

RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION AND ITS IMPACT ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT: CASE STUDY OF NKAFAMIYA, MICHIKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ADAMAWA STATE

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Abstract

Rural-urban migration has emerged as one of the most significant demographic trends shaping the development trajectory of rural communities in northern Nigeria. This study examined the impact of rural-urban migration on rural development in Nkafamiya, Michika Local Government Area (LGA), Adamawa State. Employing a descriptive survey research design with a mixed methods approach, data were collected from 205 respondents drawn from a target population of 720 households through stratified proportionate random sampling. Structured questionnaires, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions were used as data collection instruments. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and qualitative data through thematic analysis. Findings revealed that the dominant push factors driving out-migration from Nkafamiya include lack of social amenities, desire for better living standards, low agricultural income, poor healthcare, and inadequate educational facilities. The study further found that rural-urban migration has significantly impaired rural development in Nkafamiya by depleting the agricultural labour force, reducing local food production, diminishing community participation in development activities, and weakening social capital. The study recommends investment in rural infrastructure, creation of agro-based employment, and the strengthening of agricultural support systems as the most effective strategies for mitigating the negative developmental impact of rural-urban migration in Nkafamiya and similar rural communities across Adamawa State.

Keywords: Rural-urban migration, rural development, push factors, labour force depletion, agricultural decline, remittances, rural infrastructure.

Introduction

Nigeria's urban population has grown from approximately 10 percent of the total population at independence in 1960 to over 52 percent by 2022, a trajectory driven in significant part by sustained rural-to-urban migration flows (NBS, 2022; World Bank, 2023). While urbanisation carries potential benefits—including the concentration of industries, services, and innovations—the rural communities from which migrants originate frequently bear severe developmental costs as a result of population loss, labour shortages, and the erosion of social capital (Adedimu & Fadamiro, 2013; Adeola, 2020).

In Adamawa State is a part, rural-urban migration has been particularly pronounced in recent decades, propelled by a convergence of structural factors including environmental degradation, the protracted Boko Haram insurgency, farmer-herder conflicts, chronic poverty, and the persistent underdevelopment of rural infrastructure (Abubakar, 2014; Ibrahim & Aliyu, 2020). Michika Local Government Area, located in the northern part of Adamawa State, has been among the most affected areas, experiencing significant population

outflows as residents - particularly young men and women - migrate to urban centres such as Mubi, Yola, and cities further south including Abuja and Lagos.

Nkafamiya community in Michika LGA is a predominantly agrarian settlement whose development prospects are increasingly constrained by rural-urban migration. The departure of working-age residents has left farms understaffed, community development committees under-resourced, and social institutions weakened. Despite the clear development significance of this trend, there is a paucity of community-specific, empirical studies that systematically document the nature, drivers, and developmental consequences of rural-urban migration in Nkafamiya. This study is therefore motivated by the need to generate locally grounded evidence that can inform policy and programmatic responses at the community, LGA, and state levels.

Statement of the Problem

Nkafamiya, like many rural communities in northern Adamawa State, is confronted with a deepening development crisis that is both a cause and a consequence of sustained rural-urban migration. The community's agricultural economy - dependent primarily on the production of maize, sorghum, groundnuts, and sesame - is characterised by low productivity, poor access to markets, inadequate input supply, and minimal government extension services. These structural weaknesses push economically active residents, particularly youth and young adults, to migrate to urban centres in search of wage employment, educational opportunities, and better living standards (Adepoju, 2005; Adeola, 2020).

The developmental consequences of this population outflow are visibly manifest in Nkafamiya: farmlands lie fallow or are cultivated by elderly persons and children; local markets are losing vibrancy; and traditional social institutions that once mobilised collective action for rural development are losing their membership base and authority. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022) reports that rural poverty incidence in Adamawa State stands at 72.6 percent, among the highest in the country, suggesting that migration has not translated into sustained community-level improvements.

Previous studies on rural-urban migration in Adamawa State (Abubakar, 2014; Ibrahim & Aliyu, 2020) have addressed broad state-level migration trends but have not provided the community-specific, empirical data needed to understand the migration-development nexus at the level of individual rural settlements like Nkafamiya. Without such data, it is difficult to design targeted, context-sensitive interventions. This study is therefore positioned to fill this critical gap.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the major factors responsible for rural-urban migration from Nkafamiya, Michika LGA?
2. What is the impact of rural-urban migration on rural development in Nkafamiya?
3. What strategies can be adopted to mitigate the negative impact of rural-urban migration on rural development in Nkafamiya?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the rural-urban migration and its impact on rural development in Nkafamiya, Michika LGA, Adamawa State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. Identify the major factors responsible for rural-urban migration from Nkafamiya, Michika LGA.
- ii. Assess the impact of rural-urban migration on rural development in Nkafamiya.
- iii. Identify strategies that can be adopted to mitigate the negative impact of rural-urban migration on rural development in Nkafamiya.

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design combined with qualitative methods, constituting a mixed methods approach. The descriptive survey design was used to collect structured quantitative data from a representative sample of households in Nkafamiya on the push factors for migration, the impact of migration on rural development, and strategies for mitigation. This design is appropriate for studies that aim to describe the characteristics, opinions, and conditions of a defined population without manipulating any variables (Babbie, 2016; Obi, 2016). The qualitative component, employing key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs), provided contextual depth and enabled the exploration of community perspectives and experiences that quantitative data alone cannot fully capture.

Population of the Study

The target population of this study consists of all adult residents of Nkafamiya community, Michika LGA, Adamawa State, whose households are directly or indirectly affected by rural-urban migration. Based on data obtained from the Michika LGA Community Development Office and a household enumeration conducted during the researcher's reconnaissance visit to Nkafamiya, the total number of households in the community is approximately 720, with an estimated adult population of 2,160 persons (using a household size of 3 adults per household). The population also includes a purposively selected group of community leaders, LGA officials, and civil society representatives who constitute the key informant population.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample size for the household survey was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula:

$$n = N / [1 + N(e)^2]$$

Where n = sample size; N = total population (720 households); e = margin of error (0.05):

$$n = 720 / [1 + 720(0.05)^2] = 720 / [1 + 1.8] = 720 / 2.8 \approx 257$$

Stratified proportionate random sampling was used to select households across the community's three residential zones (North Location, Central location, and South location), ensuring geographic representativeness. Within each location, systematic random sampling was applied using household lists obtained from the Community Development Association. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was used to select six key informants (the District Head, LGA Agricultural Officer, Community Development Association Chairman, Women Leader, a representative of returned migrants, and a youth leader) and to constitute three FGD groups of eight participants each.

Instrument for Data Collection

Three instruments were used for data collection in this study. First, a structured questionnaire was designed to get data from household respondents. The questionnaire was divided into four sections: Section A (socio-demographic characteristics), Section B (factors for migration), Section C (impact of migration on rural development), and Section D (strategies for mitigating negative impacts of migration). Sections B, C, and D employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA = 5) to Strongly Disagree (SDA = 1). The questionnaire was validated through expert review by two academics in the Departments of Urban and Regional Planning and Sociology at Modibbo Adama University, Yola, and its reliability was established through a pilot test on 30 respondents in Kala'a community, Hong Local Government Area, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.81, indicating strong internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978).

Second, a semi-structured Key Informant Interview (KII) guide with open-ended questions was used to collect qualitative data from six purposively selected key informants on the community's migration history, the perceived developmental consequences, and strategies for mitigation. Third, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide was used to facilitate three group discussions with male farmers, female household heads, and community youths respectively, each comprising eight participants.

Method of Data Collection

The structured questionnaire was administered through face-to-face interviews by the three researchers who are fluent in Hausa and the local Higgi dialect. This interviewer-administered approach was preferred because of the varied educational backgrounds of respondents, some of whom had no formal schooling. Formal community entry was obtained from the Michika LGA Secretariat and the Nkafamiya District Head before data collection commenced.

Key informant interviews were conducted individually by the three researchers, lasting between 45 and 75 minutes each, and were audio-recorded with prior consent. Focus group discussions were moderated by the three researchers, with sessions conducted in the community hall in Hausa and recorded for subsequent transcription. Secondary data were sourced from the National Bureau of Statistics, Adamawa State Government planning documents, academic journals, and NGO reports on rural development in Michika LGA.

Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the structured questionnaire were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 26. Descriptive statistics - frequencies, percentages, and means - were computed for all variables. Mean scores from the five-point Likert scale items were interpreted using the decision rule recommended by Obi (2016): a mean of 3.00 and above indicates agreement, while a mean below 3.00 indicates disagreement. Results are presented in frequency and percentage tables and Likert mean score tables.

Qualitative data from the KIIs and FGDs were analysed using thematic analysis. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, translated from Hausa into English, and coded using both deductive categories derived from the study's objectives and inductive codes emerging from the data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic profile of the 205 respondents. The data show a slight female majority (52.2% female; 47.8% male), reflecting the demographic reality of communities experiencing male-dominated out-migration, which leaves a higher proportion of women as resident household heads or respondents. This finding is consistent with Adepoju (2005) and Ibrahim and Aliyu (2020), who observe that male youth constitute the dominant stream of rural-to-urban migrants in northern Nigeria, resulting in the feminisation of rural agricultural labour.

With respect to age, the largest cohort of respondents falls within the 26–35 years age bracket (34.6%), followed by the 36–45 years group (26.8%). Together, the 18–45 years cohort constitutes 81.9% of respondents, indicating a relatively young resident population. However, the low representation of the 18–25 years group (20.5%) among residents—compared to their disproportionate share of the out-migrant population documented in the qualitative data—suggests that the youngest adult cohort is most likely to have already migrated, supporting the view that Nkafamiya is experiencing significant youth depletion (Adeola, 2020).

Educational attainment shows that 43.4% of respondents have primary education or no formal education, while 38.5% have secondary education and 18.1% tertiary education. This relatively low educational profile indicates that higher-educated individuals have either migrated or have limited presence in the community, a pattern consistent with the 'brain drain' dimension of rural-urban migration identified by Adedimu and Fadamiro (2013). Farming dominates the primary occupation of respondents (55.1%), confirming the agrarian character of Nkafamiya, with trading (20.0%), civil service and teaching (13.7%), and artisan work (11.2%) constituting supplementary occupational categories.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 205)

S/N	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cum. Freq.	Cum. %
	Sex				
1	Male	98	47.8	98	47.8
2	Female	107	52.2	205	100.0
	Total	205	100.0		
	Age Group				
3	18–25 years	42	20.5	42	20.5
4	26–35 years	71	34.6	113	55.1
5	36–45 years	55	26.8	168	81.9
6	46–60 years	28	13.7	196	95.6
7	Above 60 years	9	4.4	205	100.0

S/N	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cum. Freq.	Cum. %
	Total	205	100.0		
	Educational Level				
8	No formal education	37	18.0	37	18.0
9	Primary education	52	25.4	89	43.4
10	Secondary education	79	38.5	168	81.9
11	Tertiary education	37	18.1	205	100.0
	Total	205	100.0		
	Primary Occupation				
12	Farming	113	55.1	113	55.1
13	Trading	41	20.0	154	75.1
14	Civil service	28	13.7	182	88.8
15	Artisan/Craft work	23	11.2	205	100.0
	Total	205	100.0		

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 2: Factors for Rural-Urban Migration from Nkafamiya

Table 2 presents the ratings of respondents on the factors driving rural-urban migration from Nkafamiya, with all seven items recording mean scores above the 3.00 decision threshold, indicating broad agreement that each factor contributes to out-migration. The highest-rated push factor is the desire for a better standard of living (mean = 3.99), which closely approximates the 'Agree' anchor of the scale. This is followed by lack of social amenities such as potable water and electricity (mean = 3.83), low agricultural income and crop failure (mean = 3.74), and lack of employment opportunities (mean = 3.72). The grand mean of 3.68 confirms the overall significance of these structural push factors in driving out-migration from Nkafamiya.

These findings are corroborated by qualitative data from the key informant interviews. The District Head of Nkafamiya stated during the KII: 'Our young people leave because there is nothing to keep them here. No light, no good hospital, no job. They go to Mubi or Yola and some go to Abuja. The farms are left for the old people.' This qualitative evidence substantiates the quantitative finding that structural deprivation - particularly the absence of basic amenities and economic opportunity - is the primary driver of out-migration. This is consistent with the findings of Abubakar (2014) and Adeola (2020) on migration push factors in northern Nigeria.

The relatively lower but still significant mean score for insecurity and communal conflicts (mean = 3.36) suggests that while security concerns contribute to out-migration - particularly in the context of the Boko Haram crisis that affected Michika LGA between 2014 and 2016 - structural economic and infrastructural deprivation remains the more persistent and pervasive push factor.

Table 2: Respondents' Ratings of Factors for Rural-Urban Migration

S/N	Push Factor	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean	Remark
1	Lack of employment opportunities in Nkafamiya	78	62	21	28	16	3.72	Agreed
2	Poor access to quality education	65	71	18	31	20	3.54	Agreed
3	Inadequate healthcare facilities	70	68	12	33	22	3.56	Agreed
4	Low agricultural income and crop failure	85	55	19	27	19	3.74	Agreed
5	Insecurity and communal conflicts	61	59	23	38	24	3.36	Agreed
6	Lack of social amenities (water, electricity)	88	60	10	29	18	3.83	Agreed
7	Desire for better standard of living	95	65	8	22	15	3.99	Agreed
	Grand Mean						3.68	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2026. Note: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; UD = Undecided; DA = Disagree; SDA = Strongly Disagree. Decision rule: Mean $\geq$ 3.00 = Agreed; Mean $<$ 3.00 = Disagreed.

Table 3: Impact of Rural-Urban Migration on Rural Development in Nkafamiya

Table 3 presents respondents' assessments of the developmental impact of rural-urban migration on Nkafamiya. All eight impact statements received mean scores above the 3.00 threshold, confirming that rural-urban migration has had a broadly negative impact on rural development in the community. The most strongly agreed impact is the reduction of the agricultural labour force (mean = 3.91), followed by the abandonment of farmlands and reduced crop production (mean = 3.80), and reduced participation in community development activities (mean = 3.81). The grand mean of 3.67 reflects a consistent and statistically meaningful negative developmental impact across all measured dimensions.

The finding that agricultural labour force depletion is the most acutely perceived impact is particularly significant in an agrarian community like Nkafamiya, where farming is the primary economic activity of 55.1% of households. As working-age adults migrate to urban centres, the farming workforce shrinks and becomes increasingly composed of the elderly and

children, who are less able to cultivate large plots or adopt labour-intensive improved agricultural practices. Focus group discussions corroborated this finding: female farmers in the FGD session observed that 'it is now very hard to get people to help on the farm during planting and harvesting. The young men are all gone. We are left to do the work ourselves.' This labour scarcity is directly linked to the abandonment of farmlands and the reduction in crop yields documented in item 2 of Table 3.

The finding on the erosion of community development participation (mean = 3.81) is consistent with the social capital dimension of rural development theory (Putnam, 1993; Saleh, 2012), which posits that community development depends fundamentally on the collective action, reciprocity, and trust embedded in dense social networks. As active community members migrate, these networks are attenuated, community self-help projects lose momentum, and the institutional capacity for local governance and development planning is weakened. The relatively moderate mean for the remittances item (mean = 3.41) suggests that while respondents acknowledge that remittances provide some income support, this benefit is insufficient to offset the wider developmental losses from migration - a finding consistent with the conclusions of Olawale and Dauda (2011) on the limited transformative development impact of internal remittances in Nigerian rural communities.

Table 3: Impact of Rural-Urban Migration on Rural Development

S/N	Impact Statement	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean	Remark
1	Rural-urban migration has reduced the agricultural labour force in Nkafamiya	91	63	10	24	17	3.91	Agreed
2	Migration has led to the abandonment of farmlands and reduced crop production	87	60	12	27	19	3.80	Agreed
3	Youth out-migration has weakened local craft industries and artisanal activities	72	61	18	32	22	3.56	Agreed
4	Migration has contributed to a decline in local market activities and petty trade	68	65	15	35	22	3.52	Agreed
5	Remittances from migrants have improved household incomes in Nkafamiya	55	70	22	35	23	3.41	Agreed
6	Migration has resulted in reduced participation in community development activities	83	66	9	28	19	3.81	Agreed

S/N	Impact Statement	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean	Remark
7	Migration has led to the deterioration of social infrastructure and communal maintenance	79	62	13	30	21	3.70	Agreed
8	Loss of skilled individuals through migration has weakened local governance capacity	74	63	16	31	21	3.63	Agreed
	Grand Mean						3.67	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2026. Note: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; UD = Undecided; DA = Disagree; SDA = Strongly Disagree. Decision rule: Mean ≥ 3.00 = Agreed; Mean < 3.00 = Disagreed.

Table 4: Strategies for Mitigating the Negative Impact of Rural-Urban Migration

Table 4 presents respondents' endorsements of strategies for mitigating the negative developmental impact of rural-urban migration. The grand mean of 3.85 is the highest across all three measurement tables, indicating that respondents were most emphatic in their agreement with the proposed mitigation strategies—reflecting a strong community-level aspiration for the structural improvements that would address the root causes of out-migration. Investment in rural infrastructure including roads, electricity, and potable water received the highest endorsement (mean = 4.00), followed by creation of rural employment through agro-processing industries (mean = 3.96), provision of quality education and vocational training (mean = 3.91), and agricultural support programmes (mean = 3.92).

These findings reinforce the push-pull framework's implication that addressing out-migration requires not merely retaining people against their will but creating conditions in which rural residence offers comparable opportunities to urban life. As the LGA Agricultural Officer observed during the KII: 'If we can get an agro-processing factory here—for groundnut oil, for sesame, for maize flour—the youth will stay because there will be jobs. They are not lazy. They just have nowhere to work here.' This qualitative insight directly supports the quantitative finding on the primacy of employment creation as a mitigation strategy.

The relatively lower - but still positive - endorsement of harnessing remittances through community investment schemes (mean = 3.48) suggests some scepticism about the feasibility or effectiveness of formalised remittance channelling in this community context. This is consistent with the findings of Nwosu and Orji (2019), who note that effective remittance harnessing for rural development in Nigeria requires strong diaspora-community linkages, transparent local governance structures, and financial literacy among remittance recipients—preconditions that are not fully in place in most rural communities in Adamawa State.

Table 4: Strategies for Mitigating the Impact of Rural-Urban Migration on Rural Development

S/N	Strategy Statement	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Mean	Remark
1	Investment in rural infrastructure (roads, electricity, water) will reduce migration	96	64	8	21	16	4.00	Agreed
2	Creation of rural employment through agro-processing industries can retain youth	92	65	10	22	16	3.96	Agreed
3	Provision of quality education and vocational training in rural areas	89	67	9	22	18	3.91	Agreed
4	Strengthening rural healthcare facilities to improve quality of life	85	66	10	26	18	3.85	Agreed
5	Agricultural support programmes (inputs, credit, extension) to increase farm income	90	63	11	23	18	3.92	Agreed
6	Harnessing remittances through community investment schemes	63	70	18	31	23	3.48	Agreed
	Grand Mean						3.85	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2026. Note: SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; UD = Undecided; DA = Disagree; SDA = Strongly Disagree. Decision rule: Mean ≥ 3.00 = Agreed; Mean < 3.00 = Disagreed.

Summary

This study investigated the impact of rural-urban migration on rural development in Nkafamiya, Michika Local Government Area, Adamawa State. The findings can be summarised as follows:

1. The major factors driving out-migration from Nkafamiya are the desire for a better standard of living, lack of social amenities, low agricultural income, inadequate employment opportunities, poor healthcare facilities, and limited educational opportunities beyond primary level.
2. Rural-urban migration has had a significantly negative impact on rural development in Nkafamiya across multiple dimensions: it has depleted the agricultural labour force, increased farmland abandonment, reduced local food production, weakened participation in community development activities, diminished social capital and communal maintenance of infrastructure, and eroded local governance capacity.

3. The most strongly endorsed strategies for mitigating these impacts include investment in rural infrastructure, creation of agro-based employment, provision of quality education and vocational training, strengthening of agricultural support systems, and the rehabilitation of rural healthcare facilities. These strategies target the structural push factors identified in the first research question, suggesting that respondents understand migration as a rational response to structural deprivation that can be addressed through purposive public investment and policy action

Conclusion

Rural-urban migration in Nkafamiya, Michika LGA, is not a random or accidental demographic phenomenon but a structured response to the persistent underdevelopment of rural infrastructure, services, and economic opportunities in the community. The evidence generated by this study confirms that sustained out-migration is progressively hollowing out the community's human capital, agricultural productive capacity, and social cohesion - the very foundations upon which rural development depends. The community now requires is a comprehensive, multi-sectoral investment strategy that transforms the rural livelihood environment in Nkafamiya from one that repels its most economically active residents to one that retains and attracts them.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Michika LGA Council and Adamawa State Government should prioritise investment in basic rural infrastructure in Nkafamiya, including rural electrification, construction and rehabilitation of rural access roads, and provision of potable water supply. These amenity improvements directly address the most acutely perceived factors for out-migration and are prerequisites for the viability of any rural economic development programme.
2. The Adamawa State Government, in partnership with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, should establish an agro-processing industrial cluster in Michika LGA that provides value-added processing for the area's primary agricultural commodities - groundnuts, sesame, maize, and sorghum. This would create non-farm wage employment that gives rural youth a viable alternative to urban migration while also increasing the economic returns to farming.
3. The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and Adamawa State government should upgrade existing educational facilities in Nkafamiya to at least senior secondary level, alongside the establishment of a vocational training centre offering skills in agronomy, construction, small-scale enterprise management, and digital literacy, to equip rural youth for productive engagement in the local economy.
4. The Michika LGA Primary Healthcare Development Agency should rehabilitate and adequately staff the primary healthcare centre serving Nkafamiya, ensuring year-round availability of essential medicines, maternal and child health services, and emergency care. Improved healthcare reduces the health-related push factors for migration and enhances the overall quality of rural life.

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