



## YOUTH AT THE CROSSROAD: A REFLECTION FROM THE BOOK OF RUTH 1:1-5 IN THE CONTEXT OF YOUTH MIGRATION IN NIGERIA

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**ABSTRACT:** *The article discusses the timeless narrative of the Book of Ruth, specifically chapter 1 verses 1-5, and explores its relevance to the contemporary phenomenon of youth migration in Nigeria. It examines the socio-economic and cultural factors driving youth migration by drawing parallels between the journey of Elimelech and his family and the experiences of young Nigerians seeking better opportunities outside their homeland. It reveals the challenges Nigerian youth face as they go through the terrain of migration, including the search for economic stability, the pursuit of education, and escape from conflict and instability. Moreover, the article reflects on the themes of resilience, faith, and community support depicted in Na'omi's story and their applicability to the struggles encountered by modern-day migrants. The paper employs an analytical method that combines sociological observations with biblical interpretation to analyse the dynamics behind youth mobility in Nigeria. For young people to flourish in their communities, it highlights how crucial it is to address the underlying reasons for migration, implement inclusive development policies, and promote a positive atmosphere. Finally, the paper advocates for a comprehensive strategy based on proactive intervention, empathy, and solidarity to combat youth migration.*

**KEYWORDS:** Youth, Migration, Nigeria, Book of Ruth, Socio-economic factors, Resilience, Community support, and Inclusive development.



## INTRODUCTION

Migration is a movement in residence that can be permanent or semi-permanent and is usually driven by push or pull factors. People may be forced to leave their communities by push factors such as famines and droughts, political unrest, natural disasters, socio-economic problems, unemployment, poverty, rapid population growth, unfavourable living conditions, desertification, and loss of wealth. However, pull factors entice people to move to a specific location. Examples of these include the desire for better living and employment opportunities, the ease of obtaining land for settlement and agriculture, political and religious freedom, improved welfare and educational systems, improved communication and transportation infrastructure, first-rate healthcare, a stress-free environment, and safety (Selotlegeng-Mbe 2023, 6).

Nigeria, often regarded as Africa's economic and demographic powerhouse, is now facing a significant demographic challenge because of its sizable population, the majority of whom are under 35. There is a sense of desperation among people looking for better opportunities overseas since many Nigerians believe that, despite having abundant resources, they were more affluent in the 1960s when they gained their freedom (Adepoju 2018, 1-3). This has made professionals migrate to various destinations worldwide, including Europe, America, Canada, Australia, Asia, and even other African neighbouring countries, while those who cannot afford to leave often seek opportunities in the construction and other service sectors available (Adepoju 2018, 1-3).

According to Adepoju (2018, 3), infrastructure deficiencies, particularly power supply, hinder industrial operations, leading to closures or relocation to neighbouring countries. Also, insecurity in the country deters investors and impedes job creation, leaving the labour market unable to absorb the influx of job seekers. Many youths perceive migration as their sole option, particularly amid rising unemployment rates, which drive educated youths to seek better opportunities abroad, often through perilous means facilitated by traffickers. As conditions worsen, youths either seek education, return to rural livelihoods, become self-employed, or opt for migration despite stringent immigration regulations and growing xenophobia in destination countries.

On this premise, the paper explores youth migration in Nigeria, focusing on its various dimensions, including internal, rural-urban, and international migration. It explores the drivers of migration, such as economic factors, social dynamics, and political contexts, and its multifaceted impacts on individuals, families, and communities. The paper also examines the challenges faced by young migrants, such as cultural adjustment, social integration, economic vulnerability, and the consequences for families left behind and communities of origin. Building upon the narrative of Ruth 1:1-5, the paper analyses themes within the text, such as displacement, resilience, and familial bonds and the lessons therein for the Nigerian context.

### Youth Migration in Nigeria

According to Selotlegeng-Mbe (2023, 1-2), there is a slight inconsistency in the definition of youth across countries and organisations, for example, the African Union (15-35 years), The Commonwealth (15-29 years), United Nations (15-24 years), World Bank (15-24 years), World Health Organisation (15-24 years). Nevertheless, in this paper, 18-35 years is used to define



the age range, the basis being that the official age of accountability in Nigeria is 18, and 35 is the average from the global definition.

Based on Worldometer (2024) elaboration of the latest United Nations data, the current population of Nigeria is 227,250,656 as of Saturday, February 24, 2024. Nigeria has a high population growth rate of 2.4%, driven by high fertility rates of 5.2 children per woman, compared to 3.6 in Ghana and 3.3 in Kenya. With a population growth rate of 2.62%, it is growing faster than many other nations of comparable size. According to World Population Review (2024), Nigeria, with the largest population in Africa, is projected to reach 401.31 million by 2050, with a projected 728 million by 2100. The Census Bureau predicts Nigeria's population will surpass the US in 2047, reaching 379.25 million, making it the third most populated country globally. Factors contributing to Nigeria's population growth include early marriages, high birth rates, and a lack of family planning access.

Nigeria has the largest youth population globally, with a median age of 18.1 years. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, and insecurity have made 12% of the world's population live in extreme poverty in Nigeria. According to Akinyemi (2023), this makes migration attractive to young people, known as the "Japa syndrome", and between 1990 and 2013, Nigerian international emigrants were 1,256,114 and had grown to 1,438,331 in 2019. Economic instability, political unrest, and inadequate infrastructure have exacerbated socio-economic disparities, particularly between urban and rural areas, driven by seeking economic opportunities, education, and asylum in Europe, North America, the Middle East, and other African nations, which, at times, poses risks of exploitation, abuse, and violence along the way. This aggravates migrants' sense of vulnerability and alienation in their new environments. Nigeria was once a shining star in Africa, according to Integral Human Development (IHD 2023, 2) report,

As of 2020, 1,308,568 migrants were living in the territory of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (0.63% of the country's population). 713,678 (54.54% of the stock) were male, and 594,890 (45.46% of the stock) were female. Their main countries of origin were Benin (377,169 people, 28.82% of the migrant stock), Ghana (238,284 people, 18.21% of the stock), Mali (172,481 people, 13.18% of the stock), Togo (158,262 people, 12.09% of the stock), and the Niger Republic (120,797 people, 9.23% of the stock). Most of the immigrants, then, included people coming from fellow West African states.

The story is no longer the same; according to a 2018 Afrobarometer survey, one in three Nigerians, particularly younger and more educated men, desired to leave the nation. Their primary goal is to find work inside or beyond the continent. Of Nigerian migrants, 51% possess a postsecondary degree, and over half of the 72,000 physicians registered with the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN) are no longer in Nigeria. UNESCO states that in 2017 alone, 95,600 Nigerian students were studying abroad (IHD 2023, 3). The National Population Commission (2023) further reveals that over 60% of Nigeria's youth is involved in migratory movements.

Migration sometimes offers young people opportunities to acquire new skills and experience diverse cultures. It leads to access to vocational training programs and professional development opportunities, equipping them with valuable personal and professional growth skills. However, it is a complex phenomenon influenced by social, economic, and political factors, particularly among youth, which drive many to seek better economic opportunities



within Nigeria or abroad. Many youth receive meagre salaries that are insufficient to cover their livelihood. There are no systems to ensure that young, skilled workers receive salaries commensurate with their qualifications. This raises the rate of unemployment to 42.5% in 2020, with the underemployment rate at 22.8 % (National Bureau of Statistics Nigeria, 2022). This is one of the main reasons some Nigerian youth leave the country and seek work opportunities in Europe and Northern America. The promise of higher wages, improved living standards, and access to better jobs often motivate them. They are drawn to destinations where they believe they can achieve a higher quality of life for themselves and their families.

Also, education is crucial in Nigerian youth migration, as they seek higher education opportunities that may not be available in their home regions (Belmonte et al. 2020, 6-7; De Haas, 2006; Ossia et al. 2020; Abdu et al. 2017; Oreofe and Eytayo 2022). This often leads to skilled migration for educational and professional opportunities abroad, driven by the desire for quality education and better career prospects. They consider access to quality higher education institutions is limited in some regions of Nigeria, leading to many migrating internally or internationally to countries with renowned institutions (Akusoba 2014). These countries often offer higher-quality education and prestige, particularly those that will help them enhance their credentials and improve their job prospects upon returning to Nigeria. Another aspect of this educational migration is skilled migration, where they seek educational and professional opportunities to enhance their careers and skill sets (Channels TV 2021, 1). It occurs in countries with advanced industries and technology sectors aiming to access cutting-edge research, innovation, and professional networks. However, it also raises concerns about the loss of talent and skills from Nigeria and the brain drain, where highly educated individuals permanently migrate, depriving the country of valuable human capital. This brain drain is causing Nigeria to lose its most talented and skilled individuals and depriving the country of valuable human capital for innovation, research, and economic development, undermining efforts to build a knowledge-based economy and compete in the global marketplace (Anetoh, 2020).

Furthermore, political instability, ethnic tensions, and conflict in some Nigerian regions lead to young people migrating to seek refuge in other countries. Violence and insecurity are significant drivers which cause direct threats to safety, disruption of everyday life, and psychological trauma. Therefore, they migrate in search of safety and stability. According to the Integral Human Development (IHD 2023, 4) report, states that, in 2022, 3,098,404 internally displaced persons were recorded, with 375,552 directly caused by violence and conflict and 24,366 affected by climate disasters. Violence between Fulani herders and farmers in northern Nigeria, places such as Katsina, Sokoto, and Zamfara states, has become more frequent, leading to rural robberies and criminal violence. Large-scale displacements expose people to dangers such as extortion, sexual violence, kidnappings, attacks, and violence resulting in death. Insecurity has led to the suspension of humanitarian activities in Borno's Damasak and Dikwa areas. In 2022, 400,633 Nigerians crossed borders as refugees, with the number of Nigerian refugees living in other countries at 336,862. Conflict undermines livelihoods and economic opportunities, leaving young people with few options for survival.

Consequently, the rise of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has significantly impacted how youth access information about opportunities, migration routes, and destination countries. These technologies include websites, online forums, social media platforms, and government websites that provide comprehensive information on various opportunities such as scholarships, internships, job vacancies, and migration pathways. These platforms also promise



to offer academic programs, admission requirements, and funding options. Some provide migration information portals and government websites that guide migration pathways, visa requirements, documentation procedures, and settlement assistance, sometimes deceiving Nigerians' migration decisions without reading the potential risks of their decision. Again, sociocultural factors significantly influence youth migration decisions, including family expectations, societal norms, and cultural values. Family expectations often encourage young people to contribute to migration for better job opportunities or higher wages, as it is seen as a pathway to achieving social status, economic prosperity, or personal fulfilment to help the entire family.

### **Biblical Instances on Migration**

The passage of consideration is not the only passage that carries the idea of migration; instead, the Bible frequently discusses migration, with numerous instances of individuals and communities seeking refuge, opportunity, or divine guidance. These migrations, ranging from obedience to divine calling to persecution, significantly shape the narrative of salvation history and the faith journeys of individuals and communities, illustrating the diverse motivations, experiences, and outcomes associated with migration. This section briefly provides a survey of a few of those instances.

According to Nguyen (2012, 22), "The first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis are filled with stories of forced migration. Due to pride and selfishness, namely wanting to be like God..." According to the book of Genesis, after Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they were expelled from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:14-24). This expulsion from Eden is interpreted as a forced migration, as they were driven away from their original home and forced to live outside the paradise they had known. They could no longer dwell in the Garden and were compelled to fend for themselves in a world fraught with hardship and toil. Furthermore, Nguyen (2012) mentions the case of Cain, who figuratively became a wanderer, Noah and the family, the Tower of Babel narrative, and so on (22-23).

In Genesis 12:1-5, God calls Abram (later renamed Abraham) to leave his homeland in the Ur of the Chaldeans and migrate to the land of Canaan. Abram, his wife Sarai (later renamed Sarah), and his nephew Lot obediently embark on this journey. On another occasion, due to famine in Canaan, Abraham and Sarah temporarily migrated to Egypt for residence, as recorded in Genesis 12:10 (Carroll R. 2008, 72-77; Hoffmeier 2009, 35-46). After their time in Egypt, Abraham and Sarah returned to Canaan, as described in Genesis 13:1-4. Despite the challenges they faced, including conflict over land with Lot and his herders, after separating from his uncle Abraham due to disputes between their herders, Lot chooses to migrate to Sodom and settle there with his family (13:10-12). After some time, Lot and his family migrate to Sodom before God destroys it (19:15-26). Later in Genesis 28:1-5, Jacob, one of Abraham's grandsons, migrates to Haran to escape the wrath of his brother Esau, who seeks to kill him after he deceives their father Isaac and receives the blessing intended for Esau. After serving Laban, his uncle, for many years and building a family in Haran, Jacob returns to Canaan with his wives, children, and possessions. In Genesis 31:17-21, Jacob informs his wives of his intention to leave Haran and return to his homeland. As if that was not enough, in Genesis 46-50, Jacob and his family migrated to Egypt due to famine, settling in the land of Goshen at the invitation of Joseph, who had become an influential figure in Egypt. Over time, the Israelites multiplied and became a significant presence in Egypt. However, they eventually fall into slavery under





a new Pharaoh who fears their growing numbers. After facing numerous instances of hard labour, Moses demanded the release of his people from the Pharaoh. God sends a series of devastating plagues, culminating in the final plague where the firstborn of every household of the Egyptians is killed, and he allows the Israelites to leave Egypt. After forty years of wandering, the Israelites finally reached the Promised Land. Joshua, Moses' successor, leads them in conquering the land and settling in their territories (Carroll 2013, 9-26).

Another instance of migration in the Bible is the Babylonian exile, also known as the Babylonian captivity. It occurred in the 6th century BCE when the Kingdom of Judah, including its capital, Jerusalem, was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar II. This event had profound cultural, religious, and political implications for the Jewish people, who were deported to Babylon. The exile lasted for several decades, with the exiled Jews living as captives in Babylonian territory. The exile is often seen as a divine punishment for the people's sins and disobedience, particularly idolatry and failure to uphold the covenant with God. Prophets like Jeremiah warned of the impending judgment, but they ignored them. The exile ended with the rise of the Persian Empire under King Cyrus the Great, allowing the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

In the New Testament, there are also instances of migration. For example, in Matthew 2, after the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, wise men from the East come to Jerusalem, seeking the newborn king of the Jews. King Herod, troubled by this news and fearing a potential rival to his throne, consults with the chief priests and scribes, who inform him that the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem according to prophecy. In Matthew 2:13-15, an angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream, warning him of Herod's intentions to kill the child Jesus. In response, Joseph took Mary and Jesus and fled to Egypt to escape the threat of Herod's violence. This migration fulfils the prophecy found in Hosea 11:1, which states, "Out of Egypt I called my son." After Herod's death, an angel appears to Joseph in Egypt, instructing him to return to the land of Israel with Mary and Jesus. Joseph obeys the angel's command and settles in the town of Nazareth in Galilee, fulfilling another prophecy that Jesus would be called a Nazarene (Matthew 2:19-23).

As documented in Acts, the apostles' missionary journeys were crucial in early Christianity. Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus, embarked on several journeys, including the First Missionary Journey to Cyprus and Asia Minor, the Second Missionary Journey with Silas, Timothy, and Luke, and the Third Missionary Journey, which revisited his previous missions. Despite facing opposition and imprisonment, Paul eventually travelled to Rome as a prisoner, where he continued preaching the gospel. Other apostles, including Peter, Philip, and Barnabas, also engaged in missionary activities. These journeys led to the establishment numerous Christian communities across the Mediterranean, crossing cultural, linguistic, and geographical boundaries. These communities were inclusive, welcoming people from diverse backgrounds, and formed close-knit communities centred around their shared commitment to Jesus Christ. Therefore, to achieve the purpose of this paper, the migration narrative of Elimelech and his family from Bethlehem is considered appropriate, and it is adequately discussed below.

### **Contextual Analysis Ruth 1:1-5**

This paper is about youth and migration, which may raise a question in the reader's mind on whether the book's characters fit into the age limit of youth. Several deductions of what must have been the age of Elimelech and Na'omi as they left Bethlehem and the average age of



marriage in the ancient Jewish culture have been discussed by several authors (Geertz, 1973; Porten, 1968; Cotton & Yardeni, 1997; Yadin, 1962; Yaron, 1992; Cotton, 1995; Wasserstein, 1989; and Katzoff 1991). According to Michael L. Satlow (2001, 132), in Babylonia, males were expected to marry at the age of twenty to women in their teens. However, in Palestine, men married around the age of thirty to women who were ten or fifteen years younger. The general probability is that Elimelech and Na'omi were within the age range of 20-35, which fits into the youth age in Nigeria and, of course, in the context of this study.

The book of Ruth explores the concept of divine providence in resolving three everyday human needs: food, marriage, and children. Naomi's fortunes change from emptiness to fullness with Ruth's return to finding a home and husband. Her declaration to embrace Israel and Yahweh ends her tragedies, widowhood, and foreign status. The blessings at the gate testify to the widespread acceptance of Ruth as a full-fledged Israelite. The story emphasises the importance of *hesed*, or loyalty, towards Yahweh and his people.

### Authorship

The book of Ruth does not explicitly or implicitly reveal its author's identity. The Talmud attributed its authorship to Samuel, but this suggestion conflicts with several details within the book (Hubbard 1988, 45). Samuel lived in the late Judges period; therefore, the reference to this period assumes it has already ended. The authorship fits poorly with the parenthetical explanation of legal custom in Ruth 4:7. Inferred from the book's literary genre, one may conclude that the author was a literary artist of the highest order. However, Two crucial observations by Hubbard (1988:45.; cf. (Gottwald, 1985, 555; Brenner 1986, 251-79)) suggest the possibility that the writer was a woman. First, the plot revolves around two desperate women living in a male-dominated world. As a result, it appears to represent a feminine viewpoint. Second, the novel's action is propelled by the boldness of women. Ruth and Naomi's effort deserves the most credit for its eventual success. Hence, it may be interpreted as a critique of the male characters—Naomi's close relatives, especially Boaz—for their inability to stand up for the two disadvantaged cousins. This proposal is still only a logical deduction despite such internal evidence.

### Date

For most of this century, scholars have held to a postexilic date of composition for the book Ruth, which is believed to have been written after 538 BC (Pfeiffer 1948, 718). This has been supported by several pieces of evidence, including the book's alleged late linguistic forms, legal customs, literary features, and comparisons between Ruth and supposedly late biblical books (Hubbard 1988, 46). However, the recent trend favours a pre-exilic date for the composition of Ruth and favours composition during the reign of Solomon (10th cent. BC) (Niditch 1985, 454). On the contrary, Driver (1972, 454) argues that the Hebrew of Ruth resembles the "classical" language evident in Genesis and Samuel more than the "late" Hebrew known from Esther, Chronicles, or Nehemiah. The presence of "archaic" linguistic elements in Ruth implies that the book's language is old, thus reflecting an early date of composition (Myers 1955, 20). Hence, the pre-exilic date is slightly more likely due to several arguments, including the book's purpose, which is improbable, and the theology slightly favours the pre-exilic date.



## Deconstruction of Ruth 1:1-5

### The Cause of Migration (1:1–2)

[1] וַיְהִי בִימֵי שָׁפֹט הַשְּׁפֹטִים וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לָחֶם יְהוּדָה לְגוֹר בְּשֹׂדֵי מוֹאָב הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּשְׁנֵי בָנָיו:

[2] וְשֵׁם הָאִישׁ אֱלִימֶלֶךְ וְשֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ נְעֹמִי וְשֵׁם שְׁנֵי-בָנָיו | מַחְלֹן וְכִלְיוֹן אֶפְרַתִּים מִבֵּית לָחֶם יְהוּדָה וַיָּבֹאוּ שָׂדֵי-מוֹאָב [2] וַיְהִי-וַיֵּשְׁבוּ:

[3] וַיָּמָת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ אִישׁ נְעֹמִי וַתִּשְׁאַר הִיא וּשְׁנֵי בָנֶיהָ: [3]

*1 Back in the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah went with his wife and two sons to live as a resident alien in the fields of Moab. 2 The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. When they reached the fields of Moab they settled there.*

The writer describes the era of Judges, *וַיְהִי בִימֵי שָׁפֹט הַשְּׁפֹטִים* (*Back in the days when the judges ruled*) a period of social and religious chaos in Israel. Guzik (2022:1) describes it as “the days when the Judges ruled were dark days for Israel; the period was characterised by the phrase everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” Okwueze (2001:117) opines that “the Israelites adopted cult prostitution as a way to worship Yahweh in order to make him an effective God of agriculture.” The judges were local military heroes who rescued Israel from foreign threats. The story is set against a dark background, with famines striking the land and a famine affecting the entire country. According to Hubbard (1988, 123), the famine serves two purposes: it recalls the biblical pattern that those famines often advance God’s plan for his people and hints at a thematic link between the story and the patriarchs.

The writer notes that a family from Bethlehem in Judah, consisting of four members, was forced to migrate to Moab due to the famine. According to Crossley (2002:220), Elimelech and his family fled Judah due to famine and their desire to pay off debts after losing their ancestral property, which they could not do. The family, which had only four members, migrated to neighbouring Moab as a resident alien *גֹּר*. This migration faced poverty and social ostracism, similar to the OT practices of a resident alien. The fertile Moabite plateau may have been an essential breadbasket for Palestine and regularly attracted famine refugees. The common ancestry shared by Israel and Moab has facilitated such contacts or being the closest place to Bethlehem where food was available. However, the human dimension of migration must not be overlooked. The family left the familiar for the unfamiliar, the known for the unknown, and seeking refuge in Moab was both shameful and dangerous (Hubbard, 1988).

According to Hubbard, the husband, Elimelech, is a pre-monarchical era name, possibly referring to “my God (Yahweh) is king” or “God is king” (1988, 125). The wife’s name, Naomi, is derived from the root *נְעֻמִי*, (נִמַּ) meaning “pleasant, lovely.” Mahlon *מַחְלֹן* is likely derived from *מחל*, a root unattested in Hebrew except in proper names, and Chilion *כִּלְיוֹן* has the *-ôn* ending typical among Semitic proper names. Despite their etymological uncertainty, these names have genuine counterparts in the ancient Near East, undercutting the popular idea that they are inventions” (Hubbard 1988, 125). The family is identified as Ephrathites from Bethlehem, possibly an ethnic way of specifying the clan within the tribe of Judah. The author may have identified this family as aristocratic, highlighting the humiliating tragedy of sudden





poverty and the indefinite duration of their sojourn in Moab. The story highlights the irony of the situation and the family's journey.

#### 4.3.2. Report of Double Bereavement (1:3–5)

[4] וַיִּשָּׂאוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מֵאֲבֹתָיו שֵׁם הָאֶחָת עֹרְפָה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית רֹוּת וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם כַּעֲשָׂר שָׁנִים:

וַיָּמָוּוּ גַם־שְׁנֵיהֶם מִחֵלוֹן וְכִלְיוֹן וַתִּשָּׂאֵר הָאִשָּׁה מִשְׁנֵי יְלָדֶיהָ וּמֵאִשָּׁה: [5]

וַתָּקָם הִיא וְכִלְתִּיהָ וַתֵּשֶׁב מִשְׁנֵי מוֹאָב כִּי שָׁמְעָה בְשָׂדֵה מוֹאָב כִּי־פָקַד יְהוָה אֶת־עַמּוֹ לְתֵת לָהֶם לָחֶם: [6]

*3 Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died. So she and her two sons were left alive. 4 The sons then took Moabite wives for themselves. One's name was Orpah, the second's name was Ruth. And they lived there about ten more years. 5 Then even those two—Mahlon and Chilion—died. So the woman was bereft of both her two children and her husband.*

Hubbard (1988, 127) asserts that the irony of a man named “my God is king” dying raises questions about the kind of God that cannot keep a single Israelite alive in a distant land. Slotki (1967, 42) suggests that Elimelech died because he failed to return to Palestine. The tragic result of Elimelech's death is that Naomi and her two sons are left alive, a shift of parental claim and responsibility from the dead father to the living mother. The story focuses on Naomi, not Elimelech, as she is Elimelech's widow. Despite the gloomy grief, three of the original four family members survive, and widows draw comfort from the future potential of their children.

The story of Elimelech and Naomi is a tragedy of a family on the brink of extinction due to famine and death. The children, Mahlon and Chilion, die, leaving Elimelech's family without second and third generations. This tragedy is reminiscent of human barrenness in ancient times, as Moab, the provider of “seed” for survival, is now the scene of human barrenness. The narrator emphasises the cruel result of the lost sons, with Naomi being bereft of both her two children and her husband (Victor 2004, 191; Laffey 2000, 55). Her family of four suddenly shrinks to one, and she loses all identity. Naomi's fate is bitter, as she lacks the provision and protection of a husband in a male-dominated ancient society. Her age and poverty effectively seal off three options ordinarily open to a widow: marriage, support by trade, and childbirth. She suffers from the painful shame of childlessness, facing her declining years with no children to care for her and no grandchildren to cheer her spirits.

### **Inferences and Application for the Nigerian Context**

Ruth 1:1-5 recounts the story of Naomi, her husband Elimelech, and their two sons, who migrated from Bethlehem to the land of Moab due to a famine in their homeland. Odo and Uroko (2023:5) opine that the text focuses on the voluntary migration of Elimelech and his household from Judah to Moab. This section provides inferences and applications to youth migration in the Nigerian context.

#### **Famine and Economic Hardship**

Like Naomi's family, many young Nigerians face economic challenges, which “has increased, and poverty rates have soared” (Oladejo, 2023, 2. See also, Oyedeji 2022; Jerome-Mario, 2022). Economic hardships like poverty, lack of opportunities, and income inequality compel youth to migrate for better livelihoods and economic prospects. As stated elsewhere, Nigeria grapples with high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment, with many young



people struggling to find stable and well-paying jobs despite their educational qualifications. This leads to a sense of stagnation and hopelessness. Income inequality is pronounced, with wealth and resources distributed unevenly, further marginalising low-income individuals and pushing them to seek better opportunities elsewhere.

Like Naomi's family's migration to Moab for food and economic stability, many young Nigerians migrate desire to leave their hometowns and seek greener pastures elsewhere. Economic hardships, such as food insecurity and the inability to meet basic needs, offer the possibility of escaping poverty and accessing opportunities for economic advancement that are not available in their current locations. Young Nigerians aspire for economic self-sufficiency and financial independence, driving them to migrate in search of opportunities to build better futures for themselves and their families. Many youths consider migration as a pathway to escape poverty and achieve economic empowerment, and on the one hand, "their departure is a significant brain drain for the country" (Oladejo 2023, 3).

While migration offers potential benefits, the crossroad here is that it poses risks and vulnerabilities, including exploitation, discrimination, and precarious living conditions. The International Organization for Migration (2023) reports that migrants entering Europe through the Mediterranean choose a more dangerous route due to border restrictions, increasing the risk of death. An estimated 22,500 migrants have died on the way to Europe since 2014. Only about a quarter of almost 1.5 million people have arrived on the Central Mediterranean route ending at Sicily. Nearly 80% of migrants in Libya are young men, on average 22 years old, and these young migrants travel alone. Most migrants who travel through the Mediterranean route are youth. In 2016, over 362,376 migrants risked their lives by crossing the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe. In early 2015, more than one million refugees and migrants travelled across the Mediterranean Sea in unseaworthy vessels. In 2017, 53% of those who reached European shores originated from the ten nations that produce the most refugees worldwide. The majority of arrivals are from Nigeria, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire. Greece overtook Italy as the primary point of arrival in 2015, surpassing the numbers for 2014. Over 67,500 people arrived in Italy in 2017, mainly coming from Eritrea (25%), Nigeria (10%), and Somalia (10%). Nigeria remains the single largest sender of refugees to Italy through the Central Mediterranean route. In 2017, 4757 migrants died in the Mediterranean. Nine corpses were recovered off the coast of Libya in the past five days, with one body discovered in Al Maya and eight bodies near Al Khums. The total number of fatalities in the Mediterranean is 2793 in 2017 ( Selotlegeng-Mbe 2023, 14-16).

Therefore, comprehensive strategies to tackle underlying economic challenges are required, which include job creation, skills development, and inclusive economic growth. Sustainable solutions that address the root causes of economic hardship are essential for reducing the need for youth migration and encouraging economic stability within the country.

### **Search for Opportunities**

Just as Naomi's family sought opportunities for survival in Moab, young Nigerians often migrate in pursuit of education and opportunities that may not be available or accessible in their home regions. They seek quality education to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to compete in the global job market, particularly in the face of economic challenges such as inflation, currency devaluation, and fluctuations in the job market. The expectation of improved financial prospects is a powerful incentive for migration access to better housing,



healthcare, quality of life and environments where they can achieve greater comfort, security, and well-being. However, another major crossroad is that migration promises better opportunities, but it also entails risks, challenges and obstacles such as discrimination, exploitation, legal barriers, and social isolation in destination areas. One cannot deny that many Nigerian emigrants have “made in life”, but many are suffering. Some have become beggars or slaves, sleeping under bridges (Phoenix, 2023). Some of these emigrants are ashamed to return home because of what they think others will say about them.

### **Family Dynamics and Support**

Naomi’s decision to migrate was influenced by familial considerations, including her husband’s leadership and responsibility to provide for their family. Likewise, young Nigerians sometimes migrate with the support and encouragement of their families, who seek better futures for their children and relatives. Family members, particularly parents and elders, play a significant role in guiding and supporting young people through the complexities of migration. Some families provide financial assistance to facilitate the migration process, covering transportation, accommodation, and education fees. They go to any extent to sell all their belongings to make their sons or daughters travel out. It is like a sort of investment to the family. In many Nigerian families, there is a cultural expectation for young people to contribute to the financial well-being of their families. Hence, they opt for migration to fulfil their responsibility, provide for their families, and financially support their parents and siblings. Families aspire for better futures for their children and relatives, motivating them to encourage and support migration as a pathway to economic advancement and improved living standards. The desire to see their loved ones succeed drives families to endorse and facilitate migration opportunities. Nigerian families often extend beyond nuclear households to include extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Therefore, when one “made it”, the entire family or community owns such a person. Notwithstanding, families must weigh the potential benefits of migration against the financial risks and obligations involved.

### **Identity and Belonging**

Naomi’s family faced the challenge of adapting to a new culture and environment in Moab. The challenge of adaptation and integration faced by Naomi’s family in Moab parallels the experiences of young migrants in Nigeria as they go into new social norms, languages, and customs in urban areas or foreign countries. They encounter unfamiliar social norms and behaviours in their destination areas, which may differ from those in their hometowns or communities.

Naomi’s family experienced a sense of displacement and loss of identity upon leaving Bethlehem. Likewise, young migrants grapple with issues of identity, belonging, and cultural integration as they pass through the complexities of migration and adjust to life in unfamiliar settings. Like Naomi’s family leaving Bethlehem, young migrants in Nigeria experience a sense of loss and displacement when leaving their hometowns or communities. Negotiating these identities is a complex process. Maintaining connections to cultural heritage and traditions is essential for preserving a sense of identity and belonging, but many have lost that already; they are neither here nor there.



## Resilience and Determination

Naomi's resilience and determination are evident as she faces adversity and loss in a foreign land. Despite obstacles, she demonstrates resilience, perseverance, and determination in overcoming challenges and pursuing aspirations for a better future. The comparison drawn between Naomi's resilience and determination in a foreign land and the resilience demonstrated by young migrants in Nigeria is poignant. Despite these obstacles, they demonstrate resilience by persevering through adversity and maintaining a positive outlook on their migration journey. They adapt to new environments, learn from their experiences, and grow more robust in adversity.

One good thing that will not jettison is that youth set clear goals and aspirations for themselves, whether obtaining an education, securing employment, or supporting their families financially. They remain focused on their objectives and take proactive steps to achieve them despite the challenges they may encounter. They demonstrate persistence and tenacity in pursuing their aspirations, refusing to be deterred by setbacks, showing strong determination and perseverance, and refusing to relinquish their dreams and aspirations for a better future. Also, some maintain a positive mindset, cultivating optimism, hope, and a belief in their ability to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals. They view challenges as opportunities for growth and transformation rather than insurmountable barriers to success. Resilient migrants employ effective coping strategies to manage stress, anxiety, and adversity during their migration journey. Whether practising self-care, seeking social support, or engaging in problem-solving, they adopt adaptive coping mechanisms that promote well-being and resilience.

Hence, successful ones actively contribute to their communities, volunteering and participating in social initiatives promoting integration, inclusion, and social cohesion. They recognise the importance of giving back to their communities and positively contributing to society. They are often the leading investors in their home countries. They send vast amounts of remittances back home to invest in land and real estate in cities or rural areas (Smith, 2007; Smith & Mazzucato 2009, 662–673; Melly 2010, 37–65). These remittances contribute to local and national economic development and offer new opportunities for unemployed youth who are considered a potentially destabilising societal factor (Kaag et al. 2019, 11). It also plays a significant role in Nigeria's economy, contributing to household income, poverty reduction, and local development initiatives. According to Inegbedion (2023, 5), Nigeria is the largest recipient of remittance flows in Sub-Saharan Africa, receiving over 40% of the total volume in 2020, accounting for \$17.2bn. The country ranks 10th in remittances, with India being the top recipient at \$83.1bn. The United States transfers about one-third of the total volume, followed by the UK with 20%. Other countries include Cameroon, Italy, Ghana, Spain, Germany, Benin, Ireland, Canada, Gabon, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and Niger. However, this estimate only accounts for formal channels and does not include informal channels.

## Hope for Restoration

There is this common saying that: "The downfall of any man is not the end of his/her life." This is true from Ruth's story, a powerful example of resilience in the face of hardship, particularly for Nigerian migrants. Despite facing challenges such as cultural differences, discrimination, and legal issues related to immigration status, Ruth and Naomi demonstrated remarkable resilience by refusing to give up or succumb to despair. This narrative serves as a testament to the power of perseverance in the face of adversity, as they embody this quality to



overcome obstacles and continue moving forward on their journey towards success and fulfilment in their new environment. The theme of hope and faith is central to Ruth's story and holds profound significance for Nigerian migrants in the West. Ruth's decision to accompany Naomi to Bethlehem despite the challenges ahead reflects her unwavering hope for a better future.

Therefore, Nigerian migrants who are currently facing various difficulties should maintain hope as a source of strength in the face of obstacles; holding onto hope allows individuals to see beyond their present circumstances and believe in the possibility of positive change. They should know that their current struggles are not the end of their narrative; instead, they should embrace hope and faith for a brighter tomorrow and continue striving towards their dreams with determination and optimism. Ruth's journey from adversity to prosperity is a powerful example, illustrating that it is possible to build a new life and find fulfilment even when starting with little or nothing. Migrants may consider returning home to start anew, but the decision is often personal and influenced by their circumstances. They must carefully consider their motivations, weigh the pros and cons, and plan for their reintegration into Nigerian society. Embracing this new chapter can be gratifying, allowing migrants to reconnect with their roots, pursue their aspirations, and contribute meaningfully to the development of their homeland.

## CONCLUSION

Several things have emerged throughout this study on youth migration in Nigeria. Economic opportunities, education, urbanisation, political instability, violence and insecurity, family dynamics, social networks, information and technology, social and cultural factors, identity and belonging, resilience, and hope for restoration are all significant factors shaping the migration experiences of young Nigerians. This study underscores the importance of addressing structural factors such as economic inequalities, political instability, and social disparities to create an enabling environment for youth empowerment and development. There is a need for targeted interventions to enhance education and employment opportunities, strengthen social support systems, and promote inclusive development that addresses the needs of marginalised youth populations. Ruth 1:1-5 offers valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities migrants face, including displacement, loss, and hope for restoration. The story of Naomi and her family goes with the experiences of Nigerian migrants and their determination to overcome adversity and pursue a better future. Thus, addressing the underlying causes of migration and advocating for laws and methods that provide youth agency, open doors to inclusive growth, and contribute to creating a more just and sustainable future for all.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

First, the government should invest in rural and urban infrastructure development and service provision to reduce migration pressures. This includes improving road networks, electricity supply, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions to enhance rural communities' living standards and economic opportunities. The government should develop comprehensive migration policies that address the needs and rights of youth. These policies should include





measures to improve access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities in rural and urban areas and initiatives to protect and combat human trafficking.

Second, Churches should create awareness about the risks and challenges of migration through educational programs, seminars, and workshops. They can empower local communities by promoting economic development initiatives, skills training programs, and entrepreneurship opportunities. By helping to address underlying socio-economic factors, churches can mitigate the drivers of migration and promote sustainable livelihoods.

Third, parents and guardians should be educated about the risks and benefits of migration and encouraged to support their children's aspirations while also considering alternative opportunities within Nigeria. They should not mount pressure on their children by comparing them with other children outside and laying the burden of the entire family on them. This can push youth out and put them at risk of making wrong decisions.

Fourth, individuals should invest in skill development and entrepreneurship initiatives to create opportunities within Nigeria. This includes acquiring vocational training, starting small businesses, and considering alternative pathways for personal and professional development within Nigeria. Youth should be empowered to make informed decisions about migration by accessing accurate information about the risks and opportunities involved.

Fifth, youth should not migrate from Nigeria, except God approves it. Abraham went to Egypt because of famine, and Isaac wanted to do so; in Genesis 26, God says no to him, and he waits in the land, and God prospers him. Undoubtedly, Nigeria is full of economic and insecurity crises, yet one should not jettison the fact that God is still speaking. Therefore, youth and parents should learn to listen to what God is saying. If He gives the go-ahead to travel, He will prosper the journey; likewise, if He says no, no one should dare try to.

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