



Exploration of Urban People's Perception of Social Development in Zanzibar's Urban Area

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore urban residents' perceptions of social development in Zanzibar, focusing on religious leaders, political leaders, traders, youths, and public servants. The study employed an exploratory research design, using interviews and focus group discussions with 203 key informants from these groups. Among these informants, 42 were religious leaders, 22 were political leaders, 53 were urban traders, 48 were urban youths, and 38 were public servants. Data were analysed thematically using open coding and transcription to elucidate the main findings. The results reveal that each group within urban society holds a distinct view on social development, with perceptions varying among the groups. These perceptions are shaped by factors such as friends, religious beliefs, occupation, and political affiliation. Variations in perceptions lead to differences in social development needs, desires, and priorities. The study concludes that perceptions of social development among urban residents in Zanzibar differ according to socioeconomic status and political background. Finally, it recommends that government authorities regularly plan and conduct research to obtain up-to-date information on perceptions of social development, considering ongoing social and economic changes in Zanzibar. The government should establish mechanisms to ensure balanced social development across different urban groups. Such mechanisms include improved infrastructure, supportive policies, social assistance, and development programmes that create opportunities for all groups to enhance their well-being.

Subject Areas

Sociology

Keywords

Social Development, Perception, Well-Being, Urban People

1. Introduction

Understanding perceptions of social development that influence society has been a key focus of both national and international agendas for decades. The Canadian World Conference of 1995, reflecting real-world conditions, defined social development as a cross-sectoral field that aims to promote the right to comprehensive well-being, which is shaped by social change [1]. From a theoretical perspective, social development is rooted in community, progressive social structures, institutional arrangements, and interactions [2]. Most literature indicates that social development was historically shaped by economic order and state formation, resulting from political and cultural shifts within society [3]. State authorities used economic development to assess social development across three key dimensions: working conditions, living standards, and gender equality, thereby evaluating people's levels of satisfaction [4]. Today, more than 80% of Europeans living in urban areas associate social development with social protection and participation in society [5]. Most governments, especially in developing countries, rarely fulfil citizens' demands for social progress because they often fail to understand the interests of social development [6]. In Africa, for example, social development is linked to quality education, health, employment, and participation [7]. Although political interests primarily influence perceptions of social development in Africa, this claim is rarely supported by empirical evidence, as social development remains a dynamic, continually evolving process [8]. Development policies in some East African countries, such as Rwanda, Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, have been revised to improve their communities' social well-being through infrastructure, health, and education [9]. From this perspective, social development in Africa is primarily seen as related to health and education, with the potential to improve people's well-being.

From a historical perspective, Zanzibar society has been shaped by the diversity of cultures and the intermingling of bloodlines from various ancestries around the world, mainly Arabians, Indians, Persians, Africans, and others associated with colonisation [10]. Social interaction and biological mating among these groups make Zanzibar a centre of multiculturalism, which makes it challenging to define people's perceptions of social development that affect them. Internal cultural discrepancies and historical perspectives within Zanzibar society influence social cohesion and the unification of mindsets, complicating the prediction of social expectations for any particular group [11]. However, the government of Zanzibar plays a significant role in determining the potential services for society as a whole. The government aims to eradicate widespread poverty and shift the islands towards a middle-income economy by fostering strong social cohesion and solidarity to achieve high-quality livelihoods, as outlined in Vision 2050. Nevertheless, achieving Development Vision 2050 requires an integrated policy that ensures the comprehensive well-being of all societal groups. Understanding the social development perceptions of urban residents is essential.

Social development is a deliberate process of change aimed at reducing inequalities

and improving individuals' well-being. This concept encompasses various aspects, and its primary themes are well covered, aligning closely with other existing definitions. Understanding perceptions of social development among people from diverse historical, cultural, and economic backgrounds is challenging [12]. This difficulty stems from diversity, complicating the task of identifying the interests of different groups and individuals. Since Zanzibar is a cosmopolitan island, it is hard to determine the distinct perspectives of each group on social development. As perceptions of social development differ across countries and regions, it is crucial to examine these differences among urban residents in Zanzibar. Currently, perceptions of social development among urban populations remain poorly understood. This research is significant because social development is a dynamic concept, perceived differently across Europe, Asia, and Africa, and could be interpreted differently within Zanzibar if this study is conducted.

2. Literature Review

In both developed and developing countries, societies are firmly committed to enhancing and redefining their well-being. Measures of perceived well-being reveal that, across different contexts, individuals and communities hold diverse views and goals regarding their well-being. Furthermore, the literature indicates that economic and political factors significantly influence perceptions of disparities between developed and developing regions [13]. However, the question remains: why and how is social development understood differently across communities, countries, and regions? Theoretical perspectives, such as Gibson's Theory of Perception (1966) and Cooley's Looking-Glass Self Theory (1922), offer valuable insights into how individuals develop their understanding of social development. According to Cooley, individuals form perceptions and self-concepts based on their beliefs about how others perceive them. The most crucial approach to perceived social development is through feedback from observers or authority figures. Gibson's theory, on the other hand, emphasises that perception is an active process that occurs through continuous interaction with the environment. Individuals tend to perceive social development by copying ideas and actions from the social, economic, or environmental interactions surrounding them.

In developed nations, for example, the empirical perspective often emphasises individual dignity to promote societal prosperity and well-being [14]. European societies primarily focus on achieving comfortable, efficient economic conditions, recognition, peace, and social inclusion to support successful lives [15]. In developing countries, particularly in Asia and Africa, the concept of social development is closely connected to democracy and improved living standards. Since democratisation and industrialisation, these societies have viewed social development as involving strong educational development, healthcare systems, employment opportunities, and economic stability [16]. Nonetheless, despite many developing societies being important contributors to urban development, their authorities often overlook local awareness of social development [17]. This shows that perceptions

of social development can vary significantly across local populations, groups, and authorities.

3. Methodology

The study employed an exploratory design to gain detailed insights into perceptions of social development. This approach is essential for researchers to explore and emphasise that existing knowledge is insufficient, requiring further explanation of the phenomenon [18]. The design was suitable for uncovering key insights and providing a comprehensive understanding of social development priorities among urban residents. The study involved 203 key informants selected from five distinct groups: 42 religious leaders, 22 political leaders, 53 urban traders, 38 public servants, and 48 urban youths. The number of key informants was determined by data saturation, a core principle of qualitative research. Saturation was reached when repeated and redundant data points formed a stable pattern, as, once this number was achieved, no new information was recorded. Interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with each of the five groups. The number of participants in FGDs ranged from 6 to 12, depending on their availability. However, gender equality was given significant consideration. Data were analysed thematically to present the main findings. The researcher used open coding to reveal thoughts, knowledge, and texts within particular themes, allowing the categorisation of data into themes. Any themes or sub-themes that appeared more than once in subsequent transcripts were precisely described, thereby enabling a deeper understanding of people's perceptions of social development.

4. Result and Discussion

This section presents the results and discussion of the study's main findings. It explores perceptions of social development among religious leaders, urban traders, urban politicians, urban youth, and public servants living in cities. The findings are organised according to the key research themes examined, including the meaning and features of social development as perceived by each group.

4.1. Social Development Perception of Religious Leaders of Urban Zanzibar

The study revealed that religious leaders in urban Zanzibar perceive social development as a holistic process that affects people's access to essentials and opportunities for well-being and livelihoods. They emphasised aspects such as freedom of worship, leadership, participation, the ability to work, and family enjoyment as key indicators of social development. Freedom of worship influences socialising and interactions, which are fundamental to religion and belief. People gather during worship or prayer at their places of worship, and religion and worship also promote kindness, peace, and charity, ultimately benefiting society. When this occurs, individuals improve their welfare, well-being, and satisfaction. During an interview with a Buddhist priest at his home in Stone Town, the following was

quoted.

To me, social development means everyone having the freedom to live their lives with qualities such as praying, working, and helping others. You will not see Buddhists begging on the street because we pray sincerely and learn in the temple about the importance of helping others to maintain a balanced life among Buddhists.

Another respondent from the Office of the Mufti of Zanzibar was interviewed to share his perception of social development, and he stated the following:

Social development is a way of life that can be measured through happiness, solidarity, kindness, and satisfaction. Our office is responsible for bringing all Muslims together to share happiness, love, and kindness. The fundamental principle of life is worshipping God, who rewards the best those who promote peace, solidarity, and equality.

The above quotations demonstrate that a core principle of social development for religious leaders is the worship of God and the freedom to worship as one chooses. This indicates that religion influences kindness, solidarity, and charity within society. According to religious leaders, social development is based on happiness, which humans derive from love, kindness, and solidarity with others, regardless of differences in religious beliefs.

The above agenda was then presented to the Focus Group Discussion to identify shared perceptions of social development across all religions. The FGD involved ten members from four different faiths: 4 Muslims, 3 Christians, 1 Hindu, and 2 Buddhists. The FGD aimed to discuss the social development perceptions gathered from interviews, and the discussion revealed the following:

Social development is a comprehensive process that promotes freedom of worship, kindness, and the ability to work towards improving people's lives to address their well-being challenges.

That religious leader agreed that social development is an integrated process that influences individual satisfaction, which varies according to demands, time and space.

Individual or community knowledge and skills that promote self-reliance influence the level of social development in a specific society.

That solidarity, love, kindness, and effective social interaction, regardless of religious, political, or geographical differences, are the foundations of social development.

The quality of life depends on peace and security, better economic conditions, a strong and healthy society, and a willingness to work towards well-being, which is linked to social development.

The results indicate that religious leaders in urban Zanzibar view social development as encompassing freedom of worship, solidarity, kindness, and employment opportunities. The literature describes these qualities as vital indicators of societal happiness, satisfaction, and social cohesion [19]. Consistent with this literature, the Canadian World Conference of 1995 defined social development as

a multi-sectoral effort aimed at promoting the right to overall well-being, which is influenced by social change [20]. The Canadian statement emphasises key aspects of social development within a religious context, such as the significance of physical freedom and individuals' desire to improve their well-being [21]. These findings are further supported by Professor Gracious T. A. (lecturer at Indira Gandhi University) in his book, "Origin and Development of Social Work in India".

Social development is a matter of public interest that aims to reduce human suffering and selfish tendencies that manifest globally, while also taking into account the less fortunate through the principle of mutual aid.

The above quotation indicates that social development equally influences the core principles of human rights and responsibilities. It highlights the importance of moderation in achieving social and economic equity and equality, which are considered essential for a high quality of life. Quality of life involves promoting social progress to establish moral standards within the economy for addressing living challenges [22]. Leaders such as Chrysostom and Ambrose proposed comprehensive ideas on economics and social development, including a holistic view of culture rooted in Christian life [23]. Religion mainly links social development to an individual's or society's capacity to strive for improved living conditions, taking into account economic factors and the willingness to endure in order to achieve the stability necessary to fulfil religious principles [24]. Overall, discussions of social development within religions are closely tied to mainstream religious culture, which, in turn, influences the quality of life.

4.2. Perception of Social Development among Urban Traders

The second group in the study consists of traders operating in urban Zanzibar. The key informants from this group include wholesalers, retailers, and vendors. The results show that urban traders view social development as an integrated process that enables city residents to establish businesses and access purchasing opportunities with reasonable capital and profits. They noted that better social development involves factors such as improved business infrastructure, practical guidelines, and technology, which collectively enable urban traders to conduct their commercial activities more effectively. Many traders highlighted customer flow, security, stability, and social interaction as important indicators of improved social development. They added that social development enhances people's lives by helping them achieve their social and economic goals. The interview with the hardware wholesaler at Mlandege Street described his view of social development as follows.

To me, social development encompasses qualities that address business challenges and enhance the lives of traders, families, and customers, ultimately improving their living standards.

However, perceptions of urban traders vary depending on the type of business they operate. Generally, wholesalers and retailers view social development as a

process that benefits their business through areas such as distribution and profits. Food vendors view social development as a comprehensive process encompassing economic growth, health services, and hygiene, all of which collectively affect the interests and welfare of both traders and customers. Supporting this view, an interview with a food vendor revealed the following:

My business encourages a healthier physical environment because customers are less likely to buy food from areas with poor standards. For example, when they visit and notice inadequate environmental conditions, they complain and sometimes refuse to purchase.

These arguments were then presented during the focus group discussion (FGD), which included 10 participants: three wholesalers, two retailers, two food vendors, and three street vendors. The FGD took place once at Jamuhuri Garden in Darajani on Monday, 4 March 2024, from 17:00 to 17:48 hours, and the following results were obtained.

Social development encompasses opportunities that foster business growth and enhance the welfare of urban traders, customers, and authorities. It covers specific indicators such as market competition, profit maximisation, hygiene, reasonable government levies, business infrastructure, and transparency.

Social development encompasses a robust, sustainable business infrastructure, along with equitable revenue that benefits internal stakeholders, customers, and the broader community, including the government.

The above quotations demonstrate that social development for urban traders is a process that equips them to manage their business activities, increase profits, and attract customer interest. Key components such as welfare development, standard business infrastructure, and related policies are important indicators of urban traders' social progress. Here, "welfare" refers to a system of interconnected parts representing various aspects of human needs and values, including emotional, material, spiritual, and psychological facets, reflecting the complex nature of human development [25]. The literature also highlights factors such as health, skills, and comprehensive business infrastructure, along with their practical implementation, as fundamental to social development [26]. Furthermore, these findings align with the notion that societal interest significantly increases when the business environment offers choices of business types, locations, and investors that meet social and individual preferences [27]. Many businesses have already recognised the strategic importance of customers for their success [28]. From this perspective, social development involves a process that enables traders and customers to perceive service well-being, thereby indicating positive outcomes from a service experience and promoting their overall well-being.

4.3. Perception of Social Development by Urban Politicians

The third group to examine their perceptions of social development was a group of political leaders. A total of 22 key informants from three parties were interviewed, and discussions took place to explore their views. The results indicate that

perceptions of social development among urban politicians in Zanzibar are linked to the availability of timely, high-quality, affordable, and easily accessible social services. For example, politicians, despite their differing political ideologies, emphasised aspects such as quality health services, education, safe water, reliable electricity, and improved transport services and infrastructure. These elements are vital for promoting social well-being. They also noted that such services are essential for enhancing the well-being of individuals and the broader urban community. Many politicians believe that people's happiness depends on understanding and addressing the challenges that hinder their social and economic aspirations. According to them, these challenges include shortages of healthcare, education, safe water, transportation infrastructure, and stable electricity. To support these findings, a female politician (a key informant) during an interview in Amani (Mkoa) explained the following.

Our manifesto clearly states that social development encompasses improved health services, quality education, better transport, clean, accessible water, and reliable electricity, all of which are vital to enhancing people's well-being. We have strengthened the health and education sectors to enable urban society to enjoy a better quality of life.

To complement the above findings, an FGD involving nine members from three groups was conducted at Aces College Conference Hall, Mwanakwerekwe, on 28/03/2025. The purpose of the FGD was to discuss their perceptions of social development and reach a consensus. During the discussion, all members from these three groups were invited to share their perspectives on social development. The discussion results revealed the following:

Political leaders believe that social development is closely linked to people's needs, wants, and expectations. They see social development as what people require now and in the future, and politicians must satisfy these needs.

Social development examines how individuals form impressions of their political leaders and government, an important area in social cognition. One aspect, based on politicians' perceptions and impressions, is how people view and evaluate their roles, and how they develop solidarity to support them.

What politicians understand about people's needs and their ability to meet them promptly captures the essence of social development. While politicians often see their role as maintaining a public image, fulfilling political promises, and ensuring people's satisfaction, social development is frequently overlooked.

The above results reveal that urban politicians in Zanzibar believe that social development comprises visible infrastructure and services that ensure the availability of quality health, education, transport, water, and electricity services.

The literature confirms this study's findings and aligns with the views of many African politicians, who believe that social development includes quality education, healthcare, employment opportunities, improved transportation, and access to electricity [29]. However, it also shows that citizens' changing needs and expectations influence the positive image of these politicians [30]. Experience in Zanzibar

demonstrates that many politicians adapt their perceptions to meet the needs and desires of the majority of their citizens. African politicians demonstrate social development by providing essential services, such as electricity, water, transportation, education, and healthcare [31]. Experience indicates that they promote social development by responding swiftly to citizens' demands and concerns. They conduct surveys to understand people's needs before launching political campaigns [32]. This suggests that the perceived social development of many politicians can vary widely depending on current citizen demands. Politicians in these regions tend to act more opportunistically than proactively, creating opportunities rather than seizing them. They use manifestos to announce progress in health, education, and utility services [33]. Experience also shows that African politicians view social development as a tangible, measurable phenomenon rather than an abstract concept, assessable through people's senses and levels of satisfaction.

4.4. Perception of Social Development among Urban Youth

Another group of interest in the study was the youth from urban areas in Zanzibar. The study employed a random method to select youths, who were then interviewed to assess their perceptions of social development. Results from a large group of youths indicate that social development encompasses a full spectrum of social services, including education, health, improved job opportunities, communication, and other aspects that influence happiness and overall life satisfaction. They utilise health, knowledge, experience, and communication to generate economic and employment opportunities, thereby improving living standards and the well-being of their society. During the interview on Darajani Street, one respondent (male youth) explained the following:

To me, social development means improved jobs, healthcare, education, and all the essential and sufficient factors that affect my ability to earn an income. I see better jobs, quality health services, education, and effective communication as all parts of social development.

At the same time and place, another young woman added:

Social development is a process that aims to tackle life's mental challenges, improving the well-being of individuals and society as a whole.

The quotations above demonstrate that urban youths in Zanzibar view social development as a multifaceted approach that combines social and economic strategies to enhance their well-being and living standards. It involves a continuous process of enhancing well-being, supported by quality health and educational services.

This finding aligns with an argument that quality education and health services are essential pillars for the well-being of young people and their improved living standards [34]. Other literature has extensively examined the links between health, knowledge, and the economic development of urban youth. Direct knowledge influences young people's ability to think critically about positive decision-making, boosts productivity, and fosters a competitive and sustainable advantage through

innovation and discovery [35]. The majority of urban youths engage in self-employment after experiencing difficulties in developing income sources that utilise their acquired knowledge and align with their economic expectations.

Conversely, health is a crucial factor in the sustainable economic development of youth. Practitioners have increasingly focused on researching aspects related to health and economic well-being [36]. The impact of health on economic growth in England has been evident over the past two centuries, primarily due to improvements in nutrition and health management [37]. The healthier the youth are, the more they can access economic opportunities [38]. An important aspect of social development among urban youth in Zanzibar is the quality of life, driven by vocational knowledge and health conditions, which influences their ability to address issues and facilitates their implementation.

Besides health and knowledge, which urban youths often link to social development, employment opportunities are another vital aspect of their perceptions. In many countries, especially in developing nations where jobs are scarce, most youths report low levels of social progress. This is evident in numerous African countries, where youth riots and political protests indicate widespread dissatisfaction with social progress. In East Africa, for instance, governments' primary aim is to enhance youth welfare by creating job opportunities that address their development challenges [39]. Rwanda and Kenya revised their development policies in 2018 to improve their communities' social well-being, with a particular emphasis on youth employment [40]. Many urban youths are not only eager to secure employment to earn an income, but income also serves as a means for social interaction, relationships, and gaining respect.

4.5. Social Development Perception of the Public Servants

The perception of social development was also studied among public servants working in government offices in urban areas. The research involved 48 participants, comprising both male and female workers with diverse educational backgrounds and professions. To understand their perceptions, interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were held. The first method collected individual perceptions, while the second provided additional insights into public servants' overall views on social development in urban Zanzibar.

The results reveal that most public servants believe social development is connected to a positive working environment, improved incentives, and factors that foster motivation to work and enhance living standards. These elements help aid workers to overcome their humanitarian and economic challenges. For example, many public servants expressed a wish to link incentives with improvements in well-being. The study reveals that public servants in urban Zanzibar perceive social development as a comprehensive process that enables workers to perform at their best and achieve optimal outcomes for their well-being and satisfaction. During an interview held in the President's Office of Constitution, Law, and Public Services, one public servant stated the following.

To me, social development means working with less effort and receiving better-paid incentives, having an improved work environment that positively impacts workers' morale and performance, and creating a stress-free atmosphere.

On the same day, another respondent from the same office stated the following during the interview:

I prefer working with institutions that offer reasonable salaries and additional incentives. Financial benefits are my primary concern because they address all my issues, and this salary impacts my reputation as a public servant.

The results were then presented during the FGD, held at the ACES College of Economic Science Conference Hall in Mwanakwereke on 4 May 2024, from 9:30 to 11:30 am. The purpose of the FGD was to explore the consistency of perceptions of social development among all public servants in urban Zanzibar. The results from the FGD revealed that:

Social development occurs when public servants find satisfaction in their work and receive social and economic benefits both during and after their service.

Social development encompasses a series of processes aimed at creating a more supportive work environment that fosters the socioeconomic growth of workers and their families, both during employment and after retirement.

The perception of social development among public servants exhibits distinct characteristics, including moral growth, performance enhancement, and ongoing interest in the subject.

Morality is a vital component of social development, founded on equal rights and opportunities, free communication, democracy, and capacity building.

The results above indicate that public servants in urban Zanzibar view social development as a comprehensive process aimed at addressing the social and economic challenges faced by workers, both within and outside their work environments. It involves a series of steps to improve workers' social and economic well-being.

The literature recognises that enhancing individual well-being and welfare are key aspects of social development, as emphasised at the 1995 Canadian Conference on Social Development. The most important indicators of employees' well-being are job satisfaction, accountability, and employee retention, which are influenced by effective management, incentives, resources, and the work environment [41]. This implies that employees in better environments and those with participative management tend to experience higher levels of job satisfaction than those in harsh, undemocratic management environments. Undemocratic management results from external factors that resist management transformation, thereby damaging employers' social and economic reputations and increasing inequality [42]. From this perspective, social development, according to public servants, fosters work capacity, morality, and a willingness to work with less supervision and harassment.

Overall, the social development perceptions of the studied groups reveal both similarities and differences. Members of all groups emphasise key aspects of social

development, such as a good standard of living, the freedom to make decisions, and the potential for social interaction, which enhance their well-being. Additionally, a higher standard of living and increased opportunities to earn income are common features of social development across all groups. However, the study has identified distinct perspectives within the groups on social development. While religious leaders consider social development, participation, employment, and family well-being as essential, urban traders focus on business infrastructure and a supportive environment, with clear policies and regulations. These views differ from those of urban youths, who prioritise urban security and employment opportunities. Furthermore, the work environment, motivation, and incentives significantly influence public servants' perceptions of social development. In Zanzibar, political leaders have a unique focus on social development, particularly in health and education, as well as ensuring adequate water and electricity supplies for large populations.

5. Limitations of the Study

The study offers essential insights into how urban residents in Zanzibar perceive social development; however, it faces several limitations. The research primarily concentrates on urban populations whose social and economic interests differ from those of rural communities. Including rural inhabitants could help address their perceptions of social development in rural areas. The focus on qualitative insights rather than quantitative evaluation of development outcomes makes it challenging to establish causal relationships. While the study provides valuable insights, its findings should be interpreted with caution. Future research should incorporate mixed methods, larger sample sizes, a broader scope, and comparative analyses to enhance understanding and validity.

6. Conclusion

According to this study's findings, the urban community perceives social development differently, mainly because of their unique needs, desires, and interests. In each group, the concept of social development has been analysed through various features reflecting their perceptions. Socioeconomic differences among social groups significantly influence perceptions of social development. Furthermore, factors such as social interaction with friends, religious beliefs, occupation, political affiliation, and historical background also play important roles. The government and development partners have been crucial in shaping each group's understanding of social development.

7. Recommendations

The study identified several gaps that require attention. The recommendations aim to address these perceived gaps in social development perspectives among urban residents in Zanzibar. Various opinions on social development have been shared by religious leaders, politicians, urban traders, youths, and public servants.

Based on the findings, the study proposes the following recommendations: The government should establish mechanisms such as training programmes, workshops, and seminars through its planning departments, involving political leaders, religious leaders, and other development stakeholders. These should be designed to foster a shared understanding of social development that can be applied in their careers and transmitted across generations. Differences in perceptions are mainly driven by social and economic priorities, with each group in the urban community having specific interests. The government is also encouraged to implement mechanisms that promote social development and harmony among different groups in urban communities. These include improved infrastructure, clear guidelines, social support, and development programmes that expand opportunities across sectors and promote equitable conditions for social development.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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