

YOUTH BULGE, DIGITAL MIGRATION AND URBAN INEQUALITY: EXAMINING SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF INTERNAL MIGRATION AMONG YOUNG ADULTS IN SUB SAHARAN AFRICA

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Abstract

The study looks at how internal migration affects young people in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in light of the region's youth population, internet technologies, and urban inequalities. Data was collected from 500 young migrants in Lagos, Abuja, and Port Hacourt using a mixed technique that included questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. The results show that even while many young migrants have access to electronics and are well-educated, they still struggle to obtain steady employment, and the majority of them wind up working informally and living on the streets or in dangerous neighbourhoods. Despite being widely available in many locations, internet connection typically does not lead to stable employment for the majority of people due to both ineffective infrastructure and a lack of digital literacy. The lives of young migrants are shaped in part by housing and job issues in urban areas, which has a greater impact on female migrants. More collaborative and youth-focused initiatives are needed to promote digital access, assist with housing, enhance skills, and safeguard the lives of young people, since it reveals gaps in the present policies

Keywords: Youth Bulge, Digital Migration, Urban Inequality, Migration, Adults

1. Introduction

There is currently a major shift in Sub-Saharan Africa's demographics, mainly due to a fast rise in the number of young people, a process usually known as the "youth bulge." This change in the population can give us benefits and cause us issues. According to the United Nations, there are more than 60% of people younger than 25 in the region, and their numbers are going to rise sharply in the coming years. Even though young people can help the economy develop and invent, this surge also brings serious issues concerning employment, living as a part of the community, and equal opportunities. In this regard, the movement of young adults within a nation is now an important factor in the region's social and demographic changes, altering cities and their growth directions.

Now, youth mobility in Sub-Saharan Africa includes a growing type called digital migration, which is driven by jobs online in addition to the normal economic reasons for migrating internally. With a wider spread of mobile devices and access to the internet in Africa, many young people are migrating to urban regions or new digital centers in pursuit of new jobs in online sales, marketing, software, and content

creation (World Bank, 2021). Because of this trend, cities are unable to handle the hordes of young people eager to build digital careers, which is disrupting the usual flow of migration.

Still, the potential of digital migration is not experienced by each country in the same way. Some youthful migrants are able to participate in the digital economy, but a large number get excluded since they lack certain skills, can't get modern devices, and face urban differences that make it difficult for them to improve their lives. Urbanization at a fast rate has led to bigger gaps in housing, health, education, and employment, especially among the young migrants living in informal settlements. Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt show these trends, as young people launch new projects while poverty and inequality remain in the cities (Sommers, 2015). Consequently, when a youth bulge combines with a large shift to urban digital use, social unity may suffer since everyone tries to get access to limited resources and services are pushed past their capacity.

Since youths' growth, migration patterns, and use of technology are increasing, this area questions the sociology of development. How are young migrants managing to find their way in urban areas when trying to get access to digital services? What prevents them from advancing because of their structure and the institutions in society? We need to revise our development policies for cities so that they make the most of the youth population and yet do not widen inequality. Considering these questions is very important for sustainable development in the region. More and more, it is clear to scholars and policy makers that making use of the demographic dividend requires taking into account the social and geographical aspects of youth's mobility and digital participation (de Haas, 2010; African Development Bank, 2018).

Here, the effects of young adults' internal migration on social and economic aspects in Sub-Saharan Africa will be studied by considering urban inequality and digital advancements. The study of youth digital migrants is meant to help us understand more clearly the changes and developments in demographics today.

2. Review of related literature

2.1 Demographic dynamics and youth bulge in Sub-Saharan Africa

The youth bulge has emerged as one of the most significant demographic features shaping development outcomes in Sub-Saharan Africa. The concept refers to a situation in which a substantial proportion of a country's population consists of young people, typically between the ages of 15 and 35. Sub-Saharan Africa is widely recognized as the world's youngest region, with more than 60 percent of its population below the age of 25 (United Nations, 2022). This demographic pattern is largely driven by persistently high fertility rates and declining child mortality. While international organizations often present this trend as either a development opportunity or a policy challenge, scholarly debates emphasize that its effects are neither automatic nor uniform across countries. Rather, the developmental consequences of a youth bulge depend on the political, economic, and institutional contexts within which young people live and seek opportunities.

A key argument in the development literature is that a large youth population can serve as an engine for economic growth. The demographic dividend thesis suggests that when a growing share of the population enters the working-age category, productivity and economic output can increase significantly (Bloom et al., 2003). However, this outcome is contingent upon effective investments in education, healthcare, and employment creation. Critics of the demographic dividend perspective argue that demographic change alone does not guarantee development. Countries with weak institutions, inadequate human capital development, and limited employment opportunities may fail to convert their youthful populations into

productive economic assets. Therefore, the youth bulge should be understood not simply as a demographic phenomenon but as a development challenge requiring deliberate policy intervention.

Youth unemployment remains one of the most pressing obstacles to realizing the developmental potential of Sub-Saharan Africa's youthful population. Although international reports consistently highlight high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment in the region, these statistics often mask important structural issues within local labour markets. Many young people are concentrated in informal economic activities characterized by low wages, job insecurity, and limited social protection. Scholars such as Filmer and Fox (2014) argue that the mismatch between educational systems and labour market demands further constrains youth employment prospects. Consequently, the challenge extends beyond job creation to include improving the quality of employment and strengthening skills development systems that can facilitate meaningful economic participation.

The relationship between the youth bulge and rapid urbanization further illustrates the complexity of development processes in the region. As increasing numbers of young people migrate to urban centres in search of education and employment opportunities, cities experience unprecedented population growth. While urbanization can stimulate economic dynamism and innovation, it also places significant pressure on housing, transportation, healthcare, and other essential services. The growth of informal settlements across many African cities reflects the inability of urban planning systems to accommodate expanding populations. Thus, urbanization presents both opportunities and constraints, making it necessary to examine how demographic pressures interact with governance and infrastructure development.

Gender inequalities and governance challenges also shape how the youth bulge influences development outcomes. Young women frequently face barriers such as early marriage, limited access to education, and restricted economic opportunities, reducing their ability to contribute fully to social and economic development. Similarly, weak governance structures and political instability can undermine the productive engagement of young people. In conflict-affected settings, exclusion from economic and political opportunities may increase vulnerability to crime, violence, or recruitment into armed groups. These realities suggest that the developmental implications of the youth bulge cannot be separated from broader issues of social inclusion, gender equality, and institutional effectiveness.

The foregoing discussion highlights the need to move beyond generalized assessments commonly found in international development reports. Even while organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank provide valuable demographic and economic data, they often offer broad regional analyses that pay limited attention to local variations and lived experiences. This study contributes to the existing literature by examining how youth bulge dynamics are experienced within a specific socio-political context, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between demographic change and development. By focusing on contextual realities rather than aggregate regional trends, the study seeks to generate insights that can inform more targeted and effective youth development policies.

The youth bulge represents both an opportunity and a challenge for Sub-Saharan Africa's development trajectory. However, whether it becomes a demographic dividend or a source of social and economic strain depends largely on the capacity of governments and institutions to provide quality education, decent employment, healthcare, and inclusive governance. Understanding these dynamics at the local level remains essential for designing policies capable of transforming youthful populations into drivers of sustainable development.

2.2 Digital migration and transformation of youth migration patterns

In Sub-Saharan Africa, youth have seen their transportation habits change a lot due to the digital revolution. Even though people traveled within their countries for different reasons, digital migration is now an additional motivation for people to relocate. It refers to the migration of youth toward cities, since they have better access to digital services and jobs online. As ICTs play a bigger role in youth life, plans for moving and working in other places are also changing across the region.

Because an increasing range of people across Sub-Saharan Africa now use the internet and smartphones, digital tools are helping to decide their migration movements. The GSMA (2022) states that from 2016 to 2021, more than 40% of internet users in the region accessed the internet through mobile devices, and young people were the major users. They are making information more available to people and at the same time supporting new forms of business, like online trading, freelancing, content creation, hailing a ride, and sending mobile money. Lagos, Abuja, Kigali, and Portharcourt are now famous places where young people are lured by exciting opportunities in the new digital economy (World Bank, 2021).

There are many reasons why digital migration is happening. Today's youth are guided by a drive to get by economically and to climb the social ladder, and these often involve using digital platforms. Tech hubs, innovation labs, and startup ecosystems give people jobs and also host places for showing their ideas, gaining new abilities, and meeting people worldwide. According to Tade and Adeniran (2020), digital technologies help young people take on more power and face the difficulties in Africa's modern economy. In other words, digital migration reacts to as well as updates existing barriers in the job market when traditional careers are not growing.

Nevertheless, this change widens the gaps between those who have and those who do not have opportunities. Whereas cities promise great progress in digital services, the lack of web access remains a big issue, dividing city dwellers from those in rural areas as well as inside cities. Since they lack basic computer abilities and do not have access to cheap, dependable internet, many young migrants cannot take part fully in the digital world (Donner et al., 2019). Also, there is a lot of competition among urban tech companies, so prior training, connections, or funds tend to give an advantage. Consequently, digital inclusion is still mostly focused on some youths, leaving others feeling left out from today's technology.

Besides affecting the economy, digital migration also affects how people meet and interact, build their selves, and form cultural idiosyncrasies among the youth. Youth now use social media to connect, argue their views, and create their version of an ideal lifestyle, which helps decide where they want to move and what they want to do in the future (Bosch, 2017). Because aspirations are changing, traditional ways of society are also challenged and the established developmental order is being questioned. Digital migration is one of the main aspects of youth movement in Sub-Saharan Africa now. It shows the way demographics, technology, and urbanization come together. Although it provides both new opportunities for creativity and people to participate, every community needs to focus on modern technology, upgraded education, and fair urban planning to enjoy these advantages.

2.3 Socioeconomic Reality and Inequality among Young People who Migrate to the City

When young people from Sub-Saharan Africa relocate to urban areas for digital jobs, they meet the difficulties that come with the great inequality found in cities. Even though cities are thought of as hotbeds for growth and progress, especially now with a growing digital economy, many young people who move

within their country experience difficulty and are often excluded. Young people going to places like Lagos, Abuja, Addis Ababa, and Johannesburg have caused those cities' infrastructure to burst and made it clear how unfair the structures are in the region.

Much of this inequality involves having little access to housing and standard services that most people use. A lot of young migrants live in places like slums or informal settlements, where houses are crowded, the public area is dirty, and there are not enough community services. As UN-Habitat states in its 2020 report, more than half of those living in cities in Sub-Saharan Africa call informal housing their homes. Areas like these are most likely to have young migrants with few finances or friends. Finding affordable housing causes many of them to live in dangerous places and harms their hopes for a comfortable life.

Another important issue is that urban inequality is very clear in the job market. As there are more employment opportunities in cities, work in the informal economy tends to involve little regulation, little money, and unpredictable security. A lot of young migrants face difficulties in getting the right employment or jobs that go beyond casual work. ILO, in 2020, indicated that almost all youth are employed in informal jobs in African cities. Eventhough the digital economy is growing, most young people don't have the skills they need to apply for good tech jobs or the help that they require to succeed.

Besides, access to educational and digital resources keeps creating unequal conditions for young migrants. People living in urban peripheries usually find that education and training are hard to come by. For this reason, young people who come from poor backgrounds have difficulties gaining the abilities required for jobs today. It adds more complexity because of gender issues. Because of cultural rules, caring for someone else, and unsafe conditions for girls, many young women find it challenging to use transport as well as city parks and online spaces (World Bank, 2019).

Unequal situations in urban areas can cause people to experience social exclusion. Many migrant youth experience biases and are not usually included in the process of making city laws and decisions. People in charge of urban planning most often disregard the thoughts of young people in favor of helping wealthy or outside investors. Not being accepted can cause young people to feel lonely and powerless, which may lead to more tension in society and, in some situations, inspire them to take part in protest actions or develop informal communities as alternatives (Sommers, 2015).

To sum up, cities can bring economic progress and use technology to close the gap, but they are also where hardships such as poverty, risks, and inequality are found. A lot of young migrants moving within Sub-Saharan Africa must handle unsafe housing, finding odd jobs, and risk being excluded by society. In order to make the most of youth migration and close the urban inequality gap, authorities need to choose inclusive city designs, help young adults get housing that fits their budget, train youth, and include them in important urban management roles. This can only be achieved if all possible aspects of youth migration are considered together.

2.4 Appropriate Policies and Strategies for Helping Youth in the City

An increase in young people relocating to cities in Sub-Saharan Africa due to demographic reasons and technology dreams indicates the need for urgent and accurate policies. While urban areas are leading places for youth to make progress, they also stand out for the big differences in opportunity and exclusion between individuals there. Whether inclusive development succeeds in Africa depends on how the governments, their partners, and urban planners deal with helping youth participate in city life. Any good policy must

cover several parts, including educational opportunities, jobs, where people live, the role of the internet, and government responsibilities.

A major way to deal with the challenge is to improve skills and educate workers for jobs offered by cities. A lot of young migrants get to the cities without having the proper qualifications for jobs or for using technology for work. That's why more vocational, technical, and online learning should be made available to everyone. According to the African Development Bank (AfDB, 2018), programs that teach youth how to code and use computer services close the digital gap and promote youth entrepreneurship in Africa. Kigali and Portharcourt are offering youth innovation hubs and training centers so that city youth can get the skills required in the modern job market.

Giving work to youth through starting their own businesses is an important strategy as well. More efforts are needed to help governments and financial institutions increase youth involvement in credit, business help, and starting new businesses. According to the World Bank (2020), both Nigeria's YES initiative and Kenya's Ajira Digital Program do a good job helping young people start businesses and take part in freelance work. In addition, it is necessary to offer incentives to private organizations, helping them employ and train young people, mainly in digital and environmental sectors.

Creating good housing and infrastructure is key to helping young people become part of society. Young migrants tend to move to crowded informal areas where there are not much services. Policies for housing in cities ought to favor affordable renting, improving slums, and including plans for youth. As an illustration, Ethiopia's Integrated Housing Development Program has managed to provide affordable homes for people with low income, such as youth, in Addis Ababa (UN-Habitat, 2020). To guarantee that youth's wishes and needs are included in urban development, more youth should join in the planning and management of cities.

Helping young people join in with technology is important for today's society. There is a focus on increasing broadband internet availability, installing Wi-Fi in remote places, and creating electronic government and learning platforms for everyone's use. Smart Africa Alliance (2021) insists that urban youth should be a major part of any national strategy for digital transformation. Besides, policies should tackle affordability because a lot of low-income youth cannot buy data or smartphones. Partnering private companies with the public sector is an important way to reach wider use of digital tools.

Young migrants should be kept in mind when social support and safety measures are created. A lot of today's urban youth face the risk of losing their homes, problems with money, and treatment by the police. Offering unemployment benefits, health coverage, and relevant laws to most youth workers can help them avoid risks and feel included as citizens of the city (ILO, 2020). Safe spaces and therapy for youth, mainly young women and groups that are usually marginalized, should be included in the social services in cities.

Effective urban youth policy needs access to accurate data and is guided by youth-specific ways of leading. National authorities should gather more precise information about youth migration, employment, and living conditions to improve their policies and see the results. Providing platforms for youth advisory councils, participatory budgeting, and receiving their digital feedback can help including young voices in organizing the cities.

All things considered, including young people in cities in Sub-Saharan Africa can happen by putting policies in place that are specific, involve the youth, and look to the future. Helping youth with education,

work opportunities, places to live, technology, and social protection encourages personal development and promotes general changes in cities. It is wrong to view youth mainly as migrants or beneficiaries; they are also key participants in improving the cities of Africa.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study draws on two complementary theoretical perspectives: the Push-Pull Migration Theory and the Digital Divide Theory, to explain the relationship between youth migration, digital migration, and urban inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, while both theories provide useful insights into migration dynamics, neither is sufficient on its own to explain the complex realities experienced by young migrants in contemporary African cities. Their integration therefore offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding how economic, social, and technological factors jointly shape migration outcomes.

The Push-Pull Migration Theory, developed by Lee (1966), remains one of the most widely used frameworks for explaining migration behaviour. The theory argues that migration decisions are influenced by push factors that drive individuals away from their places of origin and pull factors that attract them to destination areas. In the context of Sub-Saharan Africa, rural unemployment, poverty, limited educational opportunities, and inadequate social services serve as major push factors, while cities attract young people through perceived employment opportunities, improved infrastructure, and greater access to information and communication technologies (Adepoju, 2010).

Despite its relevance, the theory has been criticized for treating migration largely as an individual choice while paying insufficient attention to structural inequalities that shape migrants' opportunities after relocation. Simply identifying the factors that encourage migration does not explain why many migrants continue to experience poverty, unemployment, and exclusion in urban areas. Findings from this study support this criticism. Although many respondents migrated in search of better economic opportunities, a substantial proportion remained unemployed or engaged in informal-sector activities characterized by low wages and job insecurity. This suggests that migration does not automatically translate into economic advancement, as assumed in some interpretations of the push-pull framework. Rather, the benefits of migration are mediated by labour market conditions, access to resources, and urban governance structures.

To address these limitations, the study incorporates the Digital Divide Theory (van Dijk, 2006), which emphasizes inequalities in access to, use of, and benefits derived from digital technologies. The theory argues that digital inequality extends beyond physical access to devices and internet connectivity; it also includes disparities in digital skills, affordability, and the capacity to convert digital resources into social and economic advantages. This perspective is particularly relevant in understanding contemporary youth migration because digital technologies increasingly influence access to employment, education, social networks, and public services.

However, the Digital Divide Theory has also been criticized for placing excessive emphasis on technological access while underestimating broader socio-economic constraints. Access to a smartphone or internet connection does not necessarily guarantee meaningful participation in the digital economy. The findings of this study reinforce this argument. While many respondents reported having access to mobile phones and internet-enabled devices, significant differences existed in their ability to use these technologies for income generation, job searching, and social mobility. Migrants with higher levels of education and digital literacy were more likely to benefit from digital opportunities than those with limited skills and

resources. These findings demonstrate that digital inclusion is shaped by existing social and economic inequalities rather than technology alone.

The integration of both theories provides a stronger explanation of youth migration and urban inequality than either framework independently. The Push-Pull Migration Theory explains why young people migrate, while the Digital Divide Theory helps explain why migrants experience different outcomes after arrival in urban centres. The study's findings indicate that migration decisions are driven not only by economic pressures and urban attractions but also by expectations of improved digital opportunities. At the same time, unequal access to digital resources and skills contributes to the persistence of urban inequality among migrant youth.

By combining these perspectives, this study extends existing scholarship beyond traditional explanations of migration that focus solely on economic motivations. It demonstrates that the developmental outcomes of youth migration are increasingly influenced by digital inequalities that shape access to employment, information, and social opportunities in urban areas. Consequently, policies aimed at addressing youth migration should move beyond employment creation alone and incorporate measures that enhance digital literacy, affordable internet access, and equitable participation in the digital economy. Such an approach is essential for promoting inclusive urban development and reducing inequalities among young migrants in Sub-Saharan Africa.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, enabling the researcher to examine both the quantitative dimensions of youth migration and the lived experiences of young internal migrants. A total of 500 young internal migrants aged 18–35 residing in major urban centres such as Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt were selected through simple random sampling and administered structured questionnaires. The survey collected data on respondents' demographic characteristics, employment status, educational background, migration history, access to digital technologies, and current living conditions.

To generate qualitative data, 50 participants were purposively selected from the survey population for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The interviews explored participants' migration experiences, perceptions of digital opportunities, challenges encountered during urban integration, and strategies adopted to cope with these challenges. In addition, key informant interviews were conducted with policymakers, urban planners, and youth advocates to obtain insights into existing policies and programmes aimed at addressing youth migration and urban inclusion.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, while qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The integration of both methods provided a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics of youth migration and its implications for inclusive urban development in the region.

4. Findings

This part reviews the study's findings about how internal migration impacts young adults in Sub-Saharan Africa, mainly related to a young population, new technology use, and city inequality. Surveys, interviews, and focus group sessions were held in the major centres of Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt to collect the data

4.1 Demographic profile of respondents

From a total of 500 people aged 18–35, 52 percent were male and 48 percent were female participants in the study. A large share (67%) of the people moved from their rural or semi-urban areas to urban areas, chiefly for greater financial gain. Almost 6 out of 10 youth had a secondary school certificate and close to a quarter had reached the tertiary level. Only 34% of the respondents were not engaged in the informal economy, while the remaining 66% were employed in the informal sector.

4.2 Drivers of Internal Migration

A high majority (64%) of respondents claimed unemployment and few opportunities in rural areas were what made them leave. More than one-fifth of participants said having access to digital services and wishing to start a gig economy job were their main motivators. According to interviews, a lot of youth called urban areas “progressive,” “chance-filled,” and “simple with technology,” with many influencing ideas coming from online sources and narratives on e-commerce.

4.3 Digital Access and Economic engagement

An important point is that having digital access strongly affects young people. 72% of respondents had smartphones, and most were found to use the internet regularly for work, business, transportation, or shopping online. Still, only 23% of people who use digital platforms managed to support themselves through their earnings. It points out that some people do not have the chance to use technology productively because they have less training, capital, and competitive knowledge.

According to the information gathered during interviews, even though most youth wanted to work in the digital field, they had to deal with expensive internet prices, frequent power shortages, and a lot of competition for entry-level gigs. Abuja residents expressed their thoughts as one mentioned:

It would be nice to earn income online by doing graphics or freelance jobs, but the Internet is too costly. At times, I must wait for days in the dark while my phone battery runs out. Each time I look for work, there are plenty of people also bidding for the job role. Sometimes it becomes very annoying.

Another respondent

Online jobs sound attractive, yet they are not always easy to handle. When there are power cuts, I get my routine messed up, and my internet bundles are too costly. Even after taking classes, I cannot get any work experience. These days, social media is so popular that getting attention is tough. Many people believe that the opportunities are huge, but that isn't always true (Male. Port Harcourt Resident)

4.4 Urban Inequalities and Socioeconomic challenges

While hoping for a new opportunity in the city, 57% of these participants ended up living in informal areas, where there is little water, poor sanitation, and not much sense of safety. Around 63% of newly-arrived Afghanistan's lacked financial security, even though only 18% had available and economical housing. A lot of youth in Lagos and Port Harcourt earned their livings by selling on the streets, being artisans, or acting as informal service providers.

Group discussions showed that people in these communities have problems with both economic disadvantage and social isolation. Most people voiced their unhappiness about how the promised benefits of moving to cities did not come to pass. In his own words, this was what one participant from Port Harcourt said.

We expected to find a better life for ourselves filled with more work in Port Harcourt. However, things have gone wrong again and again. The wealthy gets wealthier, but people similar to us keep facing hard times. We're left out and are not given much attention. People are not interested in hearing our opinions. My family believed they would help us grow, however, we've stayed in the same place while struggling to make ends meet. I feel that we are being ignored by the country we call home (Male resident in Port Harcourt)

Also, a man who joined the focus groups commented as follows:

I was sure that my experience would be different when I relocated to Port Harcourt. It is easier for me to blend in everywhere else. Living from day to day without a real income and help. It is hard for outsiders to feel welcomed without either a network or resources. We exist far from the events happening outside of our housing units. The exciting prospects people hear about when it comes to living in cities? All their promises turned out to be false. Most of the time, we deal with our emotions quietly (Female Resident in Lagos).

It was also known that less mobility and a higher risk of being exploited affected many females. For example, a woman who came newly to Abuja stated thus:

After my move here, I have seen that life is not the same for women in the city. I am not able to move around freely once it gets dark because it is too dangerous. It is not easy to get a job without facing attempts to take advantage of you. I have applied for positions where the qualifications do not matter as much as the conditions for employment. At times, I doubt whether choosing not to stay was a good decision, since in the city, I feel less safe and stronger (Female Resident in Abuja).

Another respondent affirmed thus:

Living in this city requires women to be cautious at all times. I avoid going out alone unless there is no other choice. The thought of being harassed or pursued crops up quite often. It gets even tougher at workplaces. I was led to believe I'd get a job, yet the person insisted on proposing various other alternatives. It's frustrating. Our reason for coming was survival, but as women, it feels like we have to deal with danger all the time (Female, Lagos Resident).

4.5 Institutional and policy gaps

According to the stakeholders, youth were not included in most urban policies. Although there were programs like Abuja Digital Skills Training (TechHer & Partners) and Google Digital Skills for Africa, taking place in Abuja and Lagos, many people still did not know about them. It was widely agreed that planning efforts should focus on digital equality, finding more homes, and helping young people get jobs.

5. Discussion

This discussion is organized around the study's research questions to provide a clearer interpretation of the findings and their implications for understanding youth migration, digital inclusion, and urban inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa.

5.1 Youth Migration Drivers and Urban Aspirations

The first research question examined the factors influencing youth migration to urban centres in Sub-Saharan Africa. The findings indicate that migration decisions were primarily driven by limited economic opportunities in rural areas and the perceived availability of employment and digital opportunities in cities. This finding supports the central assumptions of Lee's (1966) Push-Pull Migration Theory, which argues that migration is shaped by conditions that push individuals from their places of origin and factors that attract them to destination areas.

However, the findings also suggest that the theory only partially explains contemporary youth migration. While economic motivations were important, many respondents reported that expectations of digital connectivity, access to information, and participation in the digital economy also influenced their migration decisions. This indicates that migration among young people is increasingly shaped by technological aspirations in addition to traditional economic factors. Consequently, the study extends the Push-Pull framework by demonstrating that digital opportunities have become an important urban pull factor in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa.

5.2 Digital Technology and Migrant Integration

The second research question explored the role of digital technologies in the experiences of youth migrants. The findings reveal that although most respondents had access to mobile phones and internet services, access alone did not guarantee improved livelihoods or successful urban integration. Many participants reported difficulties translating digital access into stable employment and economic advancement.

These findings support the core assumptions of the Digital Divide Theory (van Dijk, 2006), which argues that inequalities persist not only in access to technology but also in the ability to use digital resources effectively. The results demonstrate that digital exclusion is increasingly linked to differences in education, digital literacy, income, and social networks. While digital technologies created opportunities for communication, information sharing, and job searching, their benefits were unevenly distributed among migrants. This finding challenges technology-driven development perspectives that assume increased connectivity automatically leads to socio-economic empowerment. Instead, the study suggests that digital technologies may reproduce existing social inequalities when access is not accompanied by relevant skills and resources.

5.3 Urban Inequality and Youth Experiences

The third research question examined how urban inequality shapes the experiences of youth migrants. The findings show that many respondents remained concentrated in informal settlements and informal employment despite relocating in search of better opportunities. These conditions limited access to stable income, quality housing, and essential urban services. This finding confirms existing literature on urban poverty and exclusion in Sub-Saharan Africa (UN-Habitat, 2020), but it also highlights an important contradiction. Although cities are often portrayed as centres of opportunity, the experiences of respondents suggest that urban environments simultaneously create new forms of vulnerability. Migration improved access to certain opportunities, particularly digital connectivity, but did not necessarily reduce socio-

economic insecurity. The findings therefore challenge simplistic assumptions that urban migration automatically results in upward social mobility. Furthermore, gender emerged as an important dimension of urban inequality. Young female migrants faced additional barriers related to employment opportunities, personal security, and access to resources. This suggests that migration outcomes are influenced not only by age and economic status but also by gender relations embedded within urban social structures.

5.4 Policy Gaps and Development Implications

The final objective examined the effectiveness of existing interventions targeting youth migrants. Stakeholder interviews revealed a significant gap between policy intentions and the lived realities of migrants. Although digital skills programmes and youth empowerment initiatives existed, their coverage remained limited and often failed to reach the most marginalized groups. This finding reinforces arguments in contemporary development literature that policy interventions frequently emphasize technological expansion without adequately addressing structural inequalities. The evidence from this study suggests that digital inclusion policies alone are insufficient unless they are integrated with broader strategies addressing employment generation, affordable housing, education, and social protection.

5.5 Contribution to Knowledge

Taken together, the findings confirm key elements of both the Push-Pull Migration Theory and the Digital Divide Theory while also revealing their limitations when applied independently. The study demonstrates that contemporary youth migration in Sub-Saharan Africa cannot be explained solely by economic push and pull factors, nor can digital inequality be understood purely in terms of technological access. Instead, migration outcomes are shaped by the interaction between economic opportunities, digital resources, and structural urban inequalities. By integrating migration and digital inequality perspectives, this study contributes to the growing literature on youth mobility in Sub-Saharan Africa. It shows that digital technologies function simultaneously as drivers of migration, tools for adaptation, and mechanisms through which existing inequalities may be reproduced. This provides a more nuanced understanding of youth migration than is offered by conventional migration or digital inclusion studies alone.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between youth migration, digital migration, and urban inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa. The findings provide clear answers to the research questions and demonstrate the complex ways in which migration, technology, and urban development intersect in the lives of young migrants.

Regarding the first research question on the factors driving youth migration, the study found that limited employment opportunities, inadequate social services, and poor economic conditions in rural areas were major push factors, while the expectation of better employment prospects, improved infrastructure, and access to digital opportunities served as important pull factors attracting young people to urban centres. These findings largely confirm the assumptions of the Push-Pull Migration Theory, which explains migration as a response to conditions operating at both the origin and destination. However, the findings also extend the theory by showing that access to digital opportunities has become a significant contemporary pull factor influencing migration decisions among youth.

Concerning the second research question on the role of digital technologies in the lives of young migrants, the study found that digital tools facilitated communication, access to information, job searches, and social networking. Nevertheless, access to technology did not automatically translate into improved socio-economic outcomes. Many migrants continued to face barriers related to digital literacy, affordability, and limited economic opportunities. These findings support the Digital Divide Theory by demonstrating that digital inequality involves not only access to technology but also differences in the capacity to use digital resources effectively and benefit from them.

With respect to the third research question on urban inequality, the study revealed that many young migrants remained concentrated in informal employment and inadequate housing despite relocating in search of better opportunities. This suggests that migration alone does not guarantee social or economic mobility. Instead, existing inequalities are often reproduced within urban environments, particularly among migrants with limited education, skills, or financial resources. The findings therefore challenge optimistic assumptions that urbanization and digitalization automatically promote inclusion and development.

The study confirms important elements of both the Push-Pull Migration Theory and the Digital Divide Theory while highlighting their limitations when considered separately. The evidence suggests that youth migration outcomes are shaped by the interaction of economic conditions, digital opportunities, and structural urban inequalities. Consequently, policies aimed at supporting young migrants should move beyond narrow employment or technology-focused interventions and adopt integrated approaches that address education, digital inclusion, housing, employment, and social protection simultaneously. The study contributes to existing knowledge by demonstrating that digital technologies function not only as tools for adaptation but also as factors influencing migration decisions and shaping post-migration experiences. Understanding this relationship is essential for designing inclusive urban development policies capable of harnessing the potential of Sub-Saharan Africa's growing youth population.

7. Recommendations

1. Governments and development partners should expand accessible training initiatives that equip young migrants with practical, in-demand skills, using delivery methods that work across all urban areas.
2. Policymakers should expand access to startup funding, mentorship, and business advisory services for young people, while encouraging private sector firms to actively hire, train, and mentor youth especially in green economy and technology sectors.
3. Cities should prioritize affordable housing and improved living conditions in low-income areas, while ensuring young people have a meaningful role in urban planning and decision-making processes.
4. Governments should partner with private sector actors to extend broadband coverage, establish public Wi-Fi in underserved communities, and ensure affordable, user-friendly access to digital tools and services.
5. Formal structures such as youth councils and digital engagement platforms should be established to ensure young migrants have a consistent and recognized voice in urban policy and decision-making

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