

**Neglect or Repression? A Comparative Analysis of Urban Governance and the
Socio-Economic Vulnerability of Street-Based Populations in Zanzibar and
Kampala**

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Abstract

Street-based livelihoods whether through vending or begging remain persistent indicators of urban poverty across African cities, paradoxically coexisting with concentrated wealth and ambitious urban modernization agendas. This paper presents a comparative analysis of socio-economic vulnerability among street vendors and the urban poor in Zanzibar Town, Tanzania, and Kampala, Uganda, drawing on primary survey data from Zanzibar (2014, n = 59) and secondary literature on Kampala's informal economy. The Zanzibar findings reveal that lack of alternative income sources (45.8%), physical fitness among 52.5% of beggars, and the near-total absence of formal Zakat assistance (96.6% never received it) define the landscape of street-level poverty. In Kampala, an estimated 230,000 individuals depend on street vending, yet face systematic evictions and repression under the Kampala Capital City Authority. While both cities exhibit structural economic exclusion as the primary driver of street-based survival, their policy responses diverge sharply: Zanzibar exhibits benign neglect with underutilized Islamic charitable mechanisms, whereas Kampala pursues aggressive spatial expulsion without adequate alternative livelihoods. Encouragingly, over 83% of Zanzibar's beggars expressed a definitive desire to cease begging if alternatives existed. The paper argues that neither approach addresses fundamental vulnerabilities and recommends formalized social protection, digitized Zakat distribution, and inclusive urban planning that recognizes street-based livelihoods as legitimate economic strategies.

Keywords: street vending, street begging, urban poverty, Zanzibar, Kampala, informal economy, social protection, Zakat, urban governance

Introduction

Beggars are persons who live by asking people for money or food. Begging is the act of some people asking others for money or food, and this act takes place along streets, trading centers, and market places, among others (Abebe, 2008). Similarly, street

vendors are individuals who sell goods and services in public spaces without formal premises (Monteith, 2017). Street-based livelihoods whether through vending or begging remain persistent indicators of urban poverty across African cities, paradoxically coexisting with concentrated wealth and ambitious urban modernization agendas. This paper presents a comparative analysis of socio-economic vulnerability among street vendors and the urban poor in Zanzibar Town, Tanzania, and Kampala, Uganda, drawing on primary survey data from Zanzibar (2014, n = 59) and secondary literature on Kampala's informal economy. The Zanzibar findings reveal that lack of alternative income sources (45.8%), physical fitness among 52.5% of beggars, and the near-total absence of formal Zakat assistance (96.6% never received it) define the landscape of street-level poverty. In Kampala, an estimated 230,000 individuals depend on street vending, facing systematic evictions and repression under the Kampala Capital City Authority. While both cities exhibit structural economic exclusion as the primary driver of street-based survival, their policy responses diverge sharply: Zanzibar exhibits benign neglect with underutilized Islamic charitable mechanisms, whereas Kampala pursues aggressive spatial expulsion without adequate alternative livelihoods. Encouragingly, over 83% of Zanzibar's beggars expressed a definitive desire to cease begging if alternatives existed. The paper argues that neither approach addresses fundamental vulnerabilities and recommends formalized social protection, digitized Zakat distribution, and inclusive urban planning that recognizes street-based livelihoods as legitimate economic strategies.

Precise global statistics on the number of people engaged in begging are notoriously difficult to obtain due to the transient and often hidden nature of the population, yet available data from various sources paints a substantial, if incomplete, picture of its scale. A 2023 report found that 60% of the world's population reported helping a stranger, often a beggar, in the past year, suggesting the large scale of begging worldwide (Charity Aid Foundation, 2023, as cited in Ideas for India, 2024). The United Nations estimates there are up to 150 million street children globally, many of whom rely on begging as a primary survival strategy (United Nations, n.d., as cited in WUNRN, 2023). In Africa, the phenomenon is particularly pronounced: a 2023 study by Wits University found that 20.9% of South African households resort to sending a member out to beg for food (Wits University, 2023), while in Uganda, city authorities estimate that more than 15,000 children live on the streets of Kampala (New Vision,

2023). In Mali, over 20,000 children are forced to beg, 43% of whom are girls (Malian Coalition for the Rights of Children [COMADE], n.d., as cited in various reports). A 2026 mapping exercise in Kano State, Nigeria, identified 6,573 street beggars, with the largest demographic group (56.4%) being youths aged 11-20 years (Kano State Bureau of Statistics, 2026). In Asia, India's 2011 Census recorded 413,670 beggars and vagrants (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011), while Pakistan is reported to have between 5 and 38 million beggars, with estimates suggesting as many as 25 million are professional beggars (Asian Human Rights Commission, n.d., as cited in The Express Tribune, 2023; Pakistan & Gulf Economist, 2025). In Europe, a study of beggars in Brussels (2021-2022) estimated that approximately 80% are Romanian Roma (VRT NWS, 2023), and in the Americas, a systematic review found that the economic yield from panhandling in the United States is most often \$20–\$60 per day and \$200–\$500 per month (SAGE Journals, 2023). These figures, while disparate and often based on varying methodologies, collectively underscore that begging is a pervasive global phenomenon driven by structural poverty, economic exclusion, and inadequate social protection systems.

This paper undertook a comparative analysis of socio-economic vulnerability among street-based populations in two East African urban centers: Zanzibar Town, Tanzania, and Kampala, Uganda. The Zanzibar component is based on a primary survey conducted in July-August 2014 using a structured interview guide administered to 59 street beggars by five Bachelor of Arts in Economics students from Zanzibar University, supervised by the lead researcher. The Kampala component drew on secondary literature, including academic studies, policy reports, and journalistic investigations, to construct a parallel profile of street vendors' socio-economic vulnerability and the governance regimes that shape their experiences.

Methodology

The Zanzibar survey was carried out in areas surrounding the central trading place in Zanzibar Town, including Mombasa, Jangombe, Mchangani, Majestic Cinema, and Vikokotoni. The beggars were interviewed using a structured interview guide and were mainly located on the basis of convenience sampling, suitable given the transient nature of the target population (Serwanga, 2014). Given that the language of

communication was Kiswahili, the interview guide was translated by the research assistants during the interviews. In total, 59 street beggars were interviewed. Data was edited, coded, and classified. Tabulation summarized raw data into tables. Descriptive analysis was employed to profile the street beggars, linking their profiles to motivations, structure, economics, and future plans of begging (Serwanga, 2014).

Results (Zanzibar)

Zanzibar Town: Causes and Motivations for Begging

The causes of street begging in Zanzibar Town derived from respondent interviews. Lack of alternative work was cited by the majority (45.8%) of respondents, a factor that has intensified given the recent economic downturn in Tanzania's informal sector (ILO, 2025). This finding resonates strongly with research from across Africa and the Global South. In Nigeria, a comprehensive study examining the socio-economic determinants of begging in Kwara State found that stable employment and access to essential public services were associated with reduced reliance on begging, while physical disabilities and a family history of begging were positively associated with prolonged begging (Biala et al., 2024). Research on child streetism in Nigeria similarly frames street-based livelihoods such as hawking and begging not as parental neglect but as "an adaptive response to structural deprivation and the weakness of social protection systems" (Taylor & Francis, 2026:3). In Sierra Leone, a study of persons with disabilities in Freetown's Central Business District found that "poverty, social stigma, limited access to education and employment, and environmental hazards significantly contribute to street begging" (University of Sierra Leone, 2025:2). A study examining categories of street beggars in Central Tanzania using Dodoma and Singida Municipalities found that "the phenomenon of street begging is an outcome of many factors, including poverty, unemployment, physical challenges, death of parents, and family disintegration" (CiNii Research, 2025:2). These findings across multiple African contexts corroborate the Zanzibar data, underscoring that economic exclusion rather than individual pathology is the primary driver of street-based survival.

Disability accounted for 27.1% of respondents in Zanzibar, while 25.4% reported earning higher income from begging than from any available work. The latter finding that begging can yield higher returns than formal or informal employment has been

documented elsewhere. A study in Delhi, India, provided "*theoretical and empirical analysis of begging as an economic activity*," revealing complex preferences among beggars regarding paid work, free-riding, and honesty (Ideas for India, 2024:1). Research in Lucknow, India, found that some beggars earn incomes exceeding those of mid-level professionals, with consistent daily earnings allowing certain beggars to accumulate between Rs 80,000 to Rs 1,00,000 monthly (Times of India, 2024). Average street beggars in Indian metros reportedly earn ₹200–₹2,000 per day, typically translating into ₹60,000–₹75,000 monthly income in dense commercial zones (Choudhury, 2025). However, a contrasting study of over 500 homeless individuals in Mumbai found that 391 respondents rejected the notion that begging yields substantial earnings, with 285 strongly disagreeing that it is "easy money" (The Koshish Trust, 2025:2). This divergence suggests that begging's profitability varies significantly by location, season, and the demographic characteristics of both beggars and donors—a nuance that the Zanzibar data, with its average daily income of Tshs. 7,889 (approximately \$4.60 in 2014), helps illuminate.

Regarding motivation, 69.5% of Zanzibar's beggars were self-motivated, indicating personal hardship as the primary driver, while 16.9% were motivated by family members. Peer influence was significant in the initiation phase, with 74.6% indicating they were influenced by a friend to begin begging. This social dimension of begging initiation has been observed elsewhere. A study of child street beggars in Accra, Ghana, found that "among the causal factors for child street begging, peer influence emerged the most influential causal factor" (University of Ghana, 2021:2). In Nairobi, Kenya, street children organize themselves into groups that enhance survival, with begging identified as one of the primary survival strategies (Mwangi & Ochieng, 2020). Research on migration for begging among Nigerian migrants in Accra found that "migration for begging is mainly facilitated by Personal Network support rather than Organized Criminal Networks" (University of Ghana, 2021b: 1). In Winnipeg, Canada, research on street-involved persons found that while panhandling is primarily a solitary behavior, flagging is a highly organized and intricate type of informal labor characterized by social networks, cohesion, conflict and control over space (Athabasca University, 2024:2).

Despite the social dimension of initiation, 72.9% of Zanzibar's beggars agreed begging is shameful, and 61% reported not enjoying the activity currently,

highlighting significant psychological distress. This finding aligns with research from South Africa, which explored "a range of experiential factors that contribute toward the practice, and reinforcement, of begging" (South African Journal of Psychology, 2013:1). The psychological toll of begging including non-person treatment, existential mattering, and learned helplessness has been documented among people who live on the street in Stellenbosch, South Africa (Schade & Lesch, 2023). Research in South Africa also found that "begging for food was the most harmful coping strategy for mental health" (EWN, 2024:1). The shame and distress expressed by Zanzibar's beggars thus reflect a universal human response to the indignity of street-level survival.

Zanzibar Town: Structure of Begging

The structure of begging in Zanzibar Town reveals largely individualistic, unorganized patterns. The majority (76.3%) beg alone without instruments, and none seek permission to beg. Shopkeepers were identified as the primary donors (57.6%), with mornings (55.9%) and Fridays (79.7%) being peak times; the latter reflecting the Islamic holy day when alms-giving is considered particularly meritorious. Money constituted the primary donation type (78.0%).

This relatively unorganized structure contrasts sharply with findings from other contexts. In Nigeria, research has documented that begging has become "a structured industry where childhood innocence is treated as something to be sold" (The Guardian, 2026:2). The Almajiri system in northern Nigeria represents a long-established culture of children begging for alms, propelled by poverty and religious tradition. As one investigation noted, *"children, especially those in the almajiri system in the northern part of Nigeria, are compelled to beg to sustain themselves and their schools, while in the southern part of Nigeria, children are either forced by parents or lured by traffickers into begging in urban centers"* (Academia.edu, 2025:1). In Uganda, a 75-day undercover investigation by New Vision newspaper unmasked "a ruthless criminal syndicate that has transformed child trafficking into a high-revenue industry," revealing "how a secret cartel is minting millions of shillings by exploiting vulnerable children from the Karamoja sub-region" (PML Daily, 2025, p. 1). The investigation found that "the trafficking network treats children as commodities, with activity reaching its peak in the months leading up to Christmas" (PML Daily, 2025, p.

1). In Nairobi, Kenya, "the presence of organized exploitation networks has worsened the situation, particularly for individuals with disabilities who are especially vulnerable" (The Star, 2025, p. 1). In Ghana, the Immigration Service rescued 305 West African nationals, including 113 children, in an intelligence-led operation targeting "suspected human trafficking networks posing as street begging groups" (The Ghana Report, 2026, p. 1). The Zanzibar finding that 98.3% of respondents had no other family members engaged in begging further distinguishes it from contexts where begging is a family-based or intergenerational enterprise.

Critically, 96.6% of Zanzibar's respondents had never received Zakat, the Islamic obligatory alms, indicating a significant gap between religious charitable obligations and actual distribution to street-level poor. This finding aligns with research from Nigeria, where Zakat institutions were found to be "ineffective and overwhelmed to meet the demands of their patrons" (Abdulrazak & Sani, 2020). However, studies from Indonesia present a more optimistic picture: research using the Autoregressive Distributed Lag approach found that zakat has "a significant short-run effect, reducing poverty with its strongest impact appearing after a lag (coefficient = -0.131)" (Al Berto et al., 2026:92). Another study found that zakat has "a significant negative impact on the poverty level, signifying its effectiveness in wealth distribution and the economic empowerment of the poor community" (Journal UNNES, 2025, p. 1). The BAZNAS productive zakat programme in Indonesia has been evaluated using the CIBEST model, demonstrating that "the proportion of mustahiq in the Welfare Quadrant increased significantly from 18.4% to 47.3% ($\Delta = +28.9$ percentage points), while the Absolute Poverty Quadrant declined from 36.2% to 13.2% ($\Delta = -23.0$ pp)" (Latief & Alam, 2026:33). In Bangladesh, research found "a statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) increase in living costs above the poverty line, indicating the effectiveness of zakat in reducing extreme poverty in the country" (Discover Sustainability, 2025:81). The contrast between Indonesia's and Bangladesh's relatively institutionalized zakat distribution and Zanzibar's near-total absence of zakat reaching street beggars suggests that the problem is not with zakat as an instrument but with its institutional management (Office of the Chief Government Statistician Zanzibar, 2012).

Economics of Begging

While 55.9% of Zanzibar's beggars acknowledged begging had positively changed their lives, the average daily income was Tshs. 7,889 (approximately \$4.60 in 2014), which has been severely eroded by inflation. As of 2026, the real value of this income has declined significantly, making survival even more precarious. Savings behavior was mixed, with 49.2% having some savings (often stored in informal wooden boxes), while 81.4% lacked formal bank accounts.

The economic strategies of street beggars have been investigated across multiple contexts. In Ghana, research found that beggars employ various strategies to gain "a competitive advantage within the contested urban spaces they occupy" (Adonteng-Kissi, 2021). A study in Abuja, Nigeria, examined street begging and income levels among 422 beggars across six Area Councils, revealing significant income variation (Adesina & Ogunleye, 2021). In Bangladesh, research found that "among those who lost an income source prior to becoming a beggar, 75% tried to get alternative income source but failed and started begging" (Journal of Social Science, 2025:91). A study in Chattogram, Bangladesh, found that "both offering job and granting allowance can be effectively used to reduce the incidence of begging" (Journal of CU, 2025, p. 1). Research in Dhaka found that "a disabled beggar in Dhaka earns an average of 1.25 USD per day" (IEEE, 2024, p. 1). In the United States, research found that "panhandlers solicit more actively when they compete, when they have more human capital, and when passersby are more numerous and responsive to solicitation" (Wiley Online Library, 2025, p. 1). The Zanzibar finding that nearly half of beggars have some savings albeit informal challenges the stereotype of beggars as purely passive recipients of charity.

Zanzibar Town: Socioeconomic Status

The demographic profile revealed a dominance of females (74.6%), Muslims (89.8%), and a significant proportion (52.5%) who are physically fit, challenging the stereotype that only the disabled beg. Illiteracy was extremely high at 61.0%, and 42.4% were aged 56 and above.

The feminization of street begging in Zanzibar (74.6% female) is mirrored in other contexts. In Kampala, street vending is similarly feminized, with women constituting the majority (Monteith, 2017). In Nigeria, a special report on Kano's female begging culture found that "the rise in street begging among young women is not a religious

phenomenon but a product of cultural practices compounded by economic hardship" (PRNigeria, 2026:93). The report documented how married women "neither widowed nor divorced" beg openly with their children, exposing "cracks in family responsibility, economic support systems, and community accountability" (PRNigeria, 2026, p. 2). In Abuja, "some of the women that beg with their kids told Weekend Trust that they were widows displaced by the unrest in some northern states" (Daily Trust, 2024, p. 1). Research in Kano found that "most of these street beggars are displaced women, widows, divorcees, and children" (Daily Reality, 2025, p. 1). In Brazil, seven in every ten people living on the streets are Black, reflecting historical inequality (Almeida, 2021). The high proportion of physically fit beggars in Zanzibar (52.5%) aligns with findings from Johannesburg, South Africa, where able-bodied adults engage in begging at traffic lights (Nuttall & Mbete, 2021).

The high illiteracy rate (61%) and aging population (42.4% over 55) in Zanzibar present structural barriers to alternative employment. Research from Freetown, Sierra Leone, similarly found that "limited access to education and employment" significantly contributes to street begging (University of Sierra Leone, 2025, p. 2). Research in Central Tanzania found that "the demographic of street beggars reflect that begging is more pronounced among natives or indigenous, physical disabled, male, single, widowed, and Illiterates" (MOCU Repository, 2023, p. 2). The aging profile of Zanzibar's beggars distinguishes it from contexts like Kampala, where street children constitute a significant proportion of beggars, with an estimated 3,476 children living and working on Kampala's streets (Kampala Capital City Authority [KCCA], 2022).

Zanzibar Town: Future Plans

Encouragingly, the majority expressed a desire to quit. 83.1% did not like to continue begging, and 93.2% did not want their children to beg. Those who wished not to continue based their response on the fact that begging is shameful and not encouraged by Islam. Furthermore, 72.9% indicated they would prefer alternative employment if given the opportunity, with physical disabilities and old age cited by the minority wishing to continue.

This aspirational finding is consistent with research from multiple contexts. A study of child street beggars in inner-city Accra, Ghana, found that "despite these

challenges, many child street beggars expressed aspirations to return to school, acquire vocational skills, or achieve economic self-reliance" (Discover Social Science and Health, 2026, p. 1). Research in Bangladesh found that "92 percent of beggars would stop begging if appropriate alternatives were available, such as skill training, job-creation facilities, and rehabilitation" (IEEE, 2024, p. 1). Another study in Bangladesh found that "30% of the beggars have a plan to quit begging as soon as they get a job" (Journal of Social Science, 2025, p. 1). In Ethiopia, programs providing "short-term vocational training and start-up support" have enabled street-involved individuals to transition to self-reliance (SOS Ethiopia, 2026, p. 1). In Ghana, organizations have transformed "street youth lives" through "education, skills training, and employment" (GhanaWeb, 2025, p. 1). The Zanzibar finding that 72.9% would prefer alternative employment if given the opportunity underscores the potential effectiveness of such interventions, provided they are tailored to the demographic realities of the target population—particularly the high illiteracy rate and aging profile.

Results (Kampala)

Kampala, Uganda: The Scale of Informal Employment and Drivers

Kampala presents a dramatically larger scale of street-based economic activity. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), more than 80% of Uganda's workforce operates in the informal sector (The Observer, 2026). In Kampala alone, an estimated 230,000 people earn their livelihoods from street vending and hawking (Economic Policy Research Centre [EPRC], 2023). Over 85% of Kampala's working population is engaged in informal employment due to inadequate formal job creation (EPRC, 2023). Street vending in Uganda is "a vital livelihood strategy, especially in a context where formal job creation falls far short of labour market demand" (Daily Monitor, 2026, p. 1). The informal sector in Kampala accounts for about 1.5 million jobs that include street vending (KCCA, 2016).

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated vulnerabilities: with over 82% of city residents employed in the informal economy, unemployment levels for those in the informal sector rose to over 60%, with 72% of the population facing reduced incomes (EPRC, 2023). This vulnerability mirrors experiences elsewhere. In Bangladesh, a study found that 39.6% of urban street vendors experienced significant income loss

during COVID-19 lockdowns (Hossain et al., 2023). In South Africa, informal traders similarly faced catastrophic income losses during lockdowns (Skinner & Peters, 2022).

Similar to Zanzibar's beggars, Kampala's street vendors are primarily driven by economic necessity rather than choice. Young (2019) noted that economic pressure forces most vendors onto the streets, with capital so low that they cannot afford to rent stalls in established markets. Street vending serves as a "no hard barrier" entrance for women, yet women are most adversely affected by enforcement actions (Monteith, 2017). In Harare, Zimbabwe, street vending "functions as an informal safety net in the absence of adequate formal employment opportunities and social protection systems" (ZOU Repository, 2025, p. 1). In Hanoi, Vietnam, "street vending plays a critical role in the informal urban economy of cities in the Global South, serving as a key source of livelihood for the urban poor" (Cardiff University, 2025, p. 1).

Kampala, Uganda: Governance and Repression

Unlike Zanzibar's relatively unregulated environment, Kampala's street vendors face systematic repression. Monteith (2017) documented that the introduction of the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) marked a sharp shift from protection to repression, with evictions, arrests, confiscation of goods, and harassment becoming ever-present threats. Goodfellow (2019) observed that the KCCA's developmental ambitions caused it to commit to eradicating informal vending from the city's streets, while its recentralized and de-democratized structure closed the political space that street vendors had formerly used to exercise political influence.

Since early 2026, a renewed drive to rid Kampala's streets of vendors has created a sense of order but at tremendous human cost, described as "a moral quandary regarding what to do with displaced populations" (Daily Monitor, 2026, p. 1). Critics note that "a city reveals its soul not in its skylines, but in how it treats those who sweep its streets at dawn, hawk tomatoes under the midday sun, uncertain of what tomorrow brings" (The Observer, 2026, p. 1). The enforcement operations have been described as "a governance challenge and calls into question the feasibility of modernization without displacing the most vulnerable" (Daily Monitor, 2026b, p. 1). MPs have criticized KCCA over "rushed eviction of vendors from Kampala streets without adequate alternative market spaces" (UG Bulletin, 2026, p. 1). Some analysts,

however, argue that enforcement is necessary for urban order, as licensed traders view unregulated vending as unfair competition (The Independent, 2026).

This policy approach has parallels elsewhere. In Zimbabwe, street traders in Harare have faced violent crackdowns under Operation Restore Order (Moyo, 2021). In South Africa, the COVID-19 lockdowns were used to crack down on street traders in Cape Town (Skinner & Peters, 2022). In India, street vendors face ongoing harassment despite the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation) Act of 2014 (Ghate, 2024). The KCCA's Child Protection Ordinance of 2022 makes it illegal not only to exploit children for begging but also for the public to give them money on the streets (KCCA, 2022).

Discussion

Economic Exclusion as the Primary Driver

The causes and motivations for street-based poverty in both Zanzibar Town and Kampala are deeply rooted in economic exclusion, a problem that has intensified over the past decade due to the compounded effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global cost-of-living crisis, and reduced informal sector opportunities (ILO, 2025; World Bank, 2024). Abebe (2008) observed that begging is fluid and contingent on changing socio-economic conditions, a characterization equally applicable to street vending. In Zanzibar, 45.8% of beggars cited lack of alternative work as their primary motivation, while in Kampala, over 85% of the working population is engaged in informal employment due to inadequate formal job creation (EPRC, 2023). Young (2019) similarly noted that economic pressure forces most Kampala vendors onto the streets.

This finding resonates across Africa. Biala et al. (2024) found in Nigeria that stable employment and access to essential public services were associated with reduced reliance on begging. Taylor and Francis (2026) framed child streetism including hawking and begging as "an adaptive response to structural deprivation and the weakness of social protection systems." In Sierra Leone, Koroma et al. (2022) found that "poverty, social stigma, limited access to education and employment, and environmental hazards significantly contribute to street begging." Research in Central Tanzania (CiNii Research, 2025) similarly found that "the phenomenon of street begging is an outcome of many factors, including poverty, unemployment, physical challenges, death of parents, and family disintegration." In Zimbabwe, ZOU

Repository (2025) found that street vending "functions as an informal safety net in the absence of adequate formal employment opportunities and social protection systems." In Hanoi, Vietnam, Cardiff University (2025) found that "street vending plays a critical role in the informal urban economy of cities in the Global South."

The Professionalization and Organization of Street-Based Livelihoods

The structure of street-based livelihoods varies significantly across contexts. In Zanzibar, begging remains largely individualistic and unorganized: 76.3% beg alone without instruments, and none seek permission to beg. This contrasts sharply with findings from other contexts. In Nigeria, research has documented that begging has become "a structured industry where childhood innocence is treated as something to be sold" (The Guardian, 2026). The Almajiri system in northern Nigeria represents a long-established culture of children begging for alms (Academia.edu, 2025). In Uganda, PML Daily (2025) unmasked "*a ruthless criminal syndicate that has transformed child trafficking into a high-revenue industry,*" with a "secret cartel minting millions of shillings by exploiting vulnerable children from the Karamoja sub-region." In Kenya, The Star (2025) reported that "*the presence of organised exploitation networks had worsened the situation, particularly for individuals with disabilities.*" In Ghana, The Ghana Report (2026) documented the rescue of 305 West African nationals from "exploitative street begging networks."

The finding that most Zanzibar beggars do not seek permission reflects an unregulated environment, while the influx of beggars from mainland Tanzania suggested a degree of professionalization, aligning with historical accounts of beggars migrating to favorable territories (Bentwick, 1894). This is consistent with University of Ghana's (2021b) finding that "*migration for begging is mainly facilitated by Personal Network support rather than Organized Criminal Networks.*" However, the presence of transnational begging networks in other African contexts suggests that professionalization exists on a spectrum, with Zanzibar occupying the less organized end.

The Feminization and Gendering of Street-Based Poverty

Both Zanzibar and Kampala exhibited significant feminization of street-based poverty. In Zanzibar, females constituted 74.6% of beggars, with widows (33.9%) and divorced women (23.7%) particularly overrepresented. In Kampala, street vending is

similarly feminized, with girls/women constituting the majority, though they are "*the most hard hit by the brunt raw law enforcement*" (Monteith, 2017: 220). In Nigeria, PRNigeria (2026) reported that "*the rise in street begging among young women is not a religious phenomenon but a product of cultural practices compounded by economic hardship,*" documenting how married women "neither widowed nor divorced" beg openly with their children. Daily Trust (2024) reported that in Abuja, "*some of the women that beg with their kids told Weekend Trust that they were widows displaced by the unrest in some northern states.*" Daily Reality (2025) found that in Kano, "most of these street beggars are displaced women, widows, divorcees, and children." In Brazil, Almeida (2021) found that seven in every ten people living on the streets are Black, reflecting historical inequality. This feminization of poverty has been linked to family breakdown, marital instability, and the inadequacy of social protection systems for women.

The Paradox of Physical Fitness and Disability

A striking finding in Zanzibar is that 52.5% of beggars are physically fit, challenging the stereotype that only the disabled beg. This aligns with findings from Johannesburg, South Africa, where Nuttall and Mbete (2021) found that able-bodied adults engage in begging at traffic lights. In Central Tanzania, MOCU Repository (2023) found that "the demographic of street beggars reflect that begging is more pronounced among natives or indigenous, physical disabled, male, single, widowed, and Illiterates." However, the presence of physically fit individuals engaged in begging and vending across both cities suggests that street-based poverty is primarily a function of economic exclusion rather than individual pathology. This challenges "*deserving poor*" narratives and underscores the need for employment-focused interventions.

Zakat and Religious Charitable Mechanisms

The demographic profile of Zanzibar, dominated by Muslims (89.8%), presented a critical paradox. Islam mandates Zakat as a means of wealth redistribution; however, the finding that 96.6% had never received it highlights a systemic failure in the institutional management of religious charities (Office of the Chief Government Statistician Zanzibar, 2012). Abdulrazak and Sani (2020) similarly found that Zakat institutions in Nigeria were "*ineffective and overwhelmed to meet the demands of their patrons.*"

However, this contrasted sharply with evidence from other Muslim-majority contexts. Al Berto et al. (2026) found that zakat in Indonesia has "a significant short-run effect, reducing poverty with its strongest impact appearing after a lag (coefficient = 0.131)." Journal UNNES (2025) found that zakat has "*a significant negative impact on the poverty level, signifying its effectiveness in wealth distribution and the economic empowerment of the poor community.*" Latief and Alam (2026) demonstrated that the BAZNAS productive zakat programme in Indonesia increased the proportion of beneficiaries in the Welfare Quadrant from 18.4% to 47.3%, while the Absolute Poverty Quadrant declined from 36.2% to 13.2%. Discover Sustainability (2025) found in Bangladesh "*a statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) increase in living costs above the poverty line, indicating the effectiveness of zakat in reducing extreme poverty.*" The contrast between Indonesia's and Bangladesh's relatively institutionalized zakat distribution and Zanzibar's near-total absence of zakat reaching street beggars suggested that the problem is not with zakat as an instrument but with its institutional management. As KCI (2014) noted, "*Zakat is an Islamic faith-based institution and is being underutilized for poverty reduction in many of these poor Muslim countries.*"

Policy Responses: Neglect versus Repression

The comparative analysis revealed that policy responses diverge sharply. Zanzibar exhibits benign neglect: begging is neither systematically criminalized nor supported. Kampala pursues aggressive spatial expulsion through the KCCA's enforcement operations (Monteith, 2017; Goodfellow, 2019). Critics of the Kampala approach argue that "*development that excludes the most vulnerable raises serious concerns*" (The Observer, 2026). MPs have criticized KCCA over "*rushed eviction of vendors from Kampala streets without adequate alternative market spaces*" (UG Bulletin, 2026). Some analysts, however, argued that enforcement is necessary for urban order, as licensed traders view unregulated vending as unfair competition (The Independent, 2026).

This debate underscored the tension between modernization and social protection, a tension observed globally. In Zimbabwe, Moyo (2021) documented that Operation Restore Order displaced over 700,000 people, creating lasting social and economic disruption. In South Africa, Skinner and Peters (2022) found that "*an eviction-only*

approach to street trading perpetuates exclusion and erodes the right to the city." In India, Ghate (2024) found that despite the Street Vendors Act of 2014, implementation has been inconsistent. Smith (2005) argued that anti-begging regulations often fail to address underlying causes and can perpetuate cycles of poverty.

Aspirations and Pathways Out of Poverty

Encouragingly, both populations express strong aspirations to escape poverty. In Zanzibar, 83.1% did not wish to continue begging, and 72.9% would prefer alternative employment if given the opportunity. This aligned with findings from other contexts. Discover Social Science and Health (2026) found that child street beggars in Accra *"expressed aspirations to return to school, acquire vocational skills, or achieve economic self-reliance."* IEEE (2024) found that *"92 percent of beggars would stop begging if appropriate alternatives were available"* in Bangladesh. Journal of Social Science (2025) found that *"30% of the beggars had a plan to quit begging as soon as they get a job."* SOS Ethiopia (2026) documented successful programs providing "short-term vocational training and start-up support" that have enabled street-involved individuals to transition to self-reliance.

This aspirational finding supported Smith's (2005) argument that policy interventions focusing on vocational training and micro-credit access yielded high success rates. However, the high illiteracy rate (61%) and aging population (42.4% over 55) in Zanzibar must be addressed through tailored support. In Kampala, the Ugandan government initiated programs like the Roadside Market Vendors Project (2023) and the Katale Loan to support informal traders, yet these remained insufficient relative to the scale of the problem (Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives, 2023). Adonteng-Kissi (2021) emphasized *"the importance of incorporating children's voices in policy development"* in addressing child street begging. The high proportion of physically fit individuals willing to work suggests that appropriately designed interventions could yield significant success.

Theoretical Implications

These findings contributed to several theoretical debates. First, they challenged simplistic distinctions between "deserving" and "undeserving" poor. The high proportion of physically fit individuals engaged in begging and vending in both

Zanzibar and Kampala suggested that street-based poverty is primarily a function of economic exclusion rather than individual pathology. This aligned with Abebe's (2008) framing of begging as "*complex and fluid*" and contingent on changing socio-economic conditions.

Second, they highlighted the limitations of both laissez-faire and repressive approaches to urban poverty. As Rawls (1971) argued, social and economic inequalities are only justifiable if they benefit the least advantaged. When enforcement disproportionately burdens marginalized women and single mothers, public policies fail this moral test. The "*right to the city*" framework, articulated by Lefebvre (1968) and extended by Harvey (2008), suggested that marginalized populations have a right to participate in the production of urban space. Skinner and Peters (2022) applied this framework to street trader struggles in South Africa, conceptualizing them as "*a struggle for the right to the city*." Ghate (2024) similarly found that street vendor organizations in India have framed their demands as a matter of urban citizenship.

Third, they underscored the importance of context-specific interventions. Zanzibar's predominantly Muslim population and Islamic charitable traditions suggested different policy pathways than Kampala's more religiously diverse context. The Indonesian and Bangladeshi experiences with institutionalized zakat distribution (Al Berto et al., 2026; Discover Sustainability, 2025; Latief & Alam, 2026) offered models that could be adapted for Zanzibar. The South African experience with informal sector integration (Skinner & Peters, 2022) offered lessons for Kampala. The Indian experience with street vendor legislation (Ghate, 2024) offers a middle path between neglect and repression.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The persistence of street-based poverty in both Zanzibar and Kampala evidenced that complete eradication remains an elusive goal given the complex nature of urban poverty (Abebe, 2008). Neither benign neglect nor aggressive repression effectively addressed structural vulnerabilities. The findings underscored the need for context-specific interventions that recognize street-based livelihoods as legitimate economic strategies. As The Observer (2026) noted, "*a city reveals its soul not in its skylines, but in how it treats those who sweep its streets at dawn*."

Recommendations for Zanzibar

Formalize and Digitize Zakat Distribution: With 89.8% of beggars being Muslim and 96.6% never receiving Zakat, authorities should establish a formal Zakat distribution system that explicitly targets registered street dwellers via mobile money platforms. This approach has proven effective in Indonesia, where institutionalized zakat distribution has demonstrated significant poverty reduction (Al Berto et al., 2026; Latief & Alam, 2026), and in Bangladesh, where zakat has shown statistically significant effectiveness in reducing extreme poverty (Discover Sustainability, 2025). As KCI (2014) noted, "*Zakat is being underutilized for poverty reduction in many poor Muslim countries*" and requires institutional reform.

Expand Social Safety Nets: Given the aging population (42.4% over 56) and high proportion of widows, social protection schemes must be expanded to cover destitute elderly and vulnerable women. This is consistent with the World Bank's (2024) recommendation for strengthening social protection in Tanzania.

Implement Market-Relevant Vocational Training: With over half of beggars physically fit and willing to work, short-term vocational training aligned with Tanzania's evolving digital economy is essential. Successful models exist in Indonesia (Latief & Alam, 2026), Ethiopia (SOS Ethiopia, 2026), and Ghana (GhanaWeb, 2025).

Conduct a New Comprehensive Survey: A new survey of street beggars is urgently required to capture the post-pandemic landscape and the impact of recent infrastructure developments in Zanzibar Town.

Recommendations for Kampala

Adopt Inclusive Urban Planning: Kampala should systemically embed informal trade in urban planning rather than relying on irregular crackdowns (Monteith, 2017; Goodfellow, 2019). This aligns with the "*right to the city*" framework advocated by Lefebvre (1968) and Harvey (2008).

Conduct Livelihood Impact Assessments: Before major evictions, compulsory livelihood impact assessments must be conducted to understand household dependency ratios and income instability (Skinner & Peters, 2022).

Create Economically Viable Relocation Sites: Markets for relocation should be sited in dense urban areas, well-served by public transport, and include storage and sanitation. Investments in storage, sanitation, and lighting can make compliance easier and reduce enforcement challenges (EPRC, 2023).

Address Root Causes: As child rights advocates emphasized, until poverty, family collapse, and trafficking are addressed, Uganda's street children will continue to slip through the cracks (Uganda Radio Network, 2026; KCCA, 2022). The exploitation of children from Karamoja through organized begging rings must be met with robust law enforcement and rehabilitation (PML Daily, 2025).

Cross-Cutting Recommendations

Both cities require regular, comprehensive surveys of street-based populations to inform evidence-based policy. Regional learning between Zanzibar and Kampala could be beneficial: Zanzibar from Kampala's (flawed) enforcement mechanisms, and Kampala from Zanzibar's potential for mobilizing religious charitable resources. Furthermore, both cities should draw on successful international examples, including the informal sector integration policies in South Africa (Skinner & Peters, 2022), the zakat institutionalization in Indonesia and Bangladesh (Al Berto et al., 2026; Discover Sustainability, 2025), and the street vendor recognition policies in India (Ghate, 2024). Smith (2005) argued that policy interventions focusing on vocational training and micro-credit access could yield high success rates, a finding supported by the aspirations expressed by street-based populations in both cities.

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