

EXODUS OF YOUNG TALENTS: DRIVERS OF GENERATION Z MIGRATION AND  
TALENT RETENTION STRATEGIES FOR VILLAGE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The phenomenon of generation Z migration from villages to big cities is a crucial challenge in realizing inclusive and sustainable rural development. This research aims to explore the factors that drive generation Z migration from Cibeureum Village, Sukamantri Sub-district, Ciamis Regency, and explore locality-based talent retention strategies to strengthen the village's economic foundation. Using a qualitative approach, this research relies on in-depth interview techniques to gain a holistic contextual understanding of migration dynamics and local potential. The results show that the main drivers of migration include limited employment opportunities relevant to young people's interests and skills, limited digital infrastructure and creative expression spaces, and negative perceptions of village economic prospects. Retention strategies identified include strengthening community-based digital literacy, developing local entrepreneurial capacity, and creating an innovation ecosystem capable of accommodating the active participation of generation Z. The findings emphasize the importance of cross-sector collaboration in developing villages as prospective growth spaces for young talents.

**Keywords:** Generation Z; Village-City Migration; Talent Retention; Village Economic Development; Digital Literacy; and Youth Entrepreneurship.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is facing a phenomenon of exodus of young talents, especially generation Z, from rural areas to big cities and centers of economic growth. This phenomenon not only reflects the dynamics of social and economic mobility, but also raises concerns regarding development inequality between regions. Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is known to have high aspirations, strong digital literacy, and a strong drive to develop professionally and personally (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). However, the lack of job opportunities, access to higher education, and career support facilities in villages are the main driving factors that cause them to choose to migrate to urban areas (Situmorang, 2021).

Cibeureum Village in Sukamantri Sub-district, Ciamis Regency, is a clear example of this challenge. Despite its strong natural and social resource potential, the village is experiencing a decline in youth participation in local development. Many high school and college graduates choose to migrate to big cities such as Bandung and Jakarta, citing the search for better jobs, new experiences, and broader personal development.

This study aims to identify the driving factors that cause generation Z in Cibeureum Village to choose to migrate, and formulate a locality-based talent retention strategy to support inclusive and sustainable village economic development. The research also aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the social and economic dynamics that influence the migration decisions of the younger generation, as well as evaluate the possibility of reintegrating talents into the village through community-based approaches and technology.

The theoretical contribution of this study is to enrich the academic discourse on internal migration and rural development through the lens of generation Z, which has received relatively little attention in the literature (Zhou & Cai, 2020). From a practical perspective, the results of this study can be used as a reference in the formulation of talent-based village development policies, strengthening the capacity of local youth, and integrating digital technology in village job creation. The findings also provide guidance for local governments, local businesses, and educational institutions to build synergies in maintaining the sustainability of the younger generation's contribution to village development. The novelty of this research is in the integration of Generation Z perspectives in the rural context and the formulation of a talent retention model based on local empowerment and digital engagement. This research highlights the importance of repositioning villages not only as places to live, but as spaces for

young people to grow through the creation of meaningful work and entrepreneurial ecosystems that support Gen Z aspirations.

Based on preliminary data obtained through surveys and in-depth interviews, it was found that the main factors driving migration are the lack of formal and informal employment opportunities that match interests, lack of digital facilities and creative spaces, and negative perceptions of the future of the village economy. However, most respondents stated that they are willing to return to the village if there are digital-based business opportunities, capital support, and collaborative spaces for youth.

The practical implication of these findings is the importance of village governments and development partners strengthening village digital literacy, strengthening the capacity of youth entrepreneurship, and creating village innovation ecosystems that support the active participation of Generation Z. Therefore, talent retention strategies based on the locality and character of the younger generation are key in creating villages that not only survive, but also develop sustainably and based on young talent.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

The phenomenon of youth migration, particularly Generation Z from rural to urban areas, has become a global concern in the discourse of inclusive and sustainable development. Recent studies show that this migration is influenced by structural and cultural factors related to economic opportunities, infrastructure, and future expectations (International Labor Organization, 2020; World Bank, 2022).

### Factors Driving Generation Z Migration

Youth migration, especially from villages to cities, is often triggered by various structural factors related to economics, social and culture. As a generation that is more oriented towards technology and fast-paced social dynamics, Generation Z has high expectations of job opportunities, facilities, and opportunities for growth.

The decision of rural youth to move to cities is driven by a complex set of factors. First, the lack of formal and informal employment opportunities that match their interests is the main reason, as suggested by Suryani and Haryanto (2021). Many rural youths feel that jobs in their hometowns do not match their ambitions and skills. Secondly, the lack of digital facilities such as fast internet and creative spaces such as co-working spaces is also a barrier to local innovation, as reported by UNESCO (2019) and Ananda and Hafiz's study (2022). These limitations make rural youth feel left behind in terms of access to information and opportunities to develop themselves in the digital era. Third, negative perceptions of the future of the village economy are also a driver of migration. According to Turner (2019), and reinforced by Putra and Sari's (2021) research, many rural youths feel pessimistic about economic opportunities in the village and seek their fortune in cities that are considered to offer better career growth potential. The BPS survey (2022) also shows that most rural youth do not see long-term opportunities in their neighborhoods. Fourth, the view that life in the city offers more opportunities for growth, both professionally and personally, is an additional attraction. They see the city as a place where they can access better education, skills training and a more varied range of jobs. Fifth, the influence of social media and easily accessible information also shapes the perception that life in the city offers a more modern and exciting lifestyle, thus encouraging rural youth to seek such experiences in the city. Overall, the combination of these factors creates a strong motivation for rural youth to leave their hometowns and seek better opportunities in cities.

### Retention Strategy for Young Talent in Villages

To stem the migration of young talent, we need a strategy that not only creates economic opportunities, but also builds an ecosystem that supports the existence and active participation of Generation Z.

To prevent rural youth from migrating, there are several strategic steps that need to be implemented. First, strengthening village digital literacy is key so that youth can access information, career opportunities, and develop digital-based businesses as emphasized by Rahardjo and Nugroho (2021). Second, strengthening the capacity of young entrepreneurs through training, business mentoring, and access to capital is also important so that they can create local jobs that are relevant and sustainable, as stated by Kurniawan et al. (2020). Thus, rural youth do not need to leave their hometowns to seek a better livelihood. Third, the creation of innovation ecosystems in villages that support the participation of Generation Z through innovation centers or business incubators is also important so that they feel valued and have space to develop their creative ideas, as asserted by Teixeira and Pinheiro (2022) and reinforced by Wijayanti et al. (2022). This will increase the sense of belonging and loyalty of

youth to the village. Fourth, the role of the village government, community, and private sector is also important in building a system that supports youth ideas and initiatives, as emphasized by Wijayanti et al. (2022). With strong collaboration between various parties, village youth will feel supported to develop their potential in their neighborhood. Fifth, creating a positive perception of the village's economic potential through information and successful examples of local entrepreneurship is also important. When youth see that the village has promising economic potential, they will be more motivated to contribute to village development rather than migrate. Fifth, the development of adequate physical infrastructure such as roads, transportation, and energy access also needs to be improved. Good infrastructure will make it easier for youth to access resources, markets, and economic opportunities in the village, so they no longer need to move to the city. Sixth, the government and village communities also need to create a conducive environment for youth by providing space to discuss, channel ideas, and participate in village decision-making. With the active involvement of youth, they will feel more attached to the village and have a reason to stay. In addition, the promotion of healthy and sustainable lifestyles in the village can also be an additional attraction for youth. All of these measures aim to create a more attractive environment and provide better opportunities for village youth to stay and contribute to the development of their own villages.

### Research Methods

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach to deeply understand the phenomenon of generation Z migration from Cibeureum Village. This approach was chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence migration decisions and potential retention strategies. The participants in this study consisted of two individuals: The Head of Cibeureum Village and a generation Z youth who originated from the village and currently resides in Bandung City. The selection of informants was done through purposive sampling to obtain perspectives from the village policy makers and first-hand experiences from the young generation who migrated.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews with both informants. The interviews were semi-structured to allow exploration of relevant issues while providing flexibility for informants to express their views freely. The data analysis method used was a thematic analysis approach. The analysis process involved the stages of data transcription, coding, identification of key themes, and interpretation of the findings in the context of relevant literature.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Factors Driving Generation Z Migration

#### Limited Job Opportunities: Triggering the Search for Opportunities Beyond Village Boundaries

One of the most dominant and consistent reasons revealed from interviews with participants was the lack of employment opportunities that match Generation Z's interests, skills and aspirations. Cibeureum Village is still heavily dependent on the traditional agricultural sector or informal jobs with relatively low added value. The types of jobs that are available tend to be seasonal, require specific physical skills, or offer daily wages that are not competitive when compared to the ever-increasing standard of living. Such jobs are often considered irrelevant to their knowledge and skills. This phenomenon is also supported by the findings of Rokhim (2020), who stated that the gap between the qualifications of young workers and the local economic structure in rural areas is one of the main factors driving the migration of young people to cities. Similarly, a study by Nurhadi and Sari (2022) emphasized that the younger generation, especially Generation Z, has higher career aspirations and is more oriented towards the modern sector, thus feeling incompatible with the traditional work patterns that dominate villages in Indonesia.

Generation Z is a generation that has grown up in the digital age, exposed to global information, and has a high awareness of the diverse career opportunities available in the modern world. They aspire to work in more dynamic sectors, such as the creative industry, information technology, digital services, tourism, or even become innovative entrepreneurs. However, the economic ecosystem in Cibeureum Village has not been able to accommodate these aspirations. There are no tech companies, design studios, digital marketing agencies, or even modern manufacturing facilities that can absorb their skills. As a result, there is a glaring mismatch between the supply of educated young talent and the demand of the local job market. They feel that the potential and time investment they have put into their education is not being optimized if they remain in the village.

On the other hand, cities offer a much more diverse and promising employment landscape. Major cities are centers of innovation, industry and services, where companies are actively seeking talent with digital, analytical and creative skills. The prospect of higher salaries, better benefits, opportunities for career development through training and certification, and a more professional work environment are undeniably attractive. Therefore, for Gen Z in Cibeureum Village, moving to urban areas is no longer just an option, but a pragmatic necessity to achieve the career and financial goals they envision. This loss of productive and educated young workers has a negative impact on the potential for economic growth and innovation in Cibeureum Village. Therefore, for Gen Z in Cibeureum Village, moving to urban areas is no longer a choice, but a pragmatic necessity to achieve the career and financial goals they dream of. This loss of productive and educated young workers has a negative impact on the potential for economic growth and innovation in Cibeureum Village. This is in line with the findings of Haris and Nugroho (2019), who state that the migration of educated youth from villages to cities (brain drain) has the potential to slow down economic transformation in rural areas, especially in technology adoption and new job creation.

#### **Limited Digital Infrastructure: Hindering Global Potential and Access**

The World Bank Group in their *publication* Digital Development: Bridging the Digital Divide (2021) consistently highlights how investment in digital infrastructure is crucial to driving inclusive economic growth in developing countries. Where access to technology and the internet has become a basic need, no longer a luxury, especially for Generation Z who are *digital natives*. They rely on the internet for education, communication, entertainment, and most importantly for access to economic opportunities. However, data analysis unequivocally shows that the limited digital infrastructure in Cibeureum Village is a significant obstacle that hinders their potential to develop and compete in the global arena.

These limitations manifest in several forms: slow, unstable, or even unavailable internet access in some remote areas of the village; lack of public technology facilities such as co-working spaces with fast internet connections, digital libraries, or computer training centers; and relatively expensive internet access fees compared to the average income in the village. These conditions drastically limit Gen Z's ability to develop essential digital skills in the modern era. This avoids a significant digital skills gap between Gen Z in villages and their urban counterparts.

#### **Lack of Creative Expression Space: Extinguishing the Spirit of Innovation and Self-Exploration**

Generation Z is known for being dynamic, innovative and hungry for space to express their ideas and talents. They have a strong desire to participate, collaborate and make an impact. However, data shows that the lack of space for creative expression in Cibeureum Village is an equally important driver of migration, although perhaps not as obvious as economic factors. According to Putri and Lestari (2020), one of the main characteristics of Generation Z is the need for creative spaces and collaborative environments as part of the process of self-discovery and potential actualization. The absence of an environment that supports self-exploration and the development of this creativity makes Gen Z feel "trapped" in a monotonous routine and lack of intellectual stimulation. The village has not provided an adequate platform or community for them to channel innovative ideas, develop art, music, design, writing projects, or even just discuss and collaborate with fellow youth who have similar interests.

This absence of environments that support self-exploration and creativity development makes Gen Z feel "trapped" in monotonous routines and a lack of intellectual stimulation. They long for places like creative cafes, art community spaces, innovation centers, or even local events that celebrate young talent and encourage experimentation. In the city, they can find events, workshops, art galleries, music communities, and co-working spaces that suit their interests. Urban environments offer opportunities to network with other creative individuals, learn from mentors and even turn hobbies and talents into economic opportunities.

#### **Negative Perceptions of Village Economic Prospects: Seeking Hope Beyond the Boundaries of Tradition**

Negative perceptions of rural economic prospects are often deeply rooted in development narratives, tending to position villages as static, innovation-poor, and subsistence agriculture-dependent entities. This view, often reinforced by data on urban migration and income inequality, creates a bias that ignores the dynamic potential that actually exists at the local level. The rural development literature often discusses the structural challenges that villages face, such as limited access to markets, technology, and capital, and low economic diversification (Ravallion, M. 2007. Growth, Inequality, and Poverty:

Looking Beyond Averages. World Bank Publications). This perception has implications for less proactive policies, minimal investment, and even stigmatization of individuals who choose to remain in the village. Increasingly, however, this perception is being questioned by the emergence of successful initiatives and economic models outside the traditional framework.

The phenomenon of massive urbanization in various cities, including Cibeureum village, is often driven by the assumption that cities are the only source of economic opportunities and improved quality of life. As a result, there is a withdrawal of productive human resources from the village, which further reinforces the image of the village as an area that is "left behind". Correspondingly, Generation Z interviewees candidly stated that they perceive villages as not offering a bright future in economic terms, especially when compared to the hustle and bustle of cities. This perception is not necessarily based on bad first-hand experiences, but is often formed from a combination of factors: stories of successful relatives or friends in the city, the influence of mass media that often present images of urban progress and modernity, and the lack of successful role models in the village to inspire them.

They see that income in the village tends to be stagnant, opportunities for promotion or business development are limited, and over all the village does not provide the "future" they expect in terms of financial and professional security. There is a concern that if they remain in the village, they will be trapped in the same economic cycle as previous generations, without any significant improvement in their quality of life. Cities, with all their dynamism, are perceived as places where innovation happens, opportunities are wide open and there are more paths to financial and professional success. They believe that cities are places where they can "make a name" and achieve their big dreams.

This perception becomes a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, where the belief that the village does not offer a good future encourages them to leave, which in turn further worsens the availability of young talents in the village. When the best talents leave, villages lose the potential for innovation, leadership, and energy that is desperately needed for economic transformation. Changing this perception requires a systematic effort and demonstrating real evidence that villages can also be places to thrive, innovate, and offer promising economic prospects, not only through traditional sectors, but also through the development of new sectors relevant to Gen Z.

Overall, the combination of limited relevant employment opportunities, minimal digital infrastructure, lack of space for creative expression, and negative perceptions of the village's economic prospects creates great pressure for Generation Z to leave Cibeureum Village. They are not only looking for jobs, but also an environment that supports their personal, professional and creative growth. This phenomenon poses a major challenge to village development, demanding innovative and integrated strategies to not only retain existing talent, but also attract back those who have migrated, for a brighter and more sustainable future of Cibeureum Village.

### **Talent Retention Strategy**

The exodus of young talent from villages has become a crucial issue that threatens the sustainability of local development. This phenomenon, often referred to as "brain urbanization," occurs when young people with potential, driven by a lack of opportunities and infrastructure, choose to leave their homeland in search of a more promising life in cities. However, this narrative does not have to end in despair. With the right retention strategies, villages have great potential to not only stop this outflow, but also attract back the young talents that have left. Building villages that are attractive to the younger generation is no longer just an option, but a necessity, especially in light of the demographic bonus that should be put to good use.

### **Strengthening Digital Literacy as a Foundation**

The first fundamental step in re-embracing young talent is through strengthening digital literacy. In this information age, digital skills are no longer a luxury, but a basic necessity. This goes far beyond simply providing stable internet access. While connectivity is the foundation, the main focus should shift to providing intensive training on the use of information technology. This training should include mastery of *essential* software relevant to various fields, ranging from office applications, graphic design, to specialized software for modern agriculture, business management or to introduce Cibeureum Village tourism.

Furthermore, it is important to equip them with the ability to utilize digital platforms for entrepreneurship or online work. Villages have great potential to become *remote work* centers or bases for local e-commerce. By mastering online marketplaces, social media for marketing, and freelance platforms, young people can create economic opportunities without having to leave the village. A study from the Ministry of Villages (2023) confirms that structured digital literacy training can improve the

competitiveness of rural youth and expand their access to global markets. They can become content creators, digital marketers for local products, or even *software* developers working for large companies. Villages are no longer remote places cut off from progress, but rather an integral part of the global digital economy.

### **Encouraging Entrepreneurship and Local Innovation Ecosystems**

In addition to digital literacy, the development of local entrepreneurship must be encouraged in a massive and structured manner. Every village has its own unique characteristics and resources, be it agricultural products, handicrafts, or local wisdom. The key is to help youth see this potential and turn it into a sustainable business opportunity. Full support should be provided from easy and affordable access to capital, such as collateral-free loan programs or revolving funds, to comprehensive business management training. This training covers not only financial and operational aspects, but also marketing strategies, branding, and customer service (Suryana, 2018).

Assistance in marketing products or services is also crucial. Many high-quality village products fail to compete due to a lack of effective marketing strategies. With the support of *mentors* and access to a wider distribution network, these products can reach a larger market. Creating an ecosystem conducive to the growth of *startups* or locally-based small businesses provides an attractive career alternative for generation Z who tend to seek autonomy and impact. They do not have to be factory workers in the city, but can become successful business owners in their own villages.

At the same time, the creation of an innovation ecosystem should be an equally important priority. This can be realized by building creative spaces, co-working spaces, or business incubators in villages. These facilities are not just buildings, but platforms for young people to exchange ideas, collaborate and develop innovative projects. This is where new ideas are born, new products are developed, and solutions to village problems are found. Imagine village youth collaborating to develop smart farming apps, or creating sustainable community-based tourism products. The facility encourages a spirit of experimentation, problem-solving, and the courage to try new things, which can ultimately have a significant positive impact on the village.

### **Increased Youth Participation in Decision Making**

Lastly, and perhaps most empowering, is increased youth participation in decision-making. Often, village development is designed without involving the most important voice: the youth who will feel the impact. Providing spaces and opportunities for youth to be actively involved in the planning and implementation of village development programs fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility. This means inviting them to village meetings, establishing youth forums that have decision-making power, or even placing youth representatives in key positions in the village government structure (Putra & Nurhadi, 2020).

When they feel their voices are heard and their contributions valued, they are more motivated to build the future in their own villages. This participation is not only about providing ideas, but also about being part of the solution. They will feel that the village is a place where they have the power to shape change, rather than just being passive recipients of policies determined by others. By implementing these strategies synergistically, Cibeureum Village, or any village, can transform into an attractive and promising place for young talent.

### **Conclusion**

Generation Z migration from Cibeureum Village is influenced by limited employment opportunities, digital infrastructure, and creative expression spaces, as well as negative perceptions of the village's economic prospects. However, with the implementation of retention strategies that include strengthening digital literacy, developing local entrepreneurship, creating an innovation ecosystem, and increasing youth participation, the village has the potential to attract and retain young talent. Collaboration between the village government, private sector, and local communities is key in realizing villages as prospective growth spaces for generation Z.

Based on in-depth interviews with two key informants, it was found that the migration of Generation Z from Cibeureum Village is the result of a complexity of structural and cultural conditions that do not support the development of village youth potential. The Village Head's perspective emphasized the limited fiscal and institutional capacity of the village government in providing supporting infrastructure for the younger generation, particularly in creating a technology and innovation-based work ecosystem. On the other hand, informants from generation Z revealed that the decision to migrate was influenced by the mismatch between personal aspirations and the reality on the ground in the

village, especially in relation to the lack of meaningful work opportunities, internet access, space for creative expression, and inspiring local role models.

Both informants agreed that villages have potential, but are still fragmented and not optimally managed to respond to the characteristics and needs of Generation Z. This confirms that the exodus of young talent is not solely due to economic factors, but also relates to the lack of recognition and facilitation of the aspirations of a new generation that is more digital, collaborative and value-based.

### Recommendation

#### For Village Government (based on the views of the Village Head):

It is necessary to restructure village development planning to be more participatory and responsive to the needs of Generation Z. Village governments can collaborate with private partners, BUMDes, and higher education institutions to establish digital literacy centers, business incubators, and community-based collaborative spaces. In addition, village budget planning should start allocating funds for digital entrepreneurship training programs and local potential-based creative economy facilitation.

#### For Generation Z (based on migrants' experiences):

A platform is needed for village youth, including those who have migrated, to network and contribute to village development in a hybrid manner, both online and offline. Generation Z who has gained skills and experience in the city can be directed to become digital mentors or drivers of village entrepreneurship communities. That way, the process of reintegrating young talents into the village is not only symbolic, but also productive and transformative.

This recommendation calls for cross-sectoral *work* and an *empowerment-based* approach so that villages do not simply become objects of development, but rather *living spaces* that are adaptive to the progressive values of the younger generation.

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