

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMERCIAL MOTORBIKE RIDING AS A TOOL
FOR EMPLOYMENTY CREATION IN FUNDONG SUB-DIVISION, NORTH WEST
REGION, CAMEROON**

By

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ABSTRACT

The upsurge of commercial motorbike riders in Cameroon cities and rural areas is indicative that the activity has provided employment solace to thousands of youths. This is the case in Fundong Sub-division where over 500 young people are involved in the activity. Paradoxically, motorbike riding seems to have created more of underemployment as most of the educated young people who are unable to find dignified jobs commensurate to their professional and educational qualifications tend to seek employment refuge under this sector. Job scarcity has instigated most of the youths to get involved into bike riding irrespective of their qualifications. This study, therefore, sets out to investigate factors for the upsurge of the activity and the type of employment created by this sector to the youths in Fundong Sub-division. Data for this study was gotten via a systematic and a random sampling technique where a total of 104 respondents from 25 villages in Fundong Sub-division provided the responses. Supplementary primary data was gotten from interviews, focus group discussions while secondary data sources were from published and unpublished documents such as; articles, conference papers, relevant Decrees and dissertations relating to motorbike riding and employment creation. Results revealed that the main factor for the upsurge of the activity is the inability of youths to secure feasible jobs after studies. Also, the activity has created both visible and invisible forms of underemployment to the youths involved in the activity as well as well as substantial employment to the youths especially those who have not undergone formal education and training. In prospects, the recommends that mitigating these issues highly depends on good employment policies and the creation of more feasible jobs by the state to absorb these youths.

Key words: Motorbike riders, employment, underemployment, education and training and Fundong Sub-division

INTRODUCTION

Commercial motorbike riding is an activity carried out mostly by male youths who either operate as a part-time job to complement their meagre salaries or as a full-time job to earn a living. In Cameroon, this activity is much recent and operates both inner cities, city peripheries and especially rural areas where the state of roads are bad and almost impassable by vehicles as the case of Fundong Sub-division. Commercial motorbike riding as used in this study is the use of motorbikes for the provision of transport services for financial benefits. This activity saw the light of the day in the early 90s following the closure of the main transport organ in Cameroon SOTUC (*Société des Transport Urbain du Cameroun*). The closure of this organ was associated with the socio-economic crises of the late 80s which came with diverse repercussions on both employment and transportation. The activity was then generally accepted and integrated into the transport system. Employment crises by then attracted dozens of youths to get involved in the activity in order to cope with the socio-economic difficulties. In fact, the activity was the main tool for survival for several young people who lost their jobs because of the crises.

Today, motorbike riding activity has become an important income generating activity where most youths educated or not seek employment solace due the high rates of unemployment in Cameroon which dates back to the economic crises of the late 1980s and early 90s which continues to rise even till date (World Bank, 2020). Those involved in the activity are people from all walks of life including; students, school drop outs, job seekers, workers with meagre salaries and those educated or not.

I. THE ADEVENT OF COMMERCIAL MOTORBIKES IN CAMEROON

Before the 1980s in Cameroon, commercial motorbike riding was not recognised as a means of public transport until the economic crises of the late 1980s and 90s which led to the collapse of the main transport organ in Cameroon SOTUC. The result was the liberalisation of the transport sector with the introduction of motorbikes. Though motorbike the activity was timid, negligible and clandestine at its beginning, it was gradually implanted and rooted as years go by and generally accepted as means of public transport linking city-peripheries and rural areas (Agossou, 2003). This activity did not give way for any official registration just like the *clando* vehicles that occupies the city peripheries. This partly explain the anarchy of the activity as its operators especially in urban areas hardly respect the high way code leading to circulation disorder.

The activity allegedly gained it grounds properly following the suspension of most Public Entrance Competitive Examinations into professional schools that offered direct civil service employment. Since then, jobs became scarce and unemployment was eminent. In response, many young educated Cameroonians exploited existing opportunities to adopt coping strategies within the informal sector with motorbike riding being the most accessible and affordable. Cameroon is one of the countries in black Africa where unemployment is high and underemployment is substantial (World Bank, 2010). Under such a precarious conditions, most young educated Cameroonians with professional and academic qualifications tend to seek employment solace in the motorbike sector. In absolute terms,

underemployment¹ appears to be more of a lost to an economy than a gain though in a relative sense it is preferred to unemployment. The chances of the educated and professional oriented youths having financial empowerment and jobs greatly depends on the adoption of good employment policies which will cumulatively reduce the rate of underemployment and ensure sustainable jobs for the youths. In this way, they will become more productive and competitive.

II. THE STUDY AREA

This study was carried out in Fundong one of the four Sub-divisions of Boyo Division, North West Region of Cameroon (Figure 1). Fundong Sub-division lies between longitude 10° 05' 11" and 10° 27' 0" east of the Greenwich Meridian and latitude 6°13'17" and 6° 22' 22" north of the Equator. It is situated about 68km from the regional capital of North West Region (Bamenda). Fundong Sub-division is boarded by Wum Sub-division in the west and Noni Sub-division to the east while to the north it is boarded by Bum Sub-division and to the south by Njinikom Sub-division (Fundong Council Development Plan, 2012). The Sub-division covers a total surface area of about 519 square kilometres with 25 villages and numerous quarters (Figure 1).

III. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Secondary data sources were based on a systematic exploration of documents on motorbikes such as; conference papers, articles, dissertations and relevant Decrees governing the operation of commercial motorbikes. Primary data for the study was generated from the Fundong motorbike riders through a random administration of questionnaires at their standing points. A total of 104 of the surveys were carried out. Besides questionnaires, 2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted and 12 interviews were also granted. In all, 2 interviews were granted to Fundong Mobile Riders (FMR) presidents and 10 for motorbike riders themselves. The intension of the interviews and FGDs granted was to get an insight into motorbike riding and the extent to which the activity has created jobs to the youths. Motorbike riders with professional and academic qualifications were identified and information on their perception on motorbike riding were drawn likewise those with no academic nor professional qualifications. The identification was done based on their educational level on the information provided on the survey instrument by the respondents. Due to the extensive size of the study area, it was mapped out into four clusters (southern, northern, western and eastern clusters). The intension was to ensure the effectiveness of surveys properly exploit by the study. The mapping out of these clusters was facilitated by

¹ The term underemployment refers a measure of employment and labour utilisation in the economy that looks at how well the labour force is being utilised in terms of skills, experience and availability to work. It also refers to a situation where individuals are forced to work in low paid jobs (<https://www.investope.com/terms/underemployment.asp>. Accessed, 20.01.21)

some integrated development projects due to the emergence of some inter-village associations where Fundong was divided into these clusters (Figure 1).

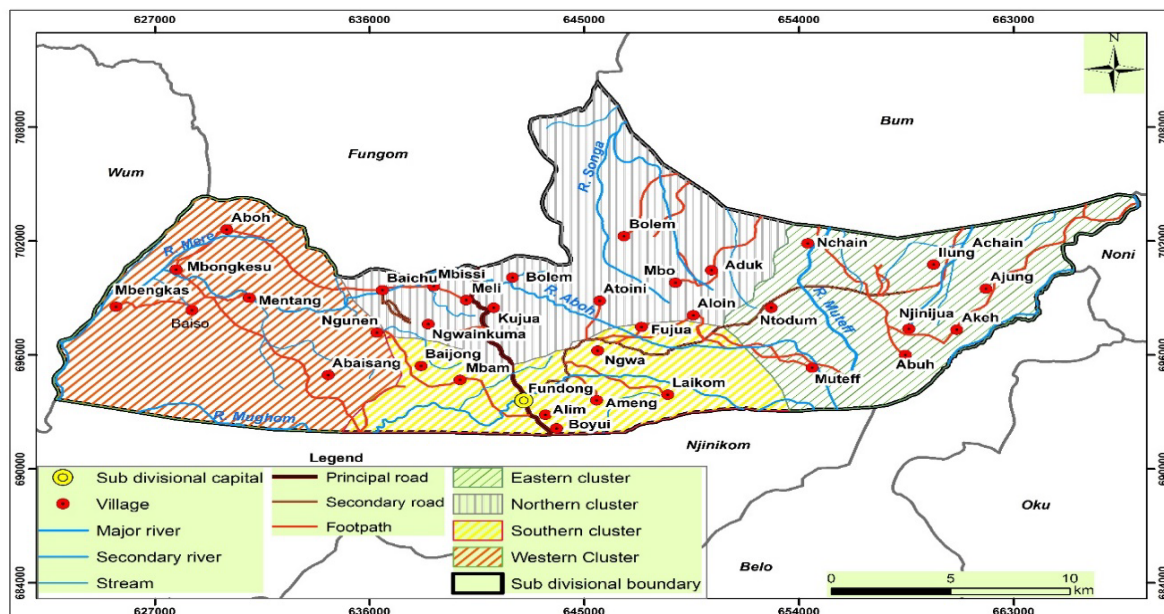


Figure 1: The study site and the delimited clusters

Source: NIC and Field work, 2019

Descriptive data was treated using data coding (*Straus method*) whereby categories of responses were identified, assigned, classified and then recorded on a prepared sheet as per research questions or objectives of the study. Concerning quantitative data, tools such as; Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Excel programs were used to produce mean scores, frequencies, and percentages. This data was presented in the form of line graphs, bar charts, frequency and percentage tables accompanied by appropriate explanation or discussions of the results.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Motorbike riding is important income generating activity amongst Cameroonian youths general and Fundong Sub-division in particular. Young people involved in this activity are of different categories seeking for employment solace. The key reasons for the youths’ involvement into this sector of economic activity is because of their inability to secure decent jobs despite their academic and professional qualification. This has forced these youths to embrace motorbike riding as stepping stone while seeking for “better” jobs. This is principally kindled by unemployment, job scarcity and difficulties in furthering their education as a result of their precarious financial conditions.

1.1. Educational status of motorbike riders in Fundong Sub-division

Generally, about 75% of motorbike riders in Cameroon have gone through the first and second cycles of secondary school while about 27% of the riders have been exercising the activity for about 3 to 5 years. However, the practice of this activity for this length of time is explained by the fact that job scarcity is in an increase to absorb these young people. Most importantly, feasible jobs commensurate to educational and professional qualifications. In Fundong Sub-division it is not rare to find motorbike riders with First Degrees, Higher National Diplomas (HND) amidst others struggling to make a living (Table 1).

Table 1: Academic and professional qualifications of sampled motorbike riders

Clusters	No./R	Academic qualifications					
		FSLC	FD	SD	UDG	PGD	MD
Western	15	2	3	2	3	4	1
Eastern	36	4	5	9	8	12	0
Northern	28	3	2	3	9	11	2
Southern	25	4	3	4	5	9	0
Total	104	13	13	18	25	36	3
%		12.5	12.5	17	24	34.6	2.9

Source: Field work, 2019

No./R= Number of respondents FSLC= First School Leaving Certificate FD=GCE O/L
SD= GCE A/L UDG= Under graduate Degree PGD= Post graduate Degree MD= Master’s Degree
GI= CAPIEM (grate 1) HND=Higher National Diploma DI= DIPES 1

In table 1, it is observed that 34.6% of motorbike riders in Fundong Sub-division are graduates. They are unable to secure decent jobs and thus pick up motorbike riding as their last resort. Interview accounts with some of these motorbike riders on the length of time they have been practicing the activity revealed that some have practiced bike riding for a period of 3-5 years while others above 5 years but are still unable to secure jobs commensurate to their educational standards. Such is the case with Falamain M. contacted in the field who underlined that;

“I have been practising this activity for close to 5 years after searching for a stable job with my First Degree to no avail. I have never thought of becoming a motorbike rider but after school I found myself as a motorbike rider because I could not find a job”.

This, therefore, reveals that most educated youths exercising this activity is by default because they cannot find paid jobs in the labour market equal to their educational qualifications. This paints a picture of job frustration which has lured youths into commercial riding for survival. Results from a focus group discussion with bike riders, however, revealed that those with limited level of educational; (FSLC (12.5%) and GCE O/L (FD) (12.5%) were very contented exercising this activity. A participant of this category noted that; *“motorbike riding has help me to achieve a whole lot of things such as; assisting my siblings in school and catering for my basic needs”.* However, considering the statistics on the table 1, a wide range of motorbike riders are not satisfied with the activity either (Table 2).

Table 2: Professional qualifications of sampled motorbike riders

Professional Qualifications			
G1	HND	DI	None
4	3	2	6
3	9	3	21
4	5	1	18
6	2	0	17
17	19	6	62

16	18.3	11.5	59.6
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Source: Field work, 2019

GI= CAPIEM (grade 1) HND=Higher National Diploma DI= DIPES 1

Table 2 depicts that 16% of the bike riders are grade 1 teachers, 18.3 HND holders and 11% are holders of DIPES 1 but there are unable to find jobs in the domain of their professionalism. They are then being lured into commercial motorbike riding while looking for other available options such as integration into the public service in due course. The difficulties in securing feasible jobs has gone a long way to make some youths to perceive education with mixed feelings and at times prefer to operate under the informal sector than spending several years schooling without being certain of securing a decent job in the labour market. This is worsen by the fact that the curricular of studies in state run institutions is largely theoretical while professional in both private and state institution is more expensive to be afforded by most youths. However, as Abraham Lincoln (1862) one time US president puts it,

“Upon the subject of education... I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we as a people can be engaged in. I will prepare and someday my chance will come”
This justifies the fact that education cannot be compromised because of the inability of the youths to secure good jobs. Education stands out as a major tool for development and the major driver of economic growth and thus vital for a sustainable society.

Among the motorbike riders contacted, some were victims of visible underemployment² while others were victims of invisible underemployment³. According to studies conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) in Yaounde on employment and the informal sector between 2005 and 2010, underemployment in Cameroon is a preoccupying issue which needs to be addressed (Eesi 2, cited by Enchaw, 2015). According to this, 6 million Cameroonians are underemployed representing 70.6% of the active population of the country. These are young people who are trained and educated but inadequate utilisation of human resources and scarcity of jobs has made them to get involved into the informal sector with motorbikes being the most common. That is why Achile (2019) noted that underemployment is a primary dysfunction of the economy. This is crystal clear among commercial motorbike operators in Fundong Sub-division in particular as a degree of incompatibility of knowledge or knowhow and proficiency in relation to motorbike riding exists.

Concerning visible underemployment, some sampled motorbike riders avouched that though they were operating motorbikes and making a living out of it, their standards of education and training were far greater than operating commercial motorbikes and thus were victims of visible underemployment. Drawing inspirations from the findings of Achile (2019) visible underemployment is highly common in the public than in the private sector but the private sector remains the most affected. This is partly explained by the fact that the state does not have the potential to employ all her work force. This has led to an increase in the informal sector activities with the motorbikes being the most common. Some of the

² Visible underemployment includes individuals who are involuntarily working less than the normal duration of work determined for the activity, who are seeking or available for additional jobs during the referenced period (OECD Employment outlook, 1995 page 45).

³ Invisible underemployment refers to individuals who are working in jobs where their skills are not fully utilised. It is very difficult to be measured because of its nature (OECD Employment outlook, 1995 page 45).

motorbike riders contacted were teachers and others operating other menial jobs. They ascertained that their involvement in this activity is to meet up with their household incomes and to complement their meagre salaries or wages. According to the finding of NIC (2011) visible underemployment in Cameroon stood at 20.8% in 2010 and has been gradually increasing. Thus, some motorbike riders who had stable jobs and were still operating motorbike riding were simply victims of visible underemployment.

Concerning invisible underemployment, it is pretty difficult to measure the utilisation of human skills and thus most organs such as International Labour Organisation (ILO, 1998) defined it based on hourly incomes. Interviews conducted with motorbike riders who were post graduates, holders of HNDs and even Masters Degrees holders revealed that the amount they earned on a daily bases was not commensurate to their level of education compared to others who have similar qualifications and are employed (Figure 2) justifies that they were victims of invisible underemployment. In a focus group discussion with these category of motorbike operators, it was realised that they embraced bike riding because of frustration as they could not get jobs upon the completion of their studies.

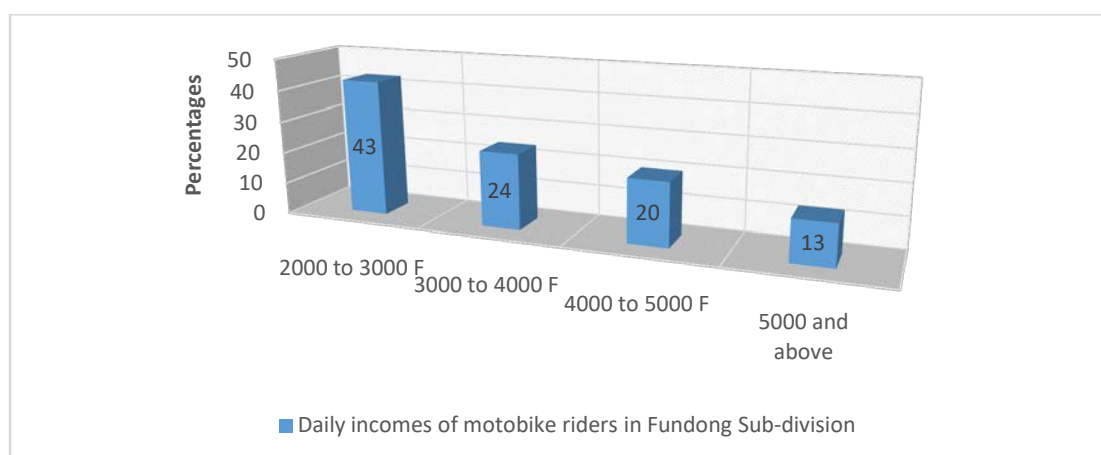


Figure 2: Average daily income of motorbike riders in Fundong Sub-division

Source: Field work, 2019

From figure 2, 43% of bike riders have incomes which oscillates between 2000 to 3000 FCFA daily in Fundong Sub-division while 24% records 3000 to 4000 FCFA on daily bases. Only 20% and 13% could realise 4000 to 5000 FCFA on daily bases and above. According to interviews conducted with some sampled motorbike riders on their daily incomes, they were unanimous that their daily incomes were not sufficient to manage their households due to high fuel prices. In line with the daily incomes of motorbike riders, it is established that those who are educated and trained and are involved in this activity are underemployed because their incomes are far less when compared to their professional and academic qualification. During a focus group discussion, a participant *Marinus. F.* stressed;

“I hold a Higher National Diploma (HND) in accountancy but I am a motorbike rider which is not even yielding me enough money besides my accountancy skills are even far greater than this motorbike which I do”.

This shows that the bike rider is frustrated and underemployed because his skills are underutilised. This falls in line with NIS (2011) which articulated that, unskilled workers, rural workers and people working in the informal sector were likely to experience underutilisation of skills. This is worsened by the fact that the rate of invisible underemployment in Cameroon has been on a continuous rise since the post economic crises

of the late 1980s and the early 90s. For example, invisible underemployment rate in Cameroon was estimated at 62.7% in 2010 which underlines the precariousness of the Cameroon labour market (Achile, 2019). In a similar way, unemployment and underemployment rates in Cameroon were estimated at 30% and 75% respectively (ILO, 1998). The precarious nature of the Cameroon labour market has partly lured young people into commercial motorbike riding because of the inability to secure feasible jobs in the public and private economic sectors which has just exposed them to be victims of visible and invisible forms of underemployment apart from a few because of their low educational standards and professional know-how. The informal sector, has therefore, become very pronounced and commercial motorbike is evident creating both visible and invisible forms of underemployment (Figure 3).

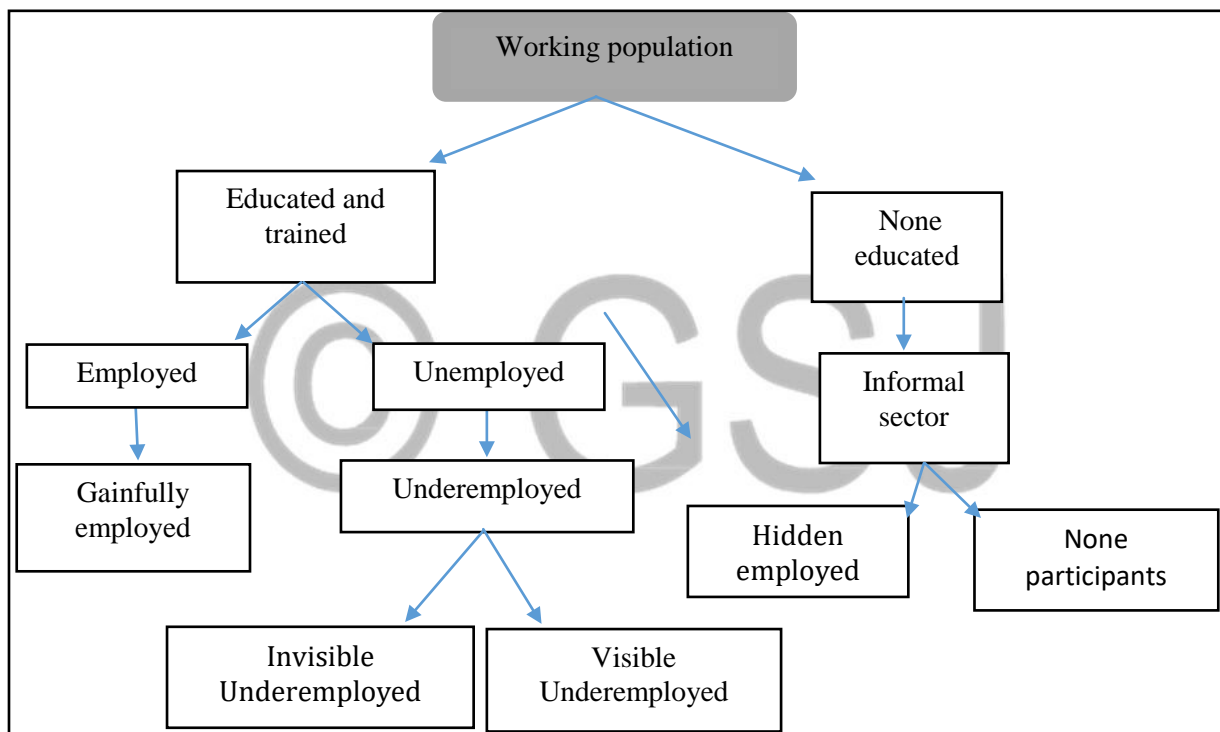


Figure 3: Measurements and types of underemployment

Source: Conceived by Tufoin K.D, 2019

A continuous rise in general population and economic dysfunction and an increase in the number of professional and academic certificates over the years have gone a long way to increase the potential work force without corresponding jobs. This has created a situation where educated and trained young people are underutilising their acquired skills in jobs that are not commensurate to their qualifications. In this light, underemployment sets in which is more of an economic loss to the economy. Figure 3 shows that those who are unemployed despite their education and training, are subsequently underemployed while others are victims of visible underemployment and others victims of invisible underemployment. Those with low or no educational standards and without any professional qualifications are found in the informal sector while others are employed others are none participants. Motorbike riding has

become a source of livelihood to these two categories though the activity is creating underemployment to the educated class.

1.2. Factors favouring motorbike riding activity in Fundong Sub-division

Most of those involved in the motorbike riding activity is mainly because they are unable to find stable and dignified jobs in the private and public economic sectors, though other minute reasons may also exist for the choice of the activity. This is explained by the fact that, thousands of young people are awarded certificates in private and public Universities in Cameroon every year but their inability to secure feasible jobs to actualise their training get themselves involved into motorbike riding as their first job (Kengne, 2015).

Motorbike riding has been implanted in Fundong Sub-division by mainly because the youths are unable secure decent and dignified jobs after their education and training. Both push and demand pull factors have favoured youth involvement into this activity. The demand pull factors were realised to be more related to the demand of the services of commercial motorbikes while the demand push factors were related with survival strategies. According to the survey instrument, unemployment is the fundamental reason instigating young people in Fundong Sub-division and in Cameroon in general to get involved into motorbike riding (Table 3). During a focus group discussion on the factors favouring the choice of motorbike riding, all of the respondents were unanimous that unemployment is the leading factor for the upsurge of motorbike riding as well as the difficulties involved in securing decent jobs both in the private and public sectors in Fundong Sub-division and Cameroon in general which as resort to motorbike riding (Table 3). According to the respondents contacted in the field, 14.4% were of the opinion that they practice motorbike riding just for survival and to make a living while 10.6% were of the opinion that they were simply advised by their friends to get involved in the activity.

Table 3: Factors favouring motorbike riding activity

Clusters	MR	Factors favouring the activity						
		UN	S./J	QC	R./PCEEs	IE	FS	A./F&P
Western	15	15	4	3	4	1	2	1
Eastern	36	36	8	5	10	4	4	5
Northern	28	28	6	4	6	5	5	2
Southern	25	25	5	6	2	5	4	3
Total	104	104	23	18	22	15	15	11
%	100	100	22	17.3	21.2	14.4	14.4	10.6

Source: Field work, 2019

MR =Motorbike riders UN=Unemployment A./F&P=Advice from friends and
parents QC= Quick cash R./PCEE=Raise revenue for Public Competitive Entrance
Examination IE=Improve earnings FS= For survival S./J= Scarcity of jobs

As illustrated in table 3, it is observed that 22% of motorbike riders were of the opinion that their involvement in motorbike riding was due to job scarcity. They, therefore, resorted to motorbike riding as their first job. Concerning the survival factor, 14.4% of the respondents carrying out the activity for survival after several failed attempts to secure jobs in the private and public economic sectors thus, resorting to motorbike riding as a temporary means of survival while trying to secure a decent job in the labour market.

Similarly, 12 interviews conducted with motorbike riders pointed out that motorbike riding requires, no formal training, no specific documents especially in rural areas and was the only economic generating activity that they could do for survival (FS). The participants were of the fact that securing jobs has become difficult coupled with corrupt practices in Public Competitive Entrance Examinations in Cameroon and employment procedures which has instigated them to be doing motorbike riding as their first job. This owes to the fact that gaining employment in Cameroon is riddled with corruption, nepotism, clientelism, tribalism and favouritism. This has gone a long way to limit merit, competitiveness and even the willingness of most youths to participate in such competitive entrance examination thus preferring motorbike riding which can easily give them some cash to establish other businesses or even travel overseas.

As concerns job scarcity and unemployment in general, the World Bank observed that the rate of unemployment in Cameroon has been fluctuating since the economic crises of the early 80s and late 90s till date where in 2007 over 30% of the active population was without jobs (World Bank, 2015). As depicted by figure 2, unemployment in Cameroon has been fluctuating dropping from 11.48% in 1999 to 4.56% in 2007 which was the lowest level in the history of the country. This was probably because of the drop in the petroleum prices in the world market that affected the state revenue. It risen again in 2007 from 4.6% to 6.3% in 2010 and from there, it has been steadily and continuously falling from 6.17% to 5.82% in 2019 which has given the youths no option than get involved in the informal sector which motorbike riding have been the most active. The findings of the World Bank are essentially a reflection of the increasing involvement of commercial motorbike riding in Cameroon and in the Fundung Sub-division in particular. As indicated by Enchaw (2015) an indicator of this steady increase in the unemployment rate in Cameroon is the cosmetic shift in fiscal policy where money circulates more in the hands of politicians rather than in the economic sector. Quite often, our politicians save their money in foreign banks, thereby demonetizing the local economies and stifling its take-off. The country may, however, experience economic growth and not economic development as distinguished by Mladen (2015). This owes to the fact economic growth is a narrower concept than economic development because economic growth is necessary but not a sufficient condition for economic development as it does not focus on per capita income of every citizen.

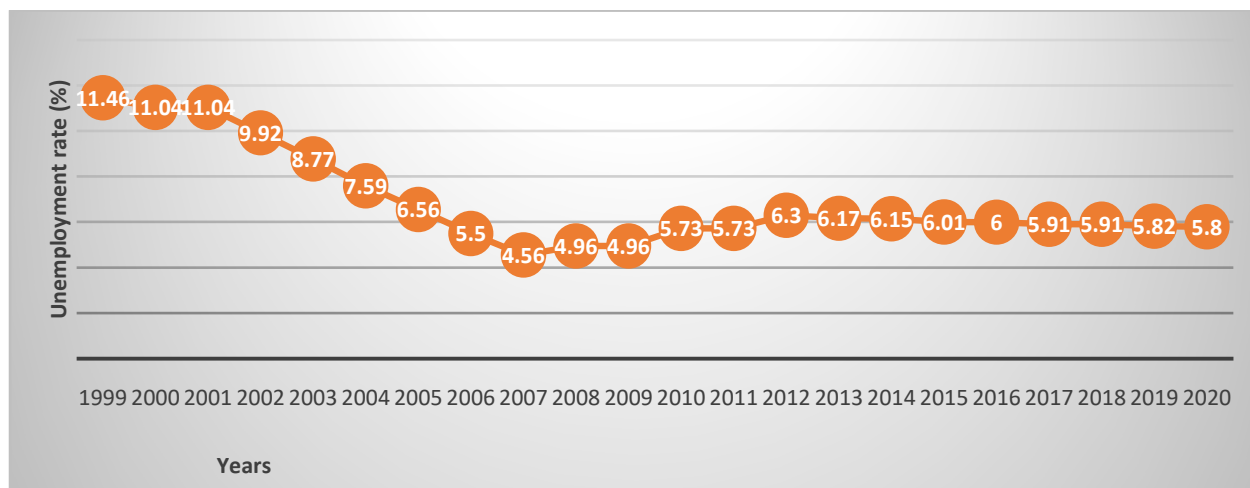


Figure 4: Evolution of unemployment in Cameroon (1999-2020)

Source: World Bank, 2020

Table 2 also depicts that the involvement of youths in the motorbike riding activity was to improve their earnings (14.4%=IE). This was basically instigated by low salaries and wages especially those who were involved in part-time jobs elsewhere such as teaching or operating petit businesses. Respondents were of the opinion that other menial jobs that they operate are not sufficient to cater for their households and thus, involving in motorbike riding was just a strategy to supplement their household incomes. Key informants in the field confirmed to the study that the majority of motorbike riders are involved in other activities or are operating other businesses during spare hours.

The table also demonstrate that, 14.4% were of the respondents were of the fact they are practicing motorbike riding just for survival and to make a living because of ravaging poverty and difficulties of obtaining a good job after school while 10.6% were of the opinion that they were simply advised by their friends to get involved in the activity. In an interview with one of this category, it was underlined that “After I completed the GCE Ordinary Level, my friend who is a motorbike rider advised me to joint motorbike riding which I did and today am making a living out of it”. This was different from other respondents 17.3% who ascertained that they simply involved in the activity because it provides quick cash. In a focus group discussion, motorbike riders unanimously agreed that the activity provides them with money on daily bases which they can use to progress with others things such as; meeting their daily needs like feeding, clothing and other basic needs since most of the motorbike riders in still job seekers.

CONCLUSION

The advent and proliferation of motorbike riding is indicative that unemployment rate is high and there is need for the youths to seek for surviving strategies which the motorbike sector seems to be the most accessible to provide employment solace for them. This activity has created jobs to thousands of young people both educated and uneducated which most of them depend on for a livelihood. The central issue stands out to be the type of jobs created by the activity especially to those who have undergone formal education and training. Visible and invisible forms of underemployment have been identified to have been created by the motorbike activity to the youths. Though in a relative sense, unemployment represents a more serious problem than underemployment because it is better to have a low paid job than to be inactive in the labour market but in absolute terms, underemployment may represent

more of a material loss to the economy than unemployment. However, the solution depends on good employment policies where youths should be able to obtain jobs upon their studies. In this way, visible and invisible forms of underemployment identified found in the labour market will be reduced.

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