



Rural-to-Urban Migration of Youths and Its Implications for Safe Cities: Community and Faith-based Response

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Abstract: This study explores the phenomenon of youths' rural-to-urban migration and its implications for developing safe cities. The aim is to examine how mass youth migration impacts urban safety, social stability, and infrastructure, and to understand the spiritual and moral lessons that biblical wisdom may offer in guiding youth decision-making and policy formation. The study addresses the problem of escalating youth exodus from rural communities due to economic hardships, unemployment, and the allure of urban opportunities, often leading to overcrowding, unemployment, urban crime, and weakened rural economies. A qualitative methodology was employed, involving interviews with migrants, city planners, and religious leaders and content analysis of urban crime data and biblical texts. Findings indicate that while migration may offer short-term economic hope, it often results in increased urban insecurity, underemployment, and declining community values. Genesis 26:2 metaphorically suggests the importance of divine guidance and contentment, highlighting the potential of local development and spiritual discernment in decision-making. The study concludes that promoting rural revitalisation, faith-based guidance, and inclusive urban planning can mitigate the negative consequences of youth migration and foster safer, more balanced cities.

Keywords: Safe cities, migration, rural areas, urban migration, Genesis 26

Introduction

The unprecedented movement of young people from rural to urban centres represents one of the most significant demographic shifts of the 21st century. This migration phenomenon, driven by a complex interplay of socioeconomic factors, reshapes urban landscapes worldwide while simultaneously transforming rural communities left behind (Tacoli et al., 2021). As cities absorb increasing numbers of youth migrants

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seeking improved livelihoods, educational opportunities, and social mobility, questions concerning urban safety, resource allocation, and sustainable development have gained prominence in both academic discourse and policy formulation (UN-Habitat, 2022). This critical examination of rural-to-urban youth migration finds unexpected resonance in biblical wisdom, particularly the divine instruction in Genesis 26:2: “Do not go down to Egypt; settle in the land that I shall show you” – words that speak to the tension between migratory impulses and the divine guidance concerning place and purpose.

The scale of youth migration to urban centres has reached remarkable proportions globally. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2021), approximately 55 per cent of the world’s population currently resides in urban areas, a figure projected to increase to 68 per cent by 2050. Young people between the ages of 15 and 29 constitute a disproportionate segment of these migration flows, with estimates suggesting they comprise nearly 30 per cent of all rural-to-urban migrants while representing approximately 24 per cent of the global population (International Organisation for Migration, 2023). This overrepresentation highlights youth’s particular vulnerability and agency in migration processes, as they navigate transitional life stages while seeking to establish independent livelihoods in increasingly competitive urban environments.

The motivations driving youth migration from rural to urban settings are multifaceted and interconnected. Economic factors feature prominently, as limited agricultural opportunities, land fragmentation, and rural poverty propel young people toward cities where they anticipate greater employment diversity and income potential (Christiansen et al., 2020). Educational aspirations similarly motivate youth migration, with rural areas frequently lacking quality secondary and tertiary institutions necessary for developing marketable skills in knowledge-based economies (White, 2019). Furthermore, sociocultural factors influence migration decisions, as urban centres represent spaces of perceived modernity, cultural diversity, and freedom from traditional constraints that may particularly appeal to younger generations seeking to establish independent identities (Langevang and Gough, 2021).

The implications of youth migration for urban safety present challenges and policy development opportunities. Cities unprepared for rapid population growth frequently experience infrastructural strain, housing shortages, and employment gaps that can contribute to increased crime rates, informal settlement proliferation, and social tensions (Muggah, 2018). Youth migrants, often arriving with limited financial resources and weak social networks, may face particular vulnerabilities, including

exploitation, substandard living conditions, and exclusion from formal economic and social protection systems (Brown et al., 2022). Conversely, when effectively integrated, young migrants contribute significantly to urban economic dynamism, cultural diversity, and innovation that can enhance urban resilience and development (Skeldon, 2020).

The biblical passage from Genesis 26:2 offers a thought-provoking theological framework through which to consider contemporary migration dynamics. Set against the backdrop of famine, this divine instruction to Isaac not to seek refuge in Egypt but rather to remain in Gerar represents a counterintuitive command that challenged prevailing survival strategies of the time (Brueggemann, 2018). This passage invites reflection on several dimensions relevant to modern migration discourse: divine providence amid scarcity, the tension between immediate survival strategies and long-term flourishing, the importance of place-based identity, and the relationship between human agency and divine guidance in migration decisions (Havea, 2020). While recognising the profound differences between ancient and contemporary contexts, this scriptural lens offers valuable insights regarding migration's spiritual and ethical dimensions that complement secular analyses focused primarily on socioeconomic factors.

Various theoretical frameworks have emerged to analyse rural-to-urban migration, including neoclassical economic models emphasising wage differentials, new economics of labour migration highlighting household risk diversification strategies, and structural approaches examining systemic inequalities driving population movements (De Haas, 2021). While illuminating different aspects of migration processes, these frameworks benefit from integration with place-based theological perspectives that consider how spiritual values, community belonging, and moral considerations influence migration decisions beyond purely economic calculations (Myers, 2019). The intersection of these theoretical approaches creates space for a holistic analysis that acknowledges both material and spiritual dimensions of human migration experiences.

The implications of youth rural-to-urban migration for developing “safe cities” – urban environments that provide security, opportunity, and well-being for all residents – require multidimensional approaches that address both structural factors and individual experiences (UN-Habitat, 2020). Effective urban safety strategies must contend with the particular vulnerabilities and contributions of youth migrants while fostering inclusive communities that integrate newcomers without marginalising existing residents. As cities worldwide continue absorbing unprecedented numbers of young people from rural areas, their capacity to provide safety, opportunity, and

belonging will significantly determine global development trajectories in the coming decades.

Rural to Urban Migration of Youth in Nigeria

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation with over 218 million inhabitants, has experienced dramatic demographic shifts in recent decades, characterised by massive rural-to-urban youth migration. This phenomenon has fundamentally transformed Nigeria's urban landscapes and rural communities, creating complex challenges and opportunities for national development. The movement of young Nigerians from rural villages to rapidly expanding cities like Lagos, Abuja, Kano, and Port Harcourt reflects broader patterns of urbanisation across sub-Saharan Africa, yet also displays distinct characteristics shaped by Nigeria's unique historical, economic, and social contexts.

Nigeria's rural-urban migration patterns have evolved significantly since independence in 1960. The oil boom of the 1970s catalysed rapid urbanisation as petroleum revenues financed infrastructure development and public sector expansion in major cities (Ajaero and Onokala, 2013). This period marked the beginning of accelerated rural out-migration as young people were attracted to emerging urban opportunities. The subsequent economic difficulties of the 1980s and 1990s, characterised by structural adjustment programs and political instability, temporarily slowed urbanisation rates but did not reverse the trend (Adepoju, 2019).

Contemporary data reveal the magnitude of Nigeria's urban transformation. According to the World Bank (2023), Nigeria's urban population increased from approximately 20 per cent at independence to over 52 per cent by 2022, with projections suggesting this figure could reach 70 per cent by 2050. Youth (aged 15-35, as defined by Nigeria's National Youth Policy) constitute approximately 60 per cent of these urban migrants, reflecting both demographic realities—Nigeria has one of the world's youngest populations—and the particular motivations driving young people to cities (National Population Commission, 2022).

There are so many drivers of rural-urban migration in Nigeria. First, limited agricultural opportunities represent a primary push factor in rural areas. The decline in agricultural productivity and land fragmentation through inheritance practices has created conditions where farming no longer provides sustainable livelihoods for growing rural populations (Adesiji et al., 2019). Young Nigerians increasingly perceive agricultural work as arduous, unprofitable, and low-status, particularly as education levels rise (Oyedele and Adenegan, 2021).

Second, urban areas exert a powerful pull through perceived employment opportunities in formal and informal sectors. Nnadi and Chukwuigwe (2020) found that 78 per cent of rural youth migrants cited “better economic opportunities” as their primary motivation for relocating to cities. The concentration of industries, services, and commercial activities in Nigeria’s urban centres creates expectations—often unrealistic—of upward economic mobility that proves irresistible to rural youth facing limited prospects.

Third, the concentration of educational institutions in urban areas constitutes another significant pull factor. Secondary schools and particularly universities are disproportionately located in or near cities, compelling rural youth to migrate for educational advancement (Mberu, 2019). This educational migration frequently becomes permanent as graduates seek to utilise their qualifications in urban labour markets rather than returning to rural communities where their skills may have limited application. The profound disparity in basic services between rural and urban areas accelerates youth out-migration. Amenities such as electricity, healthcare, internet connectivity, recreational facilities, and transportation infrastructure remain severely limited in many rural communities (Ajaero and Madu, 2018). These deficiencies make rural areas appear increasingly undesirable for youth raised with increasing awareness of urban lifestyles through media exposure and social networks.

Fifth, beyond material considerations, sociocultural dynamics significantly influence migration decisions. Urban areas represent spaces of perceived modernity, cultural dynamism, and freedom from traditional constraints. Oyefara (2018) documented how young rural Nigerians associate urban living with prestige, independence, and escape from elders’ control. Social networks play crucial roles in facilitating migration, as established urban migrants provide information, temporary accommodation, and assistance to newcomers from their home communities.

The consequences of this migration cannot be underestimated. The housing deficit in Nigerian cities has led to proliferating informal settlements where many migrant youth reside. Lagos alone contains over 200 identified slums, which make up approximately 66 per cent of the city’s population (Aluko, 2020). These settlements typically lack basic services, security of tenure, and adequate infrastructure, creating conditions of environmental degradation and health risks.

Youth unemployment and underemployment in urban Nigeria have reached crisis proportions, with urban unemployment rates for youth exceeding 42 per cent in some cities (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Consequently, many migrant youth enter the informal economy, which now constitutes approximately 65 per cent of Nigeria’s

urban economic activity (ILO, 2022). While this sector provides crucial livelihood strategies, it often features precarious working conditions, limited social protection, and vulnerability to economic shocks.

Young migrants face significant challenges integrating into urban society, particularly when crossing ethnolinguistic boundaries. Research by Adunbi and Olutayo (2021) indicates that migrant youth often maintain strong ties to rural communities of origin while forming new urban identities. This transnational existence creates complex patterns of belonging and cultural adaptation that influence urban social dynamics.

Implications of Increasing Rural to Urban Migration of Youth in Nigeria

The increasing rural-to-urban migration of youth in Nigeria has profound and multifaceted implications that affect both urban centres and rural communities across economic, social, infrastructural, and developmental dimensions. These implications present both challenges and opportunities for Nigeria's national development trajectory.

The influx of rural youth into Nigerian cities has significantly impacted urban labour markets. Formal sector employment has not expanded sufficiently to absorb these migrants, resulting in high youth unemployment rates in urban areas. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), urban youth unemployment reached 42.5 per cent in major Nigerian cities, considerably higher than the national average. Awojobi (2019) notes that this mismatch between migration rates and job creation has expanded the urban informal economy, where approximately 65-70 per cent of migrant youth find livelihood opportunities characterised by insecurity, low wages, and absence of social protection. The informal sector's expansion has become both a coping mechanism and an economic driver. As Ekpenyong and Alibaba (2021) document, migrant youth have demonstrated remarkable entrepreneurial adaptability, creating microenterprises in transportation (okada riding), street vending, service provision, and technology-enabled work. While these activities contribute significantly to urban economies, their unregulated nature presents challenges for urban governance and economic planning.

Migration establishes critical economic linkages between urban and rural areas through remittance flows. Adewale and Bamidele (2022) estimate that approximately 60 per cent of urban migrant youth regularly remit funds to their rural households, collectively transferring over ₦500 billion annually to rural communities. These remittances often constitute a significant portion of rural household incomes, funding education, healthcare, housing improvements, and agricultural investments. However, Adedokun (2018) highlights that remittance-dependent economies can create

problematic developmental dynamics in rural areas, including reduced local agricultural productivity, inflation in regional property markets, and increased inequality between households with and without urban migrants. The outflow of productive youth labour has transformed agrarian practices in many communities. Akinyemi and Akinbode (2020) documented shifts toward less labour-intensive crops, decreased land cultivation, and changing gender roles in farm management as male youth depart.

The integration of rural migrant youth into urban social fabrics presents significant challenges. Okafor and Amzat (2021) identify patterns of social stratification where ethnic, religious, and class identities mediate migrants' access to urban resources and opportunities. In cities with long-established dominant ethnic groups, such as Ibadan or Kano, migrants from minority groups often experience marginalisation and limited social mobility.

Urban migration has contributed to the emergence of what Adesina (2020) terms "hybrid identities" among Nigerian youth, blending rural cultural orientations with urban lifestyles and values. These evolving identities have implications for intergenerational relationships, as young migrants increasingly challenge traditional authority structures while simultaneously maintaining connections to rural communities through regular visits, participation in hometown associations, and social media communication. The selective out-migration of youth has profound implications for rural social dynamics. Izugbara and Egesa (2022) document how many rural communities experience demographic distortions with disproportionate numbers of children, the elderly, and women remaining. These shifts affect traditional community governance structures, cultural transmission patterns, and care arrangements for vulnerable populations.

Education systems in rural areas are also impacted by youth out-migration. As Metu et al. (2021) observe, when education is perceived primarily as preparation for urban migration rather than rural development, it can accelerate rural depopulation while creating misaligned skill development that fails to address rural development needs. Nigerian cities have experienced dramatic spatial transformation in response to rural-urban migration. The housing deficit in urban centres has led to the proliferation of informal settlements. Omole (2021) estimates that 60-70 per cent of urban growth in Nigeria occurs in unplanned settlements without adequate infrastructure. In Lagos alone, over 200 informal settlements house approximately 13 million people, many of whom are recent migrants from rural areas (UN-Habitat, 2022). This pattern of urban development has significant environmental and health implications. Research by Adedeji and Eziyi (2020) links unplanned urbanisation to increased flooding risks, waste management challenges, and public health threats.

The concentration of migrant populations in environmentally vulnerable areas has heightened exposure to climate-related disasters, particularly in coastal cities like Lagos and Port Harcourt.

The depopulation of rural areas often creates a negative feedback loop for infrastructure development. As Alabi and Mohammed (2019) document, declining rural populations reduce political incentives for infrastructure investment, leading to deteriorating roads, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions. This infrastructure deficit further accelerates out-migration, creating what development economists term “cumulative causation”, where initial migration streams become self-reinforcing. The rapid influx of rural youth has stretched urban governance capacities across Nigeria. Municipal authorities struggle to provide basic services, manage land use, and maintain social order in rapidly growing cities. According to Olajide et al. (2022), most Nigerian cities operate at 30-40 per cent of required infrastructure capacity, creating persistent deficits in water supply, sanitation, electricity, and transportation systems. Youth migration also introduces complex political dynamics into urban governance. Agbola and Agunbiade (2021) highlight how politicians increasingly mobilise migrant communities along ethnic and regional lines, sometimes exacerbating tensions between “indigenes” and “settlers” in urban political contests. The concentration of youth populations in urban areas has contributed to their growing significance in political mobilisation, as evidenced by the prominent role of urban youth in recent nationwide protests and social movements.

The increasing awareness of rural-urban migration’s implications has prompted policy reconsiderations. The Federal Government’s Agriculture Promotion Policy (2016-2020) and the subsequent National Agricultural Technology and Innovation Plan (2021-2025) have emphasised youth retention in agriculture through modernisation, technology adoption, and value chain development (Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2021). Similarly, the Rural Access and Mobility Project has prioritised connecting rural communities to market centres to reduce isolation and enhance economic opportunities without necessitating permanent migration (World Bank, 2023). The implications of rural-urban youth migration in Nigeria reflect broader development challenges facing the country. The phenomenon simultaneously represents rational responses to existing spatial inequalities and creates new developmental complications. Addressing these implications requires integrated policy approaches that acknowledge the fundamental interconnections between rural and urban spaces while recognising the legitimate aspirations of young Nigerians for improved livelihoods and life opportunities.

God's Warning to Isaac against Migration in Genesis 26:2

Genesis 26:2 contains a specific divine instruction to Isaac during a time of famine: "The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, 'Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live.'" This directive comes at a critical moment when Isaac, following a pattern established by his father Abraham, was contemplating migration to Egypt as a survival strategy during food scarcity. The passage presents a significant theological moment that illuminates several aspects of divine guidance, covenant faithfulness, and the theological significance of place in the biblical narrative.

Genesis 26 opens with a statement about famine conditions in Canaan, explicitly connecting this situation to a previous famine during Abraham's time (Genesis 12:10). This literary device creates a parallel between father and son while highlighting a crucial difference in divine instruction. While Abraham migrated to Egypt during his famine (with problematic consequences), Isaac was instructed not to follow this precedent (Brueggemann, 2010). The geographical setting is significant - Isaac had moved to Gerar in Philistine territory, ruled by King Abimelech. This represented an initial migration within Canaan but not the complete departure to Egypt that Isaac apparently contemplated. According to Wenham (2015), Gerar was located in the western Negev, functioning as a border region between Canaan and Egypt, making it a natural stopping point for someone considering continuing to Egypt—the prohibition against going to Egypt functions as a test of Isaac's faithfulness to divine guidance. As Sarna (1989) notes in his commentary, "This is the first recorded instance of direct divine communication to Isaac and constitutes his initiation into the covenant" (p. 183). By remaining in the land despite famine conditions, Isaac would demonstrate trust in divine provision rather than relying on conventional human wisdom about survival. Walter Brueggemann (2010) interprets this passage as establishing a "stay, don't go" pattern that forms a counterpoint to other migration narratives in Genesis. He argues that the text presents a theological tension between God's promise of the land and the practical challenges of sustaining life within it during periods of scarcity. The specific warning against Egypt carries symbolic significance beyond practical considerations. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, Egypt frequently functions as a theological symbol representing human self-sufficiency, material abundance apart from covenant relationship, and potential apostasy (Fretheim, 2012). Mathews (2005) suggests that the prohibition reinforced the distinct identity of the covenant family in contrast to the powerful civilisations surrounding them. According to Levenson (2012), "Egypt represents the antithesis of the covenant relationship - a place where abundance comes from the Nile rather than divine provision, where human achievement

rather than divine blessing determines outcomes” (p. 87). The warning thus carries implications about trusting God’s provision rather than seeking security through human means alone. The command to remain in “the land” (הָאָרֶץ, ha’aretz) emphasises the theological significance of geography in the covenant relationship. Waltke (2016) observes that throughout Genesis, the promised land functions not merely as territory but as the physical space where the covenant relationship between God and Abraham’s descendants unfolds. Ross (2008) notes that “the divine prohibition against leaving the land established a principle that would become increasingly important in Israel’s self-understanding - that covenant identity was tied to presence in the promised territory” (p. 460). By remaining in Canaan despite famine, Isaac would enact faith in God’s promise that this specific land would ultimately sustain the covenant people.

Significantly, the prohibition in Genesis 26:2 is immediately followed by promises of divine presence, blessing, and covenant fulfilment in verses 3-5: “Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and bless you. I will give you and your descendants all these lands and confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham...” This connection between obedience and blessing establishes what Hamilton (2018) calls a “theology of presence” - divine accompaniment that makes survival possible even in adverse circumstances.

The promise contains three key elements that contextualise the warning against migration:

1. Divine presence (“I will be with you”)
2. Material blessing despite famine conditions
3. Covenant continuity linking Isaac to both Abraham (past) and his descendants (future)

According to Arnold (2009), “The pairing of prohibition and promise creates a theological framework emphasising that covenant faithfulness sometimes requires remaining in difficult circumstances rather than seeking apparently easier paths” (p. 236).

Lessons from Genesis 26:2 in the Nigerian Context

The biblical account in Genesis 26:2, where God instructs Isaac not to migrate to Egypt during a famine but to remain in Gerar, offers several meaningful lessons for young people contemplating migration to urban centres without secured employment. While recognising the significant differences between ancient and contemporary contexts, this narrative provides thoughtful perspectives worth considering.

1. *The Importance of Discernment in Migration Decisions:* In Isaac’s case, what seemed like an obvious survival strategy—moving to Egypt during famine—was explicitly discouraged by divine guidance. For contemporary youth, this suggests the value of careful discernment before migration rather than impulsive decisions based solely on perceived opportunities. Urban centres often appear to offer unlimited possibilities compared to rural settings, creating what sociologists call the “bright lights syndrome.” However, urban migration can lead to precarious living conditions without proper planning, research, and preparation. The narrative encourages young people to thoroughly evaluate their motivations, preparation, and realistic prospects before relocating.

2. *Developing Resources Where You Are:* Following God’s instruction to remain in Gerar, Isaac “planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold” (Genesis 26:12). Despite challenging conditions, he invested in local agriculture and experienced remarkable productivity. For young people, this suggests the potential value of identifying and developing opportunities in their current locations before migrating. Many rural areas offer underutilised resources and market gaps that entrepreneurial youth could develop with the same energy they would invest in urban migration. Agricultural modernisation, value addition to farm products, rural services, and technology-enabled businesses represent potential opportunities that don’t require urban relocation.

3. *Building on Existing Foundations:* Genesis 26:18 describes how Isaac “reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham.” Rather than starting from scratch, he reclaimed and restored existing resources. This provides a powerful metaphor for young people considering their options. Before abandoning rural communities, youth might consider building upon existing family resources, inherited skills, community knowledge, or local connections. Intergenerational assets—whether land, established businesses, social networks, or traditional knowledge—often represent undervalued resources that could be revitalised rather than abandoned.

4. *Perseverance Through Initial Difficulties:* The narrative records that Isaac faced opposition from local herders who claimed his wells (Genesis 26:19-22). Rather than giving up, he persistently dug new wells until finding one that wasn’t contested. Urban migration often stems from frustration with local challenges, yet the same persistence required to succeed in cities might yield results if applied to overcoming local obstacles. The story suggests that initial setbacks don’t necessarily indicate that relocation is the answer; sometimes, sustained effort in one place eventually yields a breakthrough.

5. Recognition of Divine Provision in Current Circumstances: Throughout the narrative, Isaac experiences God's blessing in the place where he was instructed to remain. For youth with religious convictions, this highlights the importance of seeking divine guidance regarding location rather than assuming migration is always the best path. Many religious traditions emphasise discerning divine purpose in one's geographical placement. This perspective encourages youth to consider whether their migration plans align with their spiritual understanding and whether they've sought guidance through prayer or counsel from spiritual mentors.

6. Building Sustainable Community Relationships: Genesis 26:26-31 describes how Isaac eventually established a peaceful covenant with Abimelech and the Philistines, transforming potential enemies into allies. This successful community negotiation created a sustainable living arrangement. Many challenges young people seek to escape through migration—lack of opportunity, resource constraints, social limitations—might be addressed through improved community relations and collaborative initiatives. Building constructive relationships with local leaders, forming cooperatives with peers, or creating community development initiatives might generate opportunities that make migration unnecessary.

7. Understanding the Hidden Costs of Migration: While not explicitly stated in the text, God's warning against Isaac's migration implies awareness of risks or costs that weren't immediately apparent. Similarly, urban migration entails numerous hidden costs that youth often discover only after relocating. These include: Loss of social support networks and family connections, Higher living costs that offset increased earnings, Psychological challenges of isolation and adaptation, exposure to exploitation without protective community structures, and difficulty accessing services without established urban connections. The narrative encourages calculating these hidden costs before making migration decisions.

8. Balanced Application: While these lessons offer valuable perspectives, they should be applied with nuance rather than as absolute prohibitions against migration. Unlike Isaac, who received explicit divine instruction, contemporary youth must make decisions based on their specific circumstances, opportunities, and constraints. The biblical narrative doesn't establish migration as inherently wrong—indeed, Abraham's earlier migration was divinely directed. Instead, it suggests the importance of right timing, proper motivation, and alignment with divine purpose regarding place. Some youth may indeed find their purpose and opportunity through urban migration, while others might discover greater fulfilment and success by developing opportunities in their current locations.

Recommendation and Conclusion

The examination of rural-to-urban youth migration in relation to urban safety, when viewed through the theological lens of Genesis 26:2, reveals critical intersections between contemporary demographic challenges and timeless spiritual wisdom. As Nigeria and many developing nations continue experiencing unprecedented youth migration flows, the divine instruction to Isaac—“Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live”—offers a framework for reflection that complements empirical analyses and policy approaches. The youth migration patterns documented throughout this study highlight multiple dimensions requiring integrated responses. Economic factors driving youth from rural areas—including agricultural decline, land fragmentation, and limited opportunity structures—must be addressed through rural revitalisation initiatives that make remaining viable. At the same time, urban safety challenges precipitated by rapid, unplanned migration—including informal settlement proliferation, service provision gaps, and youth marginalisation—demand urban governance innovations that create inclusive cities capable of productively absorbing newcomers. Genesis 26:2 and its surrounding narrative context contribute several valuable perspectives to this discourse. First, the passage emphasises discernment regarding place and divine purpose, challenging purely economic decision frameworks while acknowledging that different individuals may receive different guidance regarding migration. Second, Isaac’s subsequent agricultural success and well-digging activities demonstrate the potential for developing resources and prosperity even in challenging environments when aligned with divine purpose. Third, the narrative’s treatment of conflict resolution and community building with foreign neighbours provides insights for navigating the diversity characterising rapidly urbanising environments.

Rather than imposing a simplistic prescription either for or against migration, this theological perspective encourages more profound reflection on individual calling, community responsibilities, and divine guidance that transcends material calculations alone. The narrative suggests that some youth may indeed be called to remain and develop rural potential, while others may legitimately migrate when aligned with divine purpose and adequate preparation. The critical distinction lies in discernment processes that consider spiritual dimensions alongside economic factors. This integrated perspective suggests several approaches for urban planners and policymakers concerned with developing safe cities amid rapid youth migration. First, urban safety initiatives must recognise and engage with the spiritual and religious dimensions of migrants’ lives rather than treating them as purely economic actors. Second, rural development policies should incorporate community-building and resource development approaches

exemplified in Isaac's well-digging initiatives. Third, education systems should equip youth with discernment tools that facilitate thoughtful migration decisions rather than unreflective urbanisation. Finally, religious institutions in both rural and urban contexts have significant roles to play in guiding youth through migration decisions and facilitating their integration into new communities or meaningful engagement in places of origin. The complexities of contemporary rural-urban migration cannot be reduced to a single biblical prescription nor adequately addressed through secular policy frameworks that ignore spiritual dimensions. As demonstrated throughout this analysis, integrating empirical research on migration patterns with theological reflection on place, purpose, and divine guidance offers a more holistic understanding of youth migration phenomena. This integrated approach recognises both the legitimate aspirations of young people seeking improved opportunities and the profound significance of discernment regarding geographical placement.

As Nigeria and similar nations continue navigating unprecedented urbanisation driven by youth migration, developing truly safe cities will require attention to both material and spiritual dimensions of human experience. Cities that provide physical security and economic opportunity and spaces for meaningful community, purpose, and spiritual flourishing will better meet the holistic needs of migrant youth. Similarly, rural revitalisation that addresses both material infrastructure and community vitality may create meaningful alternatives to migration for youth whose calling and purpose may be fulfilled in their places of origin. The divine instruction to Isaac reminds us that geographical decisions carry profound significance beyond economic calculations alone. When contemporary youth apply similar discernment to their migration decisions—considering divine purpose, community responsibilities, and holistic well-being alongside economic factors—they contribute to developing safer and more flourishing communities in both rural and urban contexts. This integrated approach offers a pathway toward urbanisation patterns that enhance human dignity, community cohesion, and sustainable development across the rural-urban continuum.

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