable model of investment for the banks.

One of the policy experts shared the following experience that was also confirmed by a senior bank executive:

Few years ago, government provided the banks with some funds to experiment a plan to finance small-to-medium enterprise (SMEs) initiatives. A few graduates benefited from the funds when they learnt about it, but the proposals were generally not attractive. Some of the unemployed graduates however got the loans but the repayments were unsuccessful and the banks had to treat them as bad-loans because they were never recovered. It was a loss to government and a bad experience for the banks.

The general views expressed by resource persons about bank loans and business plans were that most of the young graduates aspiring to be entrepreneurs would only narrate their business intentions and ideas without translating them into viable and competitive business plans. Another resource person claimed that:

Generally, young graduates aspiring for entrepreneurship did not understand the fundamentals of entrepreneurial engagements to thrive in difficult business environments. Yet, they expected to be fully pre-financed to start business. It is

understandable that they do not have money to start business, but without a viable business plan no one would grant them loans. It is very risky.

Conceptualizing feasibility as an enablement, the course structure of entrepreneurship was also brought into focus by one of the resource persons, **Ndappy**, who expressed critical views about the appropriateness of the curriculum. In questioning the training of young graduates to be proficient in entrepreneurship for self-employment in an environment with a history of high unemployment, a strong view was posited about major deficiencies in the college curricula for entrepreneurship. Ndappy expressed his concerns about the college curricula:

I have participated in some of the course reviews of the universities and my assessment was that the universities were primarily focused on teaching modular-based academic courses in entrepreneurship in an environment of depressed employment opportunity. It is my view that without application-driven and practical orientations to entrepreneurship, the concept of entrepreneurship for self-employment would only remain a dream.

Ndappy and other resource persons identified some practical areas for inclusion in the curriculum. These included *i*) in-depth understanding of the dynamic nature of business operations, *ii*) understanding of local market structures for business decision-making, *iii*) adequate skills in identifying the nature of demand for the goods and services to supply, *iv*) developing a business concept and model that matches the market structures, *v*) analyzing and exploring the potentials for growth and expansion, *vi*) developing solid business plans that reflect the capacity of the venture to compete and survive, *vii*) mobilizing the level of financing required to jump-start the initiative, *viii*) managing the set of skills and resources to effectively compete, and *ix*) developing the ability to assess and manage risks in the business cycle. In their views, these competencies were very critical for successful entrepreneurship but they were apparently either insufficiently addressed or were lacking in the skills repertoire of young graduates who aspired for entrepreneurship.

Summary of Findings on Feasibility of Entrepreneurship

Feasibility of entrepreneurship was perceived as an outcome of non-linear interactions between multiple factors and moderators that facilitated, encouraged, fostered, and enabled prospective entrepreneurs with limited financial capabilities to initiate business ventures. There was a general acknowledgement that feasibility was the most crucial variable that determined the

initiation of meaningful actions toward creating a business venture. As the center-piece of entrepreneurship, the broad tenets of feasibility were drawn from multiple avenues beginning with business practices that exposed participants to the basic skills in doing small businesses at family and community levels. These were the early steps in the scheme of events that relieved poor families of financial burdens even though they were rudimentary. Secondly, the knowledge acquired by some participants from college course also conveyed elements of feasibility. Both of these avenues, in addition to influencing desirability on the grounds of acquired skills, also played fundamental roles of infusing skills, knowledge, and confidence in the participants. They used such confidence as springboards to pivot into entrepreneurship. Most of the participants said they practiced petty trades to support themselves in college since they had had those business skills as resources they perceived as feasibility factors.

Of all the feasibility factors that participants spoke about, financial capability was identified as the most influential. Every participant pitched their financial limitations and constraints as the most serious hindrance. Business loans were not accessible by participants because the requirements for such institutionalized loans were beyond their capabilities. Nevertheless, the participants did not relent in scanning their environments for alternative sources of financing such as asking family members and friends for financial support even though they were not forthcoming. Resource persons, on the other hand, touched on the challenges of unemployed graduates to produce competitive business plans for application of bank loans. Business plans were a strong requirement, but young graduates contended that the lack of collateral security was the key hinderance that prevented them from qualifying for banks loans even if they provided competitive business plans. Overall, the entrepreneurial environment was characterized as less incentivizing for the participants to thrive in entrepreneurship. The resource persons and young graduates asserted that huge potentials however existed for entrepreneurship and that could change the landscape of entrepreneurship if government support services and favorable policies were put in place to facilitate the participation of young people in entrepreneurship.

Findings on Research Question 3

Research Question 3: How does the entrepreneurial environment affect entrepreneurship?

In the responses to RQ1 and RQ2, a lot of information was shared about entrepreneurial opportunities and their relevance for action. RQ3 was intended to describe the overall impact of the elements of the entrepreneurial environment that affected entrepreneurial action by participants. Most of the findings reported in this section, reflecting the supportiveness of the environment, were predicated on the findings that came up in the previous research questions, but were reflected in this section as well since the variables are interconnected. Although the views of young graduates subscribed to highlighting some of the issues they mentioned as expectations, the resource persons approached the phenomenon more from the policy perspective and program intervention. Four of these factors emerged in elucidating the policy issues that were paramount to the entrepreneurial environment. These included i) financing, ii) business education, iii) mentoring, and iv) networking.

Financing

The study found that almost all of the participants were from predominantly subsistence farming families and struggled to support themselves through college. Their inability to start-up a business venture was described in the context of poverty and the associated financial constraints. All the participants claimed that they would start and promote their business ventures if financing opportunities existed. Statements on financial incapability resonated throughout the study. They underscored financial constraints as the single, most powerful, and dominant challenge the participants were trying to overcome. Participants made different attempts to address the financial limitations they encountered, but the operating environment was fraught with disincentives that impeded the pursuits. The entrepreneurial environment was generally described by participants as unsupportive.

Skills in developing business plan came up as a major concern expressed by resource persons. The lack of business planning was believed to partly blur and conceal the entrepreneurial potentials of the participants, at least from the perspectives of resource persons. The strategic elements that constitute a good business plan and why participants needed to have the skills in articulating a competitive plan included the skills inventory that resource persons spoke about. These were skills in developing clear goals and objectives, forecast and project market trends, risk analysis and mitigation strategies, understanding the business cycles, budget development, understanding the roles assets and liabilities play in business, and understanding

the detailed roles and responsibilities of everyone in managing the business. Resource persons asserted that the inability of college graduates to produce good business plans was a limitation that college curricula should address to improve the chances of young graduates in accessing bank loans. Some of the participants who took college courses in business studies also understood the importance of having good business plans as roadmaps, but none of them said they had a business plan other than verbal explanations of their business ideas. Resource persons, specifically bank executives, affirmed that the banks' primary objective was customer acquisition, and to support entrepreneurship in expanding the private sector, but they were emphatic about ensuring that loans were fully repaid, and that good business plans were part of the predictors of the ability to repay business loans. They asserted that their policies on loans may be a constrain on young graduates, but the banks could not compromise them.

The prospective young graduates were not taking advantage of the bank opportunities since they perceived that bank loans were prohibitive. Only one of the graduate participants mentioned that interest rates of banks loans were high and not motivating. Since participants perceived bank loans as prohibitive, they contended that it would be a waste of time to even apply for bank financing because they were not able to meet the criteria.

The fact that a good business plan was not part of the participants' business repertoire indicated that the they were not prepared to pursue formal institutionalized loans. Their strongest hopes for business financing were found to be coming from their ability to make small personal savings, informal non-institutional loans, and promises by friends and family members, which they said were unreliable and mostly not forthcoming. Overall, the participants generally held the view that success in business corresponded to their ability to overcome their financial challenges but the entrepreneurial environment was not supportive in that light. The two elements that wedged the participants away from the banks were business plans and the inability to produce collateral security.

Business Education

Although capital was mentioned as the most critical resource for start-up ventures it was, nevertheless, generally expressed that financing alone was not the panacea, but was one in a combination of other resources constraints. Another element that resonated with some of the participants was the need for business education and mentorship. This was highlighted by only a

few of the participants but predominantly by resource persons as relevant for nascent entrepreneurs to acquire additional skills such as in market intelligence, identifications of business opportunities, and broad understanding of business models with focus on market niche.

Mentoring

Mentorship was another less mentioned resource by graduate participants that was identified by resource persons as critical for exploration of the business environment for viable alternatives and learning from experienced entrepreneurs. Mentoring was identified as a power resource that would benefit young entrepreneurs by learning from the experiences of successful entrepreneurs who are knowledgeable about business opportunities and overcoming the challenges involved in operating within the Sierra Leone business environment.

Networking

Similarly, networking was not a frequently identified resource among the participants, but also pointed out as a helpful skill in scanning for opportunities through connections and consultations with successful entrepreneurs, and for making sound judgments in business decisions and in managing business risk. Although some of the participants knew people who were doing well in business without university education, they however believed that college education, business mentoring, further training, and consultations were empowering resources for navigating and prospecting the entrepreneurial terrains for new opportunities.

Agricultural Potentials for Job Creation.

Graduates in agriculture held common views on the underexplored potentials of farming as a business and were inspired to tap into those areas so that small farmers could be connected to global market resources by taking advantage of information technology and improved technology in farming. They believed their college education in agriculture prepared them to play the role of agribusiness entrepreneur. Typical in their discussions were the issues of information technology in which they emphasized that farmers needed information to connect with global markets so they could be empowered to first compete locally and to systematically advance into value-addition technologies on global scenes. As young agriculturists they expressed strong interests, views, and compassions about taking the lead in charting the course to

effectively utilize underexplored opportunities that would improve the agricultural landscapes, and that agricultural entrepreneurship was the step in that direction. They shared strong convictions that they uniquely form the bridge to close the technology gaps that was holding their farming communities back from optimizing the benefits of agriculture such as in providing jobs for the growing number of unemployed youths, but they expressed strong disappointments that the business environment was not promoting agriculture as a potential avenue for growth. They elaborated on the point that government was also not creating the right incentives to encourage young graduates into doing agricultural businesses or, at least, there was not enough evidence to show for it. The next chapter contains the discussion of the findings and conclusions.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

Overview

This was a theory-driven inquiry to understand and describe the behaviors and determinants that explain the processes of entrepreneurial endeavors. Conceptualizing entrepreneurship as a behavioral process, the focus of this study was to understand and explain the patterns through which two variables, desirability and feasibility, were demonstrated by unemployed young graduates in bringing about entrepreneurial actions in Sierra Leone. The determinants and moderators operating in the intention-action gap and how they influenced the transition from intention to actual behavior, relative to contextual nuances, formed the theoretical significance of this inquiry. The study was grounded in the integrated entrepreneurial model of Schlaegel and Koenig (Figure 3) in which the antecedent variables (i.e., desirability and feasibility) were explained as the immediate predictors of entrepreneurial behaviors. Based on the findings, two separate, but interrelated models (Figures 4 & 5) were developed in this study to explain the transition from entrepreneurial intentions to action in a developing country context. Many factors were found to influence the transition process with implications for communication, education, and policy implementations to help facilitate entrepreneurship in developing countries.

General Discussion

Two interrelated models were developed from the findings of this study. These include the *Entrepreneurial Desirability Behavior Spectrum* (Figure 4) and the *Interactive Feasibility Field* (Figure 5). Representing the two variables of desirability and feasibility, these models are depictions that describe the findings on the transition from entrepreneurial intention to action. Entrepreneurial desirability was found to be stretched along a spectrum of structured cohorts of events. Similarly, feasibility was shown to be influenced by a complex mix of interacting factors. These two processes occurred simultaneously to intersect and culminate to permit entrepreneurial behaviors. The first model explained the processes involved in moving from perceived desirability to the formation of entrepreneurial intentions that result to actual

desirability as an outcome that is demonstrated by launching a business venture. The second model explained the process in moving from perceived feasibility to actual feasibility that also connected to practical steps that are involved in realizing entrepreneurial behaviors. These two models conjoin to explain the actualization of entrepreneurial behaviors. The discussion of the findings from the current study is situated within the elements of these two models that explained how unemployed young graduates in Sierra Leone were transforming their entrepreneurial dreams and intentions into actual behaviors in setting up a business venture.

Theoretical Contributions and Implications

The Entrepreneurial Desirability Behavior Spectrum

There are several areas in which current scholarship in entrepreneurship is understudied or underdeveloped. In this section, two models are suggested and elaborated from the findings in this study. The models are descriptive of the constituent factors underlying entrepreneurial activities in Sierra Leon. In the model that describes the entrepreneurial desirability behavior spectrum, entrepreneurial desirability is described to occur at two levels identified as **Phase 1** and **Phase 2** which are respectively referred to as the *Contingency phase* and the *Consolidation phase* of desirability. The contingency phase of desirability is explained in relation to immediacy of actions for survival when entrepreneurial actions were evoked to meet and address pressing needs. Entrepreneurial activities pursued at this level were intended to deliver instant results like immediate cash flows to sustain participants' routine living expenditures. The immediacy actions were associated with the diminishing support they once received from family and friends when they were in college. Desirability was strongly associated with the urgent need to change the trajectory of dependence on family and social networks. Throughout, the participants noted that they were of poor family backgrounds with livelihoods in subsistence farming and petty trades. Their family resources were generally insufficient. Evident in participant explanations was the inherent tradition of social support network, but upon achieving higher education or career goals, a shift was speculated where graduates, former beneficiaries of social support systems, were expected to roll out of family support. This expectation was higher after university education and the young graduates were under tremendous pressure to accelerate their independence and quickly step up to take full responsibility for themselves. This was evident with participants who

said they were hawkers doing petty trades by selling personal supplies and other consumable items to their fellow students when they were in college. Similar models of business practices were maintained after participants graduated from college.

Desirability of entrepreneurship at the contingency level was also understood to be rooted in the events and circumstances that occurred in the participants' lifetimes in which entrepreneurial activities played significant salvaging and remedial roles that remarkably influenced the formation of favorable perceptions about entrepreneurship. Participants' accounts of the positive roles that entrepreneurship played in bringing financial relief and life-changing experiences to their families in times of hardship reflected the indelible experiences and confidence in entrepreneurship to cushion hardship. This was the dominant view shared by the participants who had also been exposed to, or immersed in, business activities within the family and their neighborhoods from which they got the orientations that shaped their perceptions about entrepreneurship. While the participants were in college, they brought with them those business skills which reawakened the desirability of entrepreneurship that triggered a range of reengagement in business activities to support themselves through college. They turned to entrepreneurial engagements through petty trades as desirable behaviors to supplement the meagre support they got from their families. This was how they were able to buy their books, food, and personal supplies.

This phase was also typically a period of desperate search for employment. Some participants indicated that if they found good jobs with adequate incomes, they would defer entrepreneurship and suspend their active pursuit of feasibility. Such deferments were implied to be associated with the hassles of setting up a business venture when fulltime employment would have replaced their engagement in hawking. Other participants however maintained that they would still hold on to entrepreneurship as a part-time activity with intermittent pursuit of feasibility. Part time entrepreneurial activities were associated with reasons related to job insecurity or jobs that do not pay very well. This claim was rationalized by participants who said that the salary structure in the country was generally less than impressive and many fulltime employees were known to be engaged in doing part-time businesses together with their family members.

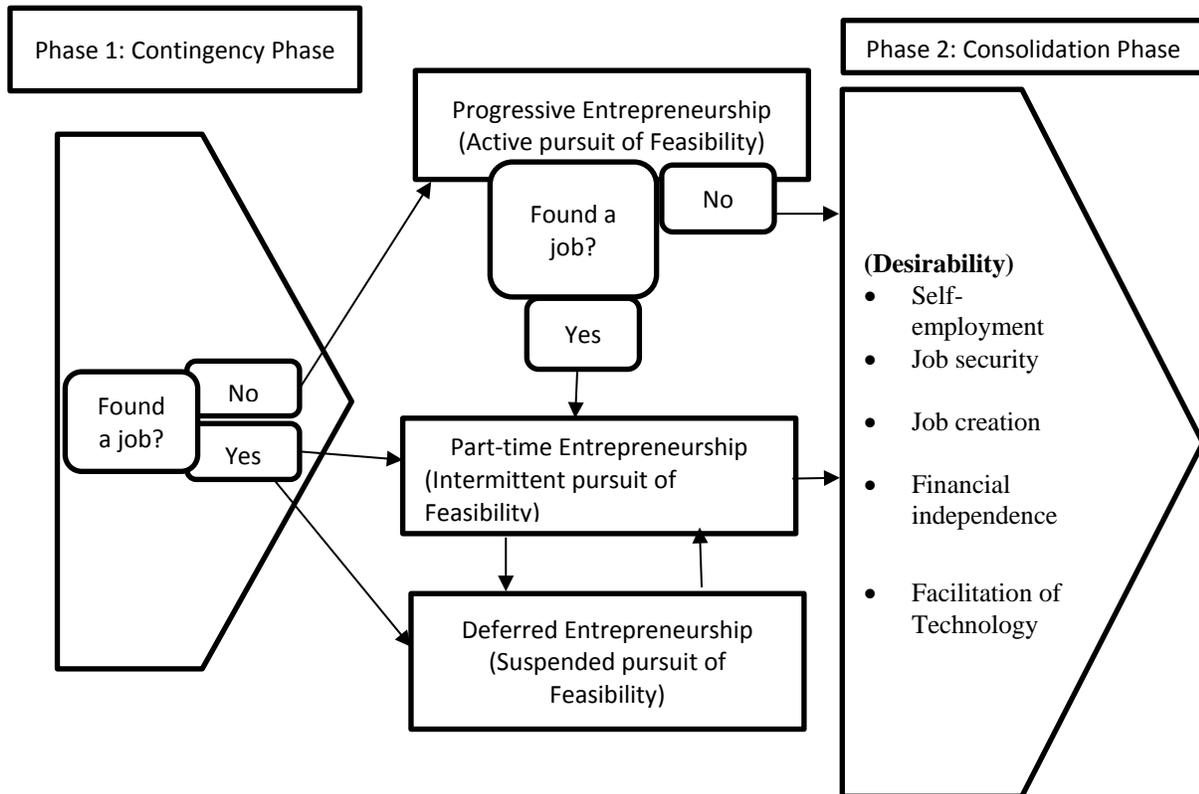
At the time of the study, all the participants (graduates) had been unemployed for at least a year and were going through hardship. They had either reengaged in entrepreneurial activities

or were anticipating reengagement after they graduated from college and were unemployed. Knowing, from childhood and through college, that entrepreneurial engagements provided some assurance of survival in critical times, the positive orientations toward business were noted to have formed the foundation of confidence that the participants perceived as a lifeline skill. They reverted to entrepreneurship as a *fallback* when their survivals were challenged by financial hardship. This *lifeline fallback* phenomenon of entrepreneurship was explored by participants in enduring unemployment after graduating from college. Most of the participants in this study were at this *level of contingency actions* on entrepreneurship to cope with the challenges and crises of unemployment. They described a cluster of short-term immediate entrepreneurial events ranging from entry-point identification of business activities they were contemplating, verbal descriptions of business plans and intentions, making considerations for securing venture resources, consultations to look for partnerships, searching for mentorship, and other information seeking behaviors such as constructive dialogues with successful business owners. These were the benchmarking activities associated with the contingency phase. Participants surrounded themselves with diverse ideas about finding jobs mixed together with entrepreneurial intensions, and they would embrace either opportunity for job or business depending on which one offered greater incentive or likelihood of success. To this extent, a key discovery from the findings was that the prediction of, or experience with, hardship after college was an influential determinant of entrepreneurial desires that invoked entrepreneurial behaviors. Hardship was believed to be the most immediate precursor to entrepreneurial behaviors that cushioned hardship characterized by immediacy and survival actions.

However, in instances where employment was still not achievable, as was the case with participants who said they could not endlessly wait for jobs, and were planning to scale-up their petty trade businesses/hawking, they had started making serious considerations to proceed toward Phase 2, the Consolidation Phase but were yet in the intermediate stage, which this study referred to as *progressive entrepreneurship*. Participants in the progressive entrepreneurship stages were those who said they were partially losing confidence in gaining employment and were moving to consolidate their positions in entrepreneurship while they were still hawking. They made considerations and initiated specific actions such as acquiring land, looking for space to lease, identifying partnership opportunities, making small personal savings, contacting and

networking with successful entrepreneurs, and identifying mentorship opportunities. Some of these actions were said to be planned or initiated, thus representing a gravitation toward the consolidation phase. But they were yet in the middle of the spectrum demonstrating progressive entrepreneurship.

Figure 4: Entrepreneurial Desirability Behavior Spectrum



At Phase 2, the Consolidation phase of desirability, the entrepreneurial actions became more robust and were driven by the desirability of long-term motivations. The long-term motivations for entrepreneurship, for example self-employment, job creation, financial independence (Table 3) that were latent and less influential in the contingency phase, now became salient in the move toward consolidation.

In these contexts, the desirability of entrepreneurship was discovered to constitute two types of behaviors associated with the desirability of entrepreneurship. These included

entrepreneurial behaviors linked to contingency to immediately cushion hardships of unemployment, and the second phase was entrepreneurial behaviors to consolidate their positions by taking steps in moving toward medium and long-term goals when job opportunities were still tight.

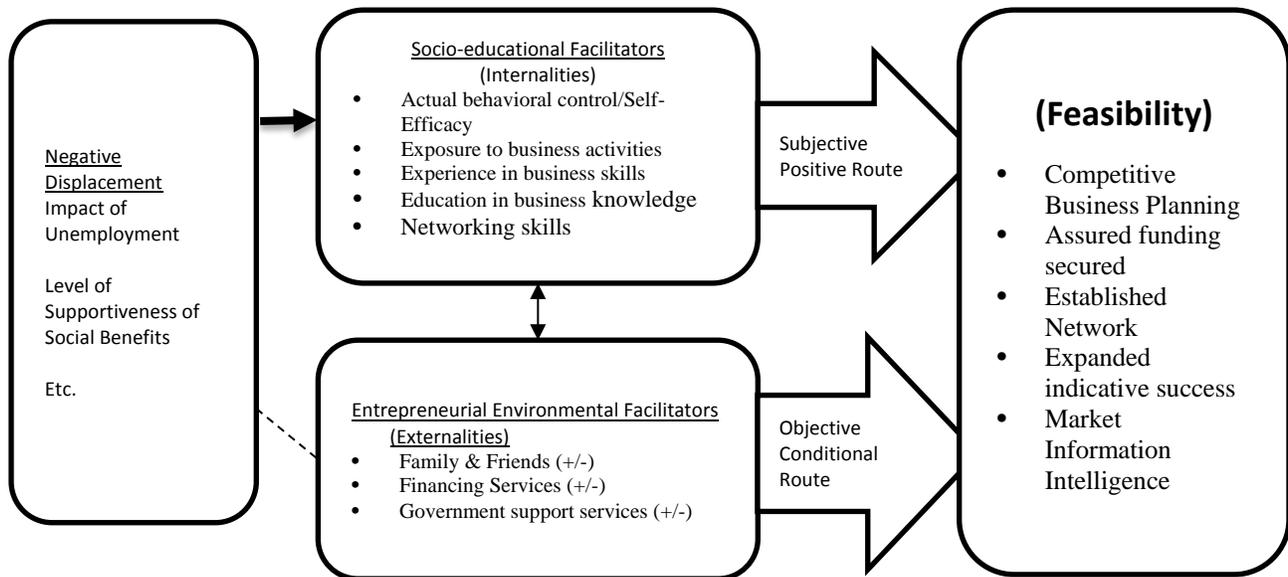
The Interactive Entrepreneurial Feasibility Field

The interactive entrepreneurial feasibility field is a depiction to describe the various resources that were associated with the performance of entrepreneurship. Since desirability included two distinct behaviors (i.e., contingency and consolidated behaviors in Figure 3), the performance of those behaviors was dependent of the repertoire of different resources that were at the disposal of the entrepreneur. Drawn from the Shapero-Sokol model of EEM, the phrase *Negative Displacement* was used to explain the consequences of social factors that put people in precarious and difficult situations that ejected them from a point of inertia into taking decisive actions to change their situations through entrepreneurship. In this study, the Negative Displacement was the social pressures exerted on the participants by unemployment after college and the diminished support from family and friends. Evident in their descriptions, the displacement effects of unemployment invigorated the *Socio-educational facilitators*. These were a set of internalized resources that accorded them the power of self-efficacy to take entrepreneurial actions. These resources were the most assured, most accessible, and far more useable set of resources that unemployed graduates relied on, and were the most explored resources for entrepreneurial action. In the model the route was depicted as the *Subjective Positive Route* since it was driven by self-efficacy. Actual Feasibility of entrepreneurial actions was conferred on the socio-educational facilitators than the entrepreneurial environmental facilitators.

The other set of factors and resources identified in the model was referred to as the *Entrepreneurial Environmental Facilitators*. These facilitators were a set of resources that were under the radar for entrepreneurial explorations by the participant, but they were less assuring, less accessible, and not useable in transitioning entrepreneurial intentions to actions. Potentially, they could have positive effects if designed with the flexibility required to address the challenges by removing the barriers to entrepreneurship such as the inability to fulfill the requirement of collateral security. They could also have negative effects when do not provide incentives and

encouragements for young graduates to succeed in entrepreneurship. Since the entrepreneurial environmental facilitators were not perceived to be feasible for entrepreneurial activities, they were less considered for actual entrepreneurship. The route that connected those resources with entrepreneurial actions in the model was labelled the *Objective Conditional Route*. This is because certain conditions were required for fulfillment before the resources would be made accessible (e.g., bank loans). The conditionalities, such as track records of success in business and the presentation of valuable assets as collateral security including the high interest rates on bank loans, were perceived by participants as unattractive. Government programs and services to support young entrepreneurs were perceived to belong to the same category because they were said to be either weak, remote, or not existing. This route was either not travelled at all by participants, or it was less explored for transitioning to actual entrepreneurial action. Participants did not confer feasibility on the entrepreneurial environment facilitators.

Figure 5: The Interactive Entrepreneurial Feasibility Field



The Interphase between Desirability and Feasibility

Studies in entrepreneurial intentions and behaviors, for example the meta-analysis by Schlaegel and Koenig, assert that the relationship between the variables of desirability and feasibility is a complex phenomenon that is mostly not conclusively understood due to the contextual nuances of factors, influences, and circumstances that operate in the entrepreneurial environment. This study corroborates their assertion that the entrepreneurial environment is the strongest determinant of feasibility, especially in environments like Sierra Leone where the desirability of entrepreneurship is evidently high among unemployed young graduates, but the opportunities to initiate business ventures were perceived to be generally low.

Transitioning into the consolidated phase of entrepreneurship invoked stronger considerations for mobilizing the required resources within the entrepreneurial environment. However, the two models in this study were conjoined to postulate that the elements of the two model of desirability and feasibility (situated on the extreme right side of the models as ‘D’ & ‘F’) must converge to determine the predictability of entrepreneurial behaviors. All the participants in this study were trapped between the *contingency phase* and the *intermediate stage* of progressive entrepreneurship but could potentially shift into the consolidation phase provided the resources in the entrepreneurial environment are made feasible to achieve the long term motivations such as self-employment.

Implications for Practice

Communication

This study was motivated by the need for communication research and strategic dialogues to solve contemporary organizational challenges across multi-disciplinary orientations. The center-piece of this inquiry therefore rested on the author’s passion for exploring the tools of Engaged scholarship to help create and promote dialogic relationships among different stakeholders including government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and multi-lateral agencies that are confronted with the challenges of rising unemployment among young adults in developing countries, and are therefore searching for best-practice programmatic options to

address the problems. The results of this study intend to inform communication practitioners on the design and implementation of strategic campaign messages in raising awareness to persuade different audiences about the untapped entrepreneurial potentials that exist among unemployed young college graduates.

Implications:

- To assume that every unemployed graduate is interested in becoming an entrepreneur will be a fallacious misrepresentation. Not everyone is an entrepreneur or can become an entrepreneur because of unemployment. Entrepreneurship is a demonstrated behavior that needs closer inquiry to investigate and classify the existing sets of skills and activities in which the unemployed person is already involved, or is demonstrating likelihood or tendency to get engaged in. Some level of engagement is necessary to identify an unemployed graduate as a potential entrepreneur. Communication experts should include these considerations in their understanding of entrepreneurship for their advocacy roles.
- In addition to knowing the existing sets of entrepreneurial skills and activities that exist in the unemployed population, it is also critical to understand that desirability for entrepreneurship is manifested along a spectrum that could include multiple segments with categorical attributes. In this study only three (Contingency, Intermediate, and Consolidation) of these categories were identified. There could be more categories depending on the context and opportunities that exist in the population of interest. Practitioners need to find out the structure of desirability that is eminent in the target groups for their interventions.
- Similarly, it is important to understand that feasibility is a complex mix of factors, and to therefore identify and understand the pools of feasibility resources that are available, their specific characteristics, and how they could be made accessible. No situation ever has the full complement of resources at its disposal. Knowing the pool of resources that exist in the entrepreneurial environment, identifying the gaps and the possible avenues to mobilize supplemental resources is a good practice toward ensuring that a comprehensive package of support is made accessible to potential entrepreneurs who demonstrate the level of motivation and possibilities to succeed with actionable levels of resources at their disposal.
- It is strategic, for communication practitioners associated with youth empowerment, to facilitate and coordinate engagements and dialogues between the different agencies, institutions, and avenues that are identified as custodians of entrepreneurial resources or are influential in creating linkages to entrepreneurial resources. Bringing these different entities into the communication network of advocacy to support young adult entrepreneurs is a strength that lies within the purview of communication and must be exploited for the appropriate courses. For example, banks and universities need to

convene and enlighten themselves to create and facilitate synergies that will help young graduates to success in entrepreneurship.

- The current generation of young graduates is popularly acknowledged to be media savvy and following online platforms to inform themselves in diverse ways to satisfy their tech savvy curiosities. Communication experts need to explore these avenues to bring critical information on entrepreneurship to potential entrepreneurs. For example, one of the participants who followed a successful entrepreneur on TV and social media said she learnt a lot about micro financing and will use those skills to effect business initiatives. That was very intriguing.

Through engaged scholarship efforts, communication practitioners and experts should strive to clearly understand these different avenues and their unique attributes to inform the design and implementation of meaningful campaign messages for advocacy to influence the decision-making processes for stakeholder interventions. Communication has the essential tools to cut-across multi-layered entities and avenue to help bring stakeholders closer to their strategic targets.

Education

Entrepreneurial education is emphasized in many of the literatures that highlight the significance of knowledge and skills as required competences that influence entrepreneurial intentions. Educationalists in entrepreneurship will find the results of this study to be useful because it unearthed and drew attention to some key deficiencies in the knowledge and skills of young college graduates who were determined to become entrepreneurs. The requirements for bank loans and many other factors of feasibility need to be addressed through college curricula to provide young graduates with helpful skills and competences that will increase their chances to benefit from bank loans. Business plans and market intelligence were two of the big concerns identified as relevant for the attention of curriculum development.

Implications:

- Not all the necessary skills or knowledge are acquired from formal education with standardized curricula. Post-college workshops play significant roles to close some of the

gaps in skills and knowledge to assist young college graduates with contemporary resources for success in entrepreneurship.

- The universities and post-college education programs (if any) need to engage to create platforms for mutual consultations to enrich themselves to make the learning processes dynamic and effective.

Policy Interventions

The last few decades have witnessed a spike in advocacy campaigns for the inclusion of interventions that target the empowerment of youthful populations through capacity building programs that will maximize their inputs in almost every sphere of political, social, economic and cultural programs. This study identified and investigated a salient thematic area of intervention for young adults who have distinguished themselves through the pursuing of advance education to prepare them for active involvement in personal and national development through entrepreneurship. The result of this study is intended to invite policy experts and activists to consider a policy approach to promote the participation of young graduates in entrepreneurship for self-employment. This could include an examination of the constraints and barriers identified in this study especially in the area of funding new business ventures for which huge potentials exist in young graduates to expand the private sector through engagement in their business initiatives. There are great opportunities for strategic policy interventions to empower young entrepreneurs and this study provides some highlights to understand some of the issues that need to be addressed through policy actions. From a practical standpoint, the results are useful for informing the design of strategic policy tools to address contextual issues that can be controlled to help bring out the underutilized potentials of young adults in developing countries.

Implications:

For example:

- Government needs to provide effective support for ongoing studies to identify the pool of entrepreneurial potentials and explore the different options for engagement with aspiring entrepreneurs to increase their entry into the private sector for expansion.

- A great need exists for government policy interventions to help minimize the burdens on government for job creation. This can be achieved through policy instruments and actions to investigate, understand, and mitigate the constraints faced by unemployed young graduates so that their efforts can be complemented to consolidate their entrepreneurial actions toward self-employment and other long-term benefits that are associated with growth in the public sector. For example, government funding for entrepreneurial initiatives is one of the possible areas for policy actions, while engaging other possible funding opportunities like non-governmental agencies to synchronize their programs with government support services for outcomes that are mutually beneficial for all the partners involved.
- Government and its multi-lateral partners need to systematically dedicate constructive efforts and commit meaningful resources to incentivize entrepreneurship for unemployed young graduates to acquire, enrich, and expend learnt experiences in entrepreneurship. This can be achieved by creating a periodic or regular interface between government agencies responsible for programs interventions in some of the underutilized opportunities such as in agricultural entrepreneurship and information technology which participants identified as opportunities that are underutilized in Sierra Leone.

Integrating the implications

With their unique thematic attributes, a synergistic relationship between the three implications for communication, education, and policy interventions will provide practical opportunities for holistic approaches to understanding the complexities of entrepreneurship and the benefits of recognizing the pivotal impacts that will accompany the integration of the three pillars in routing the resources that are critical for entrepreneurial success. The findings of this study support the need for strategic engagements between communications experts, executives of financing institutions, academic/educational curriculum analysts, and entrepreneurial policy advisors to identify and close the gaps in entrepreneurial competence and to leverage advocacy campaigns with government decision-makers, development partners, and potential investors to support unemployed graduates in their entrepreneurial endeavors. The accompanying benefits have significant potential impacts on expanding the private sector in developing countries like Sierra Leone where growth in the private sector is constrained by the low levels of investments in emerging markets. From the interpretations of the findings, the likelihood of success in graduate entrepreneurship (i.e., unlocking the potentials) will be higher with a synergy in the three critical components of communication, education, and policy actions.

Limitations

This study had a few limitations. First, it focused only on investigating the entrepreneurial behaviors of unemployed university graduates in the two largest cities with the highest employment opportunities in Sierra Leone. These two cities (Bo & Freetown) are in the Western and Southern regions of the country. The Northern and Eastern regions were not covered due to resource and time limitations. Secondly, the traditional model of entrepreneurial intentions and behaviors has three determinants including desirability, feasibility, and propensity, but only the first two were included in this study. Propensity was left out because it required a more systematic and in-depth methodological approach that this study could not cover given time limitations. Thirdly, university graduates with long histories of entrepreneurial experiences in the country were also not covered because the snowballing approach to identify them would have taken extra time and resources not available for this study. These are key areas of importance for a theory-driven inquiry that would have enriched the results by further triangulating the findings. Nevertheless, these will be of interest for future studies.

Future Research

This study was conducted as a qualitative inquiry to understand the contextual nuances of desirability and feasibility of entrepreneurship in a defined group of unemployed young graduates within a limited demographic locality of Sierra Leone. The findings of this study contribute to literature in the discipline of entrepreneurship particularly relating to entry-point challenges of unemployed young adults (otherwise known as “youths” in developing countries) who intended to own their own business venture for self-employment but were faced with resource constraints. Given the heightened level of discourse and advocacy for the empowerment of youths through entrepreneurship in developing countries, this study suggests future empirical inquiries through quantitative studies to *i*) test the generalizability of the two models across wider geographic localities in developing countries with similar situations like Sierra Leone. A qualitative study will be necessary to ascertain the relevance and validity of the model and for replication of the study in similar contexts, and *ii*) to measure/determine the relative influence/strengths of desirability and feasibility on entrepreneurial actions in different contexts. The results of such studies will be useful for the appropriate design and implementation of policy

actions to improve the supportiveness of entrepreneurial environments in different socio-economic and cultural settings.

Conclusions

The literature in entrepreneurial behaviors is rich on the moderating powers of perceived desirability and feasibility as the proximate determinants of entrepreneurial intentions. The findings of this study however took the discourse one step further into examining the relationship between entrepreneurial intentions and actions by taking account of the different factors that determine the transformation process. Generally, the conclusions corroborated other studies that the formation of intention was critical, but that intentions were not the ultimate determinants of entrepreneurial behaviors. This conclusion was drawn from the results indicating that a high level of entrepreneurial intentions and determinations existed among the participants, but they were stuck in the middle of the spectrum as a result of subjective contextual factors that did not subscribe to feasibility. Because feasibility was not commensurately responding to desirability as conjoined variables, desirability itself was also inhibited from moving forward to achieve self-employment. This was an indicative conclusion that the ultimate performance of entrepreneurial behaviors depended on feasibility which was explained as the availability and accessibility of resources to support the transition between intention and action. This conclusion corroborated several of the reports by the Global Entrepreneurial Monitor (e.g., the 2017/2018 report) that the interest in entrepreneurship in sub-Saharan African countries was consistently growing, but the opportunities were lacking especially for young adults who keep demonstrating strong intentions for entrepreneurship.

Similarly, the document on UNDP Youth Strategy 2014-2017 and many others that have advocated for youth empowerment over the last decade, have also consistently raised the issues affecting young adults followed by calls-to-action by governments and multilaterals organizations to increase their support for inclusive programs to tap into the potentials of young adults as vital partners in development.

In this study desirability was found to consist of two different, but interrelated, explanatory categories. The first category related to contingency needs to salvage and cushion pressing circumstances, and the second category related to long-term motivations that transcends the contingency phase. This postulates that until poor graduates can address entrepreneurial

desirability at the contingency level, the salience for long-term entrepreneurial desirability will remain latent. Theoretically, these results contributed to furthering knowledge on the functionality of desirability and feasibility of entrepreneurial behaviors in different contexts of unemployment in an African nation with high levels of unemployment. In the case of Sierra Leone, young graduates had tremendous desirability, but were encountering challenges and barriers in entrepreneurship due to the irresponsiveness of feasibility.

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APPENDIX 1: TABLES

Table 1: Distribution of Participants in Two cities

	<u>Individual Interviews</u> (Freetown City)	<u>Focus Group Discussions</u> (Bo City)
Male	12	12
Female	10	13
Total	22 participants	25 participants (in 4 groups)
	47 participants	

Table 2: Categories of Key Informants/Resource Persons

Respondent (Resource persons)	No	Interview Schedules	Techniques	Estimated Duration
Youth Development Consultants	3	June -July	Telephone conversation	20-30 minutes each
Program Manager, National Youth Commission	1	June -July	Telephone conversation	20-30 minutes each
Faculty Members	2	June -July	Telephone conversation	20-30 minutes each
Govt. Policy Adviser/Analysts	2	June -July	Telephone conversation	20-30 minutes each
Bankers (Business loan Dept.)	2	June -July	Telephone conversation	20-30 minutes each
Total (Target)	10	June -July		

Table 3: Desirability factors

<u>Research Question 1</u>		
What underlying perceptions explain the desirability of engagement in entrepreneurship?		
Variables of Planned Behavior		
	Themes	Codes
Antecedents of entrepreneurial Actions <i>(Social norms & Perceived behavioral control)</i>	Family and Community businesses	Business Engagements at childhood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Petty-trade activities of family • Observation of Community small business activities
	Entrepreneurial education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College courses in Business management and Entrepreneurship
Motivators of entrepreneurial actions	Self-employment and job security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create business to work for oneself. • Securing job for family members (inheritance)
	Earning capacity and Financial independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create wealth • Enjoy financial independence • Influence community & public decisions and actions
	Job creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates jobs • Employ people & • Reduce unemployment in local communities
	Independent decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power to take actions without reference for approval
	Facilitation of technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create access to technology • Improve quality & efficiency of services

Table 4: Feasibility Factors

<u>Research Question 2</u>	
What underlying factors affect the feasibility of entrepreneurial engagement by unemployed young graduates?	
Variables of Feasibility (Precursors: Entrepreneurial Efficacy, Perceived behavioral control)	
Themes	Meaning
Access to Finance	Funds for initial investment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loans • Personal finance • Wages
Access to land	Location/site of business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inherited land for farming, • Rented/leased property to house business.
Entrepreneurial education Learnt Experiences Family & Community business activities	Skills & knowledge learnt in college in entrepreneurship/business studies Practical hands-on experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagements in household petty trade • Observation of community business ventures.
Business plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document to guide business decisions and operations. • Instrument for bank loans
Networking relationships	Building rapport for mentorship and resourcing with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful entrepreneurs • Resourceful institutions • Individuals in the line of business • Exploring to secure business contact
Resilient Saving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making small systematic savings toward business goals by giving up making sacrificing

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDES

Guide A: Graduates

These questions are for participants who have completed university education but are unemployed and enrolled in post-college internship programs. This category may also include Nascent entrepreneurs who graduated and have initiated a business venture and working to improve it.

Introduction

My name is Andrew Koroma. I am in the final year of my studies toward a Ph.D. in Communication at Purdue University. The title of this study is “**Transforming Intentions into Actions: The Attitude of College Graduates toward entrepreneurship**”.

Many factors are believed to influence attitudes and intentions toward entrepreneurship.

This study is therefore to identify those factors and how they influence your engagement in entrepreneurship either as ‘*Facilitators*’ that positively influence you to become an entrepreneur; or *Barriers/Constraints* that negatively affect you -or discourage you from becoming an entrepreneur. **Your honest and frank response is therefore important for this study to achieve its goal.**

A: Demography

I want to begin by asking you to introduce yourself.

Please tell me about yourself: your age; gender; country of origin; level of education; year of graduation from university; your discipline of study/major; and your present employment; and how long.

B: Knowledge about Entrepreneurship

In college you took courses in entrepreneurship, or business-related studies:

1. What is your understanding of entrepreneurship?
 - 1i. Why is entrepreneurship important to you?
2. What are your expectations of becoming an entrepreneur? Or what influenced you to consider entrepreneurship for post-college engagement? You may also highlight the advantages and disadvantages of entrepreneurship.
3. What line of business are you engaged in doing? Or what line of business are you interested in doing?
 - 3i. And what are your reasons for choosing this line of business?
4. Given the explanations you have shared about entrepreneurship, tell me how confident you feel about succeeding as an entrepreneur?

- 4i. How did you gain this confidence about succeeding as an entrepreneur? Or, what makes you feel confident about succeeding?
- 4ii. What fear (if any) do you have about becoming an entrepreneur. Do you have any reasons you might not venture into entrepreneurship? Please explain?

C: Entrepreneurial Resources

Starting a business as an entrepreneur requires resources to succeed. The next set of questions are about the material/physical/financial resources that you believe are necessary for you to start a business.

5. For the business you are doing; or you intend to do, what resources do you believe are necessary for you to successfully do business (material, physical and financial resources)?
 - 5i. What steps have you taken to get these resources? This also includes the contacts you may have made in moving forward with your business ideas?
6. In addition to the resources you have mentioned, which services do you believe are needed for you to succeed as an entrepreneur? *the non-financial/non-material resources*
 - 6i. How do you believe those services will help you to succeed?
7. How available, accessible, and affordable are these services to you? In other words, if you need them, how easy or difficult is it for you to get them?

D: Challenges and Constraints

This final set of questions is about the challenges and constraints of entrepreneurship

8. After you graduated from college, what has stopped you from realizing your entrepreneurial ambitions? Why have you not started your own business?
9. From everything you have said about success in entrepreneurship, how would you describe a successful entrepreneur?
10. Name some examples of successful entrepreneurs/entrepreneurship you know in your community or country, and the location of the business operation?
11. If there are any questions or concerns that you believe we have not talked about, or did not sufficiently address in this interview, please bring them up now so we can discuss them.

This is the end of the interview. Thank you very much for giving up your time and effort to make this interview a success. I really appreciate it. Thank You!

Interview Guide B: Faculty/Lecturers

This interview will be conducted with faculty members of the university who teach courses in Entrepreneurship/Business studies.

Introduction

My name is Andrew Koroma. I am in the final year of my studies toward a Ph.D. in Communication at Purdue University. The title of this study is “**Transforming Intentions into Actions: The Attitude of College Graduates toward entrepreneurship**”.

Many factors are believed to influence attitudes and intentions in entrepreneurship. This study is therefore to identify those factors and how they influence the engagement of students in entrepreneurship after they leave college.

Your honest and frank response is therefore important for this study to achieve its goal

A: Demography

I want to begin by asking you to introduce yourself.

Please tell me about yourself: gender; country of origin; level of education; and the courses you teach.

B: Knowledge about Entrepreneurship

Over the years you have taught courses in entrepreneurship, or business studies. This section of the interview focuses on course content relating to entrepreneurship

1. What does entrepreneurship mean to you?
 - 1i. Why is entrepreneurship included in your curriculum?
2. In terms of course structure and content, please describe the major areas of entrepreneurship that are covered in the curriculum
3. What does the curriculum provide to influence the entrepreneurial aspirations of students? You may describe specific events of training that are designed to influence entrepreneurial intentions.
4. From your assessment of student knowledge in entrepreneurship please describe the type of business that students are more likely to consider for entrepreneurial engagement.
 - 4i. Please explain why you think so.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Entrepreneurship

5. Why do you think students want to engage in entrepreneurship? What are the expected benefits?

6. Given the knowledge and skills students acquire from the courses, how confident are you that they will succeed in entrepreneurship? Explain what makes you feel confident about their success.
7. Some students may not wish to become entrepreneurs. Do you have any reasons they might not venture into entrepreneurship? Please explain.

C: Entrepreneurial Resources

Starting a business as an entrepreneur requires resources to succeed. The next set of questions are about the material/physical/financial resources that students may need to start a business.

8. What material, physical or financial resources do you believe are necessary for students to start their own business?
 - 8i. What steps do students need to take toward getting these resources? Please include the contacts/networks they should also create (if any) to move their business ideas forward.
9. In addition to the material, physical and financial resources you have mentioned, which services do you believe students will need to succeed as entrepreneurs? *the non-financial/non-material resources*
 - 9i. Describe how these services will help them to succeed?
10. How availability, accessibility, and affordability are these services for graduates? In other words, if graduates need them, how easy or difficult is it for them to get the services?

D: Challenges and Constraints

This final set of questions is about the challenges and constraints of entrepreneurship

11. After leaving college, what do you think might stop graduates from realizing their entrepreneurial ambitions?
12. Success in entrepreneurship has observable characteristics. How would you describe a successful entrepreneur?
13. Name some examples of successful entrepreneurs/entrepreneurship you know in your community/country, and the location of the business operation?

13i. Do you have any expectations of graduates to benefit from these success entrepreneurs? Please explain.

14. If there are any question or concerns that you believe we have not talked about, or is not sufficiently addressed in this interview, please bring them up now so we can discuss them.

This is the end of the interview. Thank you very much for giving up your time and effort to make this interview a success. I really appreciate it. Thank You!

Interview Guide C

Key Informants/Resource Persons

This interview is designed to collect information from resource persons (*i.e.*, individuals working in different organizations/agencies that relate to providing support services that benefit entrepreneurship in Sierra Leone). The goal is to understand their perceptions of the engagement of youths in entrepreneurship; what is required for them to succeed in their entrepreneurial drives and the accessibility of those requirements. The interviews will be conducted via telephone from the US and payments for your time will be made in Sierra Leone by the consulting Research Organization. Interview schedule are as below:

Introduction:

My name is Andrew Koroma, a final year doctoral student working toward fulfilling the requirements of my Ph.D studies in Communication at Purdue University. As such, this research interview is a partial fulfillment of requirements toward my graduation. The title of the study is “**Transforming Intensions into Actions: The Attitude of College Graduates toward entrepreneurship in Sierra Leone**”.

Justification for Interviewing With You:

Many factors are believed to influence attitudes, intensions, and actions toward entrepreneurship. This study has been undertaken to identify the factors (Desirability & Feasibility) that influence engagement in entrepreneurship by unemployed young graduates. In other words, it intends to identify the reasons why unemployed young graduates would engage in business activities after college education, the kinds of support system/services that are available to help them succeed, and the constraints they encounter in doing business. In your respective roles and responsibilities, you may have interacted with students, as well as unemployed young graduates, who express interest in starting and owning a business of some kind. **In this respect, your knowledge is valuable for this study, and your honest and frank response is therefore be very useful to achieving its goal. These questions are open-ended to give you a chance to explain as much as you know about the issues that we will be talking about.**

A: Demography

The interview will basically start with me asking you to introduce yourself.

Tell me about yourself, the job you do, your position, and how long you have been in this position

B: Knowledge About Entrepreneurship Education

1. What does “entrepreneurship” mean to you?
2. What is your personal experience in entrepreneurship?
3. Do you think entrepreneurship is important to consider for unemployed young graduates? Explain why or why not.

4. What do you think young graduates should learn in college to prepare them for success in entrepreneurship?

C: Knowledge about Entrepreneurial Support Services/Resources

Starting a business as an entrepreneur requires resources to succeed. The next set of questions is about the material/physical/financial/training resources that students may need to start or succeed in doing business.

1. What resources do you believe are required to enable young graduate entrepreneurs to succeed? Explain/describe
2. You may be aware of the existence/availability of these required resources. To the best of your knowledge, please explain the extent to which these services/resources are available to young graduate entrepreneurs.
 - a. What is available?
 - b. Who provides them?
 - c. How accessible are they? Example:
 - i. eligibility requirements/qualifying criteria
 - ii. limitations
3. To what extent are these resources/services utilized by young entrepreneurs? How many (an estimate) have utilized the resources/services over the past few years?

D: Knowledge About Challenges and Constraints

Like any other engagement, entrepreneurship has its unique practical challenges.

1. What challenges do young graduates face in undertaking entrepreneurship? What are the reasons why young graduates might not be able to succeed in entrepreneurship?
2. What do you think young graduates should do on their own to succeed in entrepreneurship?
3. If you were in the position to influence policy, or make changes to enable young graduates to succeed in entrepreneurship, what actions would you propose?
4. If there are any questions or concerns that you believe we have not talked about, or have not been sufficiently addressed in this interview, please feel free to bring them up now so we can discuss them.

This is the end of the interview. If you consent or will be able to assist with this interview for an incentive of Le150,000.00 kindly indicate your name, signature and available time to be interviewed between May and June, 2019. Thank you very much in advance for giving up your time and effort to make this interview a success.

Name

Signature

Authentic phone Contact number for the Interview: _____

APPENDIX 3: SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH GRADUATES

- Speaker 1: 00:01 Good morning. My name is Andrew Koroma. I am a doctoral student at Purdue university. I am undertaking this study to understand the entrepreneurial attitudes of young graduates in Sierra Leone to enable me work on my dissertation. Over the past few days I have been working with the National Youth Commission here in Freetown. So, the purpose of this interview is to talk with you about your entrepreneurial interest, the challenges you experience in doing business, and the successes you may have achieved toward your entrepreneurial intentions. At the end of the interview you will have an opportunity to ask questions on issues or concerns that we may not covered but are important to you.
- With this background I will be very grateful if you could also introduce yourself to me.
- Speaker 2: 01:04 I am JSK, a graduate of Njala University. I studied Business Information Technology, and I'm doing my internship at AFCOM. I am married with kids. That's all about myself.
- Speaker 1: 01:28 During your causal story at college, did you do learn anything about entrepreneurship?
- Speaker 2: 01:36 I did. Because in my second and third year we studied entrepreneurship as a core module.
- Speaker 1: 01:55 You don't need a textbook definition, but tell me what is your general understanding or knowledge about entrepreneurship?
- Speaker 2: 02:03 An entrepreneur is somebody who is creative, somebody who comes out with something out of nothing. They have initiatives; they are innovators.
- Speaker 1: 03:17 Good. All right. Do you therefor see any need for entrepreneurship?

Speaker 2: 03:33 Yeah. As an entrepreneur you become independent. Some of the things you see as an intrapreneur, you cannot see as an employee. Because being an entrepreneur for yourself, you see it like “I have to do more in life”. You see things people don’t see. You think way above people. You see into the future (have vision).

Speaker 1: 03:45 All right, so good. So, have you ever been interested in becoming an entrepreneur? Of course. All right. So tell me about your entrepreneurial interests.

Speaker 2: 03:51 Okay. I'm already doing little things. My entrepreneurial interest is in the area of catering, decoration, and event planning but my limitation is capital. I have to have capital to start.

Speaker 1: 04:05 So you obviously have a business idea, or a business intention but you have not started. Why haven't you started?

Speaker 2: 04:13 Because my limitation is capital as I have told you. Starting business requires capita, and have passion for it?

Speaker 1: 04:29 Okay. So, is capital the only reason you have not started yet your business?

Speaker 2: 04:31 I have already started but not yet quite established. I don’t have a location. I don’t have a brand. I don’t have a website. My marketing structures and strategy are not yet developed.

Speaker 1: 04:54 Okay. So, when did you develop this business interest? Was it before you went to college or during college or after college?

Speaker 2: 05:01 This was during College. During college I was doing, a mobile or delivery service of food to offices.

Speaker 1: 05:13 How does that work? I don't understand.

Speaker 2: 05:33 I had my own car for delivery of food to my customers at their offices. I dropped off the food on credit and collected my money after one week.

Speaker 1: 05:54 How did that work for you?

Speaker 2: 05:59 This was during the Ebola outbreak when college was suspended. It worked well because it was very fruitful. But at the end of the day I had to go back to college after we reopened. I did not have someone to take it over because of the way I run my business. I didn't find someone I could trust.

Speaker 1: 06:02 interest? Okay. That's interesting. Do you still maintain that

Speaker 2: 06:08 Yes. I still take small catering contracts from time to time.

Speaker 1: 06:13 So after you finished college, what are you doing with your business interests? What have you done?

Speaker 2: 06:19 I am still on it. Like I've started one business and tried to rent a house for the location, but the contract was not very good, so I had to drop the contract. I still don't have a location for my business, but I still maintain strong interest in entrepreneurship.

Speaker 1: 07:01 So where did this inspiration come from? Your inspiration to do business. Where did it come from?

Speaker 2: 07:06 It's came from the first time I went to Ghana and Nigeria. I saw that young people were very motivated to do more. Then I said to myself...Wow! We need to stand up and do the same in Sierra Leone. People were doing packaging of fruits, and that was very inspiring. The youths were very engaged and hardworking.

Speaker 1: 07:41 So you're saying on your visit to Nigeria and Ghana, you saw young people doing their own business and that is how you got inspired. Did you talk to them about their successes?

Speaker 2: 07:54 Yes, I had direct conversations with some of them who are my friends. I wanted to know their success stories. And I learnt a lot.

Speaker 1: 08:19 So, after you graduated from college, what are you up to right now? What are you doing in pursuing your business intention?

Speaker 2: 08:32 Well, I am still working on my plans and putting things together. I am looking for loan opportunities from friends

and family members. If I have the money, I want to travel to China to buy merchandise and set up my own business. For now, I am looking for employment while I look for financing to pursue my entrepreneurial dream.

- Speaker 1: 09:11 Have you talked to other business entities or people in this line of business? Or have you had any contact with them here in Sierra Leone?
- Speaker 2: 09:21 Yes, I do. I interact and network. I sometimes get contracts to cater for weddings. I even subcontract to some of my major caterers and associates when I get big wedding contracts, and I do the coordination.
- Speaker 1: 09:42 Alright! You said you took some modules in entrepreneurship. Are you realizing any help from those classes you took? Or do you see any connection between the classes you took and the success that you could make in business?
- Speaker 2: 10:03 Yes, because in those classes we were told that entrepreneurs should demonstrate more strength to pursue a business intention. He must be focused. Becoming a successful entrepreneur involves a lot of ‘ups and downs’ to be productive.
- Speaker 1: 10:33 In term of the course itself, what are the things you learned that you think you can apply to business?
- Speaker 2: 10:46 One of the things I learned is that entrepreneur should scan their evolvement to determine the suitability of the business in that market environment. You want to know if your business location is ideal to attract customers
- Speaker 1 & 2 talking: 11:18 You just spoke about environmental scanning, been able to identify your target market, and how the market operates. These are some of the things you learned from the class, and you are applying or using the knowledge in your Business.

“Yes” she said

All right. So, given everything you have said about entrepreneurship, how confident are you that you will succeed in doing business? I mean your skills, and knowledge you have learned in college, etc. On a scale of

1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, where do you find yourself in terms of confidence?

“In terms of confidence I think I am at level six. I believe I understand what I am doing, and I am on top of my marketing activities, and I can succeed beyond that.” **She said.**

Okay. Is this level as a result of what you learned in college?

She said. “Yes. And they are going to be an added advantage for me to move forward”.

Then I said “All right. That's interesting. Let's now talk quickly about the resources. The next set of questions are about resources. The things that you believe are necessary for you to start business. Given your business preference or interest, what materials, or items or resources do you believe are necessary for you to succeed in business”?

She said. “I need to get a suitable location; I need to do branding to attract the market; I need to develop my marketing skills and strategies such as online marketing (website, WhatsApp, etc.) to stand out.”

Speaker 1: 12:57 What steps have you taken so far to grow your business? Any specific steps?

Speaker 2: Yes. I have registered the business. I am trying to create a website.

Speaker 1: What is the name of Your Business?

Speaker 2: Sonia's kitchen.

Speaker 1: Where about in town is that?

Speaker 2: I don't have a location yet. I do my publicity and adverts online through WhatsApp and Facebook, and people place their orders

Speaker 1: 14:33 That's interesting! But in addition to the financial resources you have mentioned, are there any services that you believe will be also necessary or helpful for young business intentions to thrive apart from the physical capital and the

location of the site? What else do you think would really help businesses in providing services?

- Speaker 2: 14:58 I think tutorials and seminars are needed for young entrepreneurs to strengthen their confidence in doing business; and in promoting public awareness to see the need for supporting young entrepreneurs.
- Speaker 1: 15:29 How about building relationships?
- Speaker 2: 15:34 Yes. Interacting with other entrepreneurs in the market is also necessary to help in sharing different experiences. I think that too will help.
- Speaker 1: 15:47 So you need services like that to enable you share your knowledge and experience with those that are already established and successful.
- Speaker 2: 15:57 Yes.
- Speaker 1: 16:07 Alright! So how easy has it been for you? I mean, I'm sure you have endeavored in making some attempts to grow your business. How easy or difficult has it been for you?
- Speaker 2: 16:12 Going through the road was not easy. It was bumpy. I did not study catering. I just happen to have passion for it. I watched my mom do catering at home and I watched YouTube video as well. Doing it without experience was very challenging. Also, to succeed in business in Sierra Leone one needs to build your own contact and be connected. You must be among the 'Creme de la crème' for you to be successful and be up there.
- Speaker 1: 16:23 Yes, you'll have to get the right contracts. How has that helped? Have you explored that area of creating contacts? How much contact have you created so far?
- Speaker 2: 17:21 Uh, I've done so much. People know that I can deliver. But as I said earlier, without a location for my business people will not take me seriously. Without a recognized business location, the price of services is usually negotiated downward.

Speaker 1: 17:32 So you mean an office space is needed for business recognition [business imaging].

Speaker 2: 18:01 Yes. That will help more because if I have a location and my interior decoration is very nice, and everything is in place, the image of the business will be enhanced, and people will be willing to pay. These are some of the limitations.

Speaker 1: 18:04 Okay. So, what have you done in that area to secure the resources you need? What have you done?

Speaker 2: 18:41 Because of the economy [inflation] renting a space is very expensive. Space is expensive. Capital is therefore needed to start the business.

Speaker 1: 18:50 Have you contacted anyone, or any institutions, to access resources that you need to grow your business? Have you taken any such steps?

Speaker 2: 19:08 No. I haven't. I have taken any steps to take loan from anywhere

Speaker 1: 19:21 Why haven't you?

Speaker 2: 19:59 Because I've seen that I don't have the capital to pay back. I mean if I take a loan at the bank, I will have to pay high interest and my business is not up to the standard yet. So, it is very risky for me to take a bank loan. But if I have a job and I am doing this business I can guarantee that my income will help to minimize the risk of paying back the loan. Otherwise the bank loan will be very risky for me to take. The risk involved is therefore a major limitation.

Speaker 1: 20:57 Alright! Now that you have describe the constraints of getting business capital, the constraints in getting a suitable site to locate your business and gain recognition as some of the challenges. Let us assume an investor shows up at your door and tells you he is looking for someone to do business with. And your business intention matches that of the investor's intention. What would you show him to identify you as a potential partner?

Speaker 2: 21:17 I will first want to know the kind of business he wants to do.

Speaker 1: 21:27 Let's say this investor is open to any business initiative that comes up.

Speaker 2: 21:41 I'll advise him on what to do about my own idea. I will take him to the market to see one or two places that do the same business like me. Whenever you start a business you need to watch your competitors closely. That will help you more by seeing their successes and failures. And come back to your drawing board to decide what to do.

Speaker 1: 22:11 So how do you put all of these thoughts together? For now, your description is purely what you are thinking. Right? You have it all in your mind.

Speaker 2: 22:20 I think we need to write a proposal. Do a proposal and take it from there.

Speaker 1 & 2: 22:24 Okay. Do you have one?

“Yes” [sluggishly]

Do you have a business plan?

“Yes”

Or a business proposal?

“Yes.”

Speaker 1: 22:37 Okay. How do you intend to use that business plan?

Speaker 2: 22:55 I intend to use my business plan to establish my business and do more because with a business proposal I can get someone to help me do more than just catering and decoration. I have experience in other areas like logistics and shipping services. So, I believe with a business plan I can do more.

Speaker 1: 23:03 So basically what we're trying to connect with is the fact that good business intentions start with business plans, and you say you already have one developed, and that's where my question was actually looking at. I mean, if somebody tells you he is looking for somebody to partners with, and he is open to doing any kind of business, the first thing you want to tell that person is that you have a business plan and

get that person to look at your business plan. Those are the very first initial steps in doing business.

Now, how would you describe a successful entrepreneur? Have you seen someone that you would consider to be a successful business person?

“Yes”.

Okay. How would you describe a successful entrepreneur?

- Speaker 2: 23:58 A successful business man is somebody who can stand challenges because entrepreneurship is all about overcoming challenges. It's not a smooth road to be an entrepreneur. So, somebody who can stand challenges can be a successful entrepreneur.
- Speaker 1: 24:16 So, to be a successful entrepreneur you have to be able to stand challenges?
- Speaker 2: 24:21 Yes. And you have to be innovative, creative, and technologically inclined.
- Speaker 1: 24:27 Have you seen any such entrepreneurs around your own community doing the kind of business that you are doing in catering?
- Speaker 2: 24:30 Yes
- Speaker 2: 24:47 Like the lady, the President's sister, who own the 'Cube', she started very little at home. She started cooking at home and when her brother became the president, she was the biggest caterer in town. She caters for most of the offices.
- Speaker 1: 25:10 Have you ever spoken to this successful business woman? Have you had any contact with her?
- Speaker 2: 25:18 Yes! Of course, I started with her. She started very little and now she is up there because of the political influence [networking] she gets contracts all the time. And the more contacts she gets the more money she makes.
- Speaker 1: 25:35 Okay. So, in your interaction with this successful business woman, what have you learned that you think will be of help to you?

Speaker 2: It's Perseverance!

She always tells me that it's not easy, and that I must persevere. She said when she started catering people were saying to her "you are a university graduate and you want to be a cook?" But she told them that catering was her line of business, and she persevered.

Speaker 1: 26:03 So you still have intentions to continue doing what you are doing to see it grow beyond this point?

Speaker 2: 26:19 Yes. In terms of growth I need to be marketing my product aggressively and use the media effectively. And if I have the money, I can do TV and radio commercials. The more promotions I do the more people will see my products and the more people will go for it.

Speaker 1: 26:44 All right! I think we have had a very fruitful discussion this morning and I want to conclude by thanking you and expressing my gratitude for your time.

In case you have any question that you want to ask at this point, you can ask any question that you believe you wanted to discuss that I did not ask about.

Speaker 2: Oh yes, I have one. My question is this. How do you see the markets when you came back to Sierra Leone?

Speaker 1: 28:01 There are a lot of markets here. I am not an entrepreneur myself. But the fact is the potentials are great. Business is about people providing services, goods, and products that people want to use. And the fact that these cities carry a lot of people, population is very high. This tells you that the base, the potentials of business to survive and flourish is very high.

There are a lot of markets here. I am not an entrepreneur myself. But the fact is the potentials are great. Business is about people providing services, goods, and products that people want to use. And the fact that these cities are carrying a lot of people, populations are very high. This tells you that the potentials of business to survive and flourish is very high.

But the critical thing like you mentioned, is your ability to identify your market and know who your customers are.

So, to answer your question in general, I think the potentials for business are huge. It is up to the individual entrepreneurs deciding on what they want to do; how they want to do it; and for whom?

In your line of business been catering, people eat every day. So, I'm sure your line of business has great challenges, but the potentials are also very huge. That's my description of the market as I see it. And of course there are multiple markets. People sell different kinds of things.

speaker 2:

It's all about your targeted market.

Speaker 1:

Yeah! You target your market, you know what they want and how best you can provide them satisfactorily and be very competitive.

As you know, competition is one big area for success in business. You must stand out and distinguish yourself that you can do this better than the next person.

Competitiveness is very, very important.

Okay. Well, at this point we'll close the interview. Thanks you very much for your time.

APPENDIX 4: DISSERTATION TIMELINE

Description of Task	Date	Estimated Time
Anticipated IRB Approval	Nov 2018	
Travel to Sierra Leone for Data Collection	Nov -Dec 2018	
Meetings with National Youth Commission	Third week Nov	
Data collection- Freetown & Bo City	Last week Nov to second week Dec.	
Return to West Lafayette, USA	Dec 26, 2018	
Preparation of Prospectus	Jan -April 2019	
Prospectus Defense	April 22	
Start data Analysis	April 24	
End data Analysis	May 17	
Submit First Draft of Findings for Discussion	May 30	
Make changes/corrections/revision and resubmit	June 15	
Submit revised version to committee		
Get final Draft Ready for Defense	On going	
Proposed date for defense of dissertation	Nov 22, 2019	
Make changes by the committee	Nov 22-30, 2019	
Submit dissertation for graduation		