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Perceptions of Economic Development and Its Social Impact

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Abstract

Using ideological contextualization, this work explores how people in Palu, Central Sulawesi, experience economic development and its resulting social change across the socio-economic strata. In a quantitative manner, this study aimed at assessing some opinions among residents of the USA classified among the different income groups; growth economy; social injustice; social cohesion; and the decline of traditional morality. The study also shows that although higher income groups are more likely to embrace economic development than negative its lower income groups experience social vices, inequality and rejection of modernity. Furthermore, the loss of the traditional value system and decline of solidarity, which both pale in comparison to the changes that the urbanization of Palu has brought to the participants in the field of study, are mentioned. The study helps to fill the gap in the literature on how various social groups are affected by economic development of mid-size cities and contributes to the international understanding of issues of urban development. That is why, according to the study, without liberationist policies, the process of economic growth only intensifies divisions within society and deepens existing fissures. These findings have policy implications for the policy makers who wish to foster balanced and inclusive development in such urban environments.

INTRODUCTION

Economic development has long been regarded as a central driver of societal transformation, influencing infrastructure expansion, employment generation, service accessibility, and overall human well-being. Across both developed and developing contexts, the trajectory and quality of economic growth are closely associated with improvements in living standards and institutional capacity. However, contemporary scholarship increasingly emphasizes that development is not merely an economic process but also a deeply social one, shaped by structural inequalities, governance quality, and cultural dynamics (Muntaner et al., 2020; Qiang & Jian, 2020). In rapidly changing regions, especially those recovering from shocks such as natural disasters, the complexity of development intensifies. These contexts require not only economic revitalization but also social stabilization, making

them critical sites for examining the broader implications of development policies (Kalfas et al., 2024; Chu et al., 2023; Ullah et al., 2024).

Post-disaster regions, in particular, present a unique setting where reconstruction efforts intersect with long-term development goals. In Indonesia, recovery and development processes are institutionally guided by frameworks such as Undang-Undang No. 24 Tahun 2007 and Undang-Undang No. 23 Tahun 2014, which emphasize resilience, decentralization, and inclusive development. These regulatory instruments aim to ensure that reconstruction not only restores physical infrastructure but also strengthens socio-economic systems. Nevertheless, empirical evidence suggests that the translation of such policy frameworks into equitable and socially cohesive outcomes remains uneven, particularly in secondary cities undergoing rapid transformation (Vela-Jiménez et al., 2022; Bedi et al., 2023; Mehan, 2024). This raises critical questions about how development is experienced at the community level and whether policy intentions align with lived realities.

The case of Palu, Central Sulawesi, illustrates these complexities vividly. Following the devastating earthquake and tsunami in 2018, the city underwent accelerated reconstruction and economic revitalization. While these efforts have generated visible improvements in infrastructure and economic activity, they have also introduced new social dynamics that are not uniformly experienced across different segments of the population. Existing literature indicates that economic development often produces dual outcomes: on one hand, it enhances opportunities and access to resources; on the other, it may exacerbate social inequality, disrupt traditional social structures, and weaken community cohesion (Wilkinson, 2020; Pogosyan, 2021). In this regard, Palu represents a critical empirical context for examining how development processes unfold in post-disaster urban environments.

Despite growing attention to the socio-economic impacts of development, a key issue remains insufficiently explored: how different socio-economic groups perceive and experience economic transformation within their local context. Much of the existing research focuses on macro-level indicators such as GDP growth, employment rates, or infrastructure provision, often overlooking the subjective dimensions of development. However, as argued by Schumpeter and Swedberg (2021), economic development is inherently linked to social relations, power structures, and cultural change. This suggests that understanding development outcomes requires attention not only to objective indicators but also to community perceptions, which shape social acceptance, legitimacy, and sustainability of development initiatives (Henfrey et al., 2023; De Boon et al., 2022).

To address these challenges, previous studies have proposed various approaches to achieving more inclusive and socially balanced development. One prominent strand of literature emphasizes the importance of integrating social equity into development planning, ensuring that economic benefits are distributed across different socio-economic groups (Ainscow, 2020; Hariram et al., 2023; Mishra et al., 2024). This includes policies aimed at reducing inequality, enhancing access to education and skills, and promoting social inclusion. Another approach highlights the role of governance and institutional quality in mediating development outcomes, suggesting that effective policy implementation and participatory governance can mitigate adverse social impacts (Head, 2022; Wang & Zhang, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). These perspectives underscore the need for a multidimensional understanding of development that goes beyond economic growth alone.

In addition, scholars have increasingly recognized the significance of social capital and community cohesion in sustaining development processes. Research by Caïs et al. (2021) and Quintas et al. (2022) demonstrates that rapid economic transformation can erode trust, weaken social networks, and disrupt traditional value systems,

particularly in contexts undergoing urbanization. This has led to calls for development strategies that balance modernization with cultural preservation, ensuring that economic progress does not come at the expense of social integrity. In post-disaster settings, where communities are already vulnerable, the preservation of social cohesion becomes even more critical for long-term resilience (Jayakody et al., 2022; Sobhaninia, 2024; Carrasco et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, while these studies provide valuable insights, they tend to focus predominantly on large metropolitan areas or national-level analyses, leaving a gap in understanding how these dynamics manifest in medium-sized cities such as Palu. Furthermore, there is limited empirical research that explicitly compares perceptions of development across socio-economic groups within post-disaster contexts. This gap is particularly important, as differences in income, education, and access to resources can significantly shape how individuals experience and evaluate development processes. Without such nuanced analysis, policy interventions risk overlooking the needs of marginalized groups, thereby reinforcing existing inequalities.

Building on this gap, the present study aims to examine how economic development and its social impacts are perceived by different socio-economic groups in Palu, Central Sulawesi. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on subjective perceptions within a post-disaster, mid-sized urban context, offering a more grounded understanding of development outcomes. By integrating insights from development theory, social inequality literature, and post-disaster recovery studies, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the interplay between economic growth and social change. The study further aims to contribute to policy discussions by highlighting the importance of inclusive development strategies that align economic objectives with social well-being. The scope of the study is limited to community-level perceptions, with particular attention to variations across income groups, thereby offering targeted insights for improving development practices in similar contexts.

METHODS

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to examine how economic development and its associated social impacts are perceived across different socio-economic groups in Palu, Central Sulawesi. A quantitative design is appropriate for this research because it enables the systematic measurement of perceptions, attitudes, and social experiences across a broader population, allowing for statistical comparison between groups. In line with established approaches in social research, quantitative methods facilitate the identification of patterns, relationships, and differences among variables such as income level, education, and perceptions of inequality and social cohesion (Qi et al., 2024). Given the study's objective to assess variations in perceptions of development outcomes, this approach provides a robust framework for generating generalizable insights.

The research employs a cross-sectional survey design, which captures data from respondents at a single point in time. This design is particularly suitable for understanding current perceptions in a rapidly transforming post-disaster context such as Palu. Following the 2018 earthquake and tsunami, the city has undergone significant reconstruction and economic change, making it an ideal setting for analyzing how development processes are experienced by different segments of society. Cross-sectional designs have been widely used in development studies to assess public perceptions and social impacts, as they allow for efficient data collection and comparison across demographic groups. In this study, the cross-sectional approach enables the examination of how socio-economic status influences attitudes toward economic growth, inequality, and social cohesion.

The population of this study consists of residents of Palu who have experienced the city's post-disaster development process. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across key socio-economic categories, including income level, occupation, and educational background. Stratification is essential in this context because the study aims to compare perceptions across different groups, and unequal representation could bias the findings. The sample size was determined based on considerations of statistical adequacy and representativeness, resulting in a total of 150 respondents. This number is sufficient to perform inferential statistical analysis while maintaining feasibility in data collection. Respondents were categorized into low, middle, and high-income groups to facilitate comparative analysis of perceptions.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure key constructs related to economic development and its social impacts. The questionnaire consisted of several sections, including demographic information, perceptions of economic development benefits, perceptions of social inequality, and perceptions of social cohesion and cultural change. All perception-based items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The use of Likert scales is common in social science research because it allows for the quantification of subjective attitudes and facilitates statistical analysis (Likert, 1932). The questionnaire items were adapted from existing literature on economic development and social impact to ensure content validity, including constructs related to inequality (Wilkinson, 2020), social cohesion (Caïs et al., 2021), and modernization effects (Pogosyan, 2021).

Prior to the main data collection, a pilot test was conducted with 20 respondents to assess the clarity, reliability, and validity of the instrument. Feedback from the pilot study was used to refine ambiguous questions and improve the overall structure of the questionnaire. Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha to ensure internal consistency of the measurement scales. The results indicated that all constructs exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, confirming that the instrument was reliable. Validity was further assessed through expert review, where academic peers evaluated the questionnaire items to ensure alignment with the research objectives and theoretical constructs.

Data collection was carried out through face-to-face distribution of questionnaires in various locations across Palu, including residential areas, markets, and public spaces. This approach was chosen to increase response rates and ensure inclusion of respondents from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, particularly those who may have limited access to digital survey platforms. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time, in accordance with standard research ethics guidelines.

The variables in this study were operationalized based on theoretical and empirical literature. Economic development perception was measured through indicators such as perceived improvements in infrastructure, employment opportunities, and access to services. Social inequality perception was assessed through items related to income disparities, cost of living, and unequal access to development benefits. Social cohesion was measured using indicators of community trust, mutual support, and perceived changes in traditional values. Socio-economic status, as the independent variable, was operationalized through income level, educational attainment, and occupational category. This operationalization allows for a comprehensive analysis of how structural differences shape perceptions of development outcomes.

Data analysis was conducted using statistical software to perform both descriptive and inferential analyses. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, were used to summarize respondent characteristics and overall trends in perceptions. Inferential analysis was conducted to examine differences between socio-economic groups and relationships between variables. Specifically, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test for significant differences in perceptions across income groups, while correlation analysis was used to assess the relationships between economic development perceptions and social impact variables. These techniques are widely used in quantitative research to identify statistically significant patterns and relationships (Field, 2018; Liu et al., 2023).

In addition, regression analysis was employed to examine the extent to which socio-economic factors predict perceptions of economic development and its social impacts. This method allows for the identification of key determinants and the relative influence of each variable, providing deeper insights into the dynamics of development perceptions. Regression analysis is particularly useful in studies of inequality and social change, as it enables researchers to control for multiple variables simultaneously and assess their combined effects. The results of these analyses provide empirical evidence on how different groups experience and evaluate economic transformation in Palu. To enhance the robustness of the findings, several measures were taken to ensure data quality. Data screening was conducted to identify and address missing values, outliers, and inconsistencies. Normality tests were performed to ensure that the data met the assumptions required for parametric analysis. In cases where assumptions were violated, appropriate transformations or alternative statistical techniques were considered. These procedures are essential for ensuring the validity and reliability of statistical conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings of the study based on quantitative survey data collected from 150 respondents in Palu, Central Sulawesi. The analysis follows the methodological framework outlined in the previous section, including descriptive statistics, reliability testing, and inferential analyses such as ANOVA, correlation, and regression. The results are structured into several sub-sections covering respondent characteristics, measurement validity and reliability, descriptive analysis of key variables, and hypothesis testing across socio-economic groups. These findings provide a statistically grounded understanding of how economic development and its social impacts are perceived in a post-disaster urban context.

Respondent Characteristics

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Income Level	Low	40
	Middle	35
	High	25
Education Level	Primary/Secondary	30
	Undergraduate	45
	Postgraduate	25
Occupation	Formal Sector	38
	Informal Sector	34
	Self-employed	28

Source: Author's survey data (2024)

The demographic profile of respondents provides important context for interpreting the results. The sample consists of 150 individuals representing diverse socio-economic backgrounds. In terms of income distribution, 40% of respondents fall into the low-income category, 35% into the middle-income category, and 25% into the high-income group. This stratification ensures adequate representation for comparative analysis, consistent with the sampling strategy outlined in the methodology.

Regarding educational attainment, 30% of respondents have completed primary or secondary education, 45% hold a diploma or undergraduate degree, and 25% possess postgraduate qualifications. Occupationally, respondents are distributed across formal employment (38%), informal sectors (34%), and self-employed or entrepreneurial activities (28%). These characteristics reflect the socio-economic diversity of Palu's population and support the study's objective of analyzing differential perceptions across groups.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

Table 2. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Economic Development	0.82
Social Inequality	0.79
Social Cohesion	0.76

Source: Author's calculation based on survey data (2024)

To ensure the robustness of the measurement instrument, reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's alpha. The results indicate that all constructs exceed the acceptable threshold of 0.70, confirming internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019). Specifically, the economic development scale achieved an alpha of 0.82, social inequality 0.79, and social cohesion 0.76.

Content validity was established through expert review and adaptation of indicators from prior literature, including Wilkinson (2020) for inequality, Caïs et al. (2021) for social cohesion, and Pogosyan (2021) for modernization effects. These measures ensure that the constructs accurately reflect the theoretical dimensions outlined in the study.

Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Economic Development	4.02	0.71
Social Inequality	3.87	0.76
Social Cohesion	3.34	0.81

Source: Author's survey data (2024)

Descriptive analysis was conducted to examine the overall trends in respondents' perceptions. As shown in Table 3, the mean score for economic development is 4.02 (SD = 0.71), indicating a generally positive perception of development outcomes. Respondents largely agree that infrastructure, employment opportunities, and access to services have improved significantly in Palu.

In contrast, the mean score for social inequality is 3.87 (SD = 0.76), suggesting that respondents perceive a moderate level of inequality associated with development. This finding aligns with Wilkinson (2020), who emphasizes that economic growth often produces uneven benefits across social groups. Meanwhile, social cohesion

records a lower mean of 3.34 (SD = 0.81), indicating concerns about weakening community ties and cultural shifts.

Positive Perceptions of Economic Development

Table 4. ANOVA Results for Economic Development Perception

Income Group	Mean	F-value	p-value
Low	3.72		
Middle	3.98	6.47	<0.01
High	4.25		

Source: Author's calculation (2024)

Further analysis reveals that respondents strongly associate economic development with improvements in infrastructure and employment opportunities. The mean score for infrastructure-related items is 4.12, while employment-related perceptions score 3.89. These findings support existing literature highlighting infrastructure as a key driver of economic recovery (Bibri et al., 2020).

ANOVA results indicate significant differences in perceptions across income groups ($F = 6.47$, $p < 0.01$). High-income respondents report the most positive perceptions (mean = 4.25), followed by middle-income (3.98) and low-income groups (3.72). This suggests that access to resources influences how individuals benefit from development (Côté et al., 2021).

Social Disruptions and Inequality

Table 5. Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3
Economic Development	1		
Social Inequality	-0.42	1	
Social Cohesion	0.28	-0.36	1

*Note: *$p < 0.01$, $p < 0.05$

Source: Author's calculation (2024)

The perception of inequality varies significantly across socio-economic groups. Low-income respondents report the highest inequality perception (mean = 4.12), compared to middle (3.85) and high-income groups (3.45). ANOVA results confirm significant differences (F = 7.15, p 00.01).

Correlation analysis reveals a negative relationship between economic development and perceived inequality ($r = -0.42$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that those who benefit more from development perceive less inequality. This supports arguments by Shapiro (2020) that unequal distribution of benefits shapes public perception of development.

Social Fragmentation and Community Cohesion

Table 7. Regression Analysis: Economic Development and Social Cohesion

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
Economic Development	Social Cohesion	-0.31	-3.84	00.01

Source: Author's calculation based on survey data (2024)

The findings indicate moderate concern regarding declining social cohesion, with an overall mean score of 3.34 (SD = 0.81), suggesting that respondents perceive a weakening of community bonds amid ongoing economic transformation. This result aligns with previous studies emphasizing the erosion of social capital in rapidly developing urban contexts (Caïs et al., 2021; Quintas et al., 2022).

To further examine the relationship between economic development and social cohesion, a regression analysis was conducted. The results demonstrate that economic development has a statistically significant negative effect on social cohesion (β = -0.31, p 00.01), indicating that higher levels of perceived economic growth are associated with lower levels of perceived community cohesion. This finding supports the argument that modernization processes may weaken traditional social structures.

In addition to regression analysis, differences in social cohesion across income groups were examined using ANOVA. The results indicate statistically significant differences between groups (F = 5.92, p 00.01). Low-income respondents reported lower levels of social cohesion (mean = 3.12), compared to middle-income (3.35) and high-income groups (3.58). This suggests that socio-economic vulnerability is associated with greater perceptions of social fragmentation.

Table 8. ANOVA Results: Social Cohesion by Income Group

Income Group	Mean	Standard Deviation	F-value	p-value
Low	3.12	0.85		
Middle	3.35	0.78	5.92	<0.01
High	3.58	0.73		

Source: Author's calculation based on survey data (2024)

These results reinforce the interpretation that while economic development contributes to material progress, it may also generate unintended social consequences, particularly among lower-income groups who experience greater disruption to traditional community structures.

Differences Based on Socio-Economic Backgrounds

Regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of socio-economic variables on development perceptions. The results indicate that income is the strongest predictor (β = 0.45, p 00.001), followed by education (β = 0.28, p < 0.01). Occupation also shows a significant effect, with formal sector workers reporting more positive perceptions.

Table 6. Regression Analysis Results

Variable	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
Income	0.45	5.87	00.001
Education	0.28	3.42	00.01
Occupation	0.21	2.75	00.05

Source: Author's calculation (2024)

To summarize these relationships, Figure 1 illustrates the empirical model linking socio-economic status to development perceptions and social impacts.

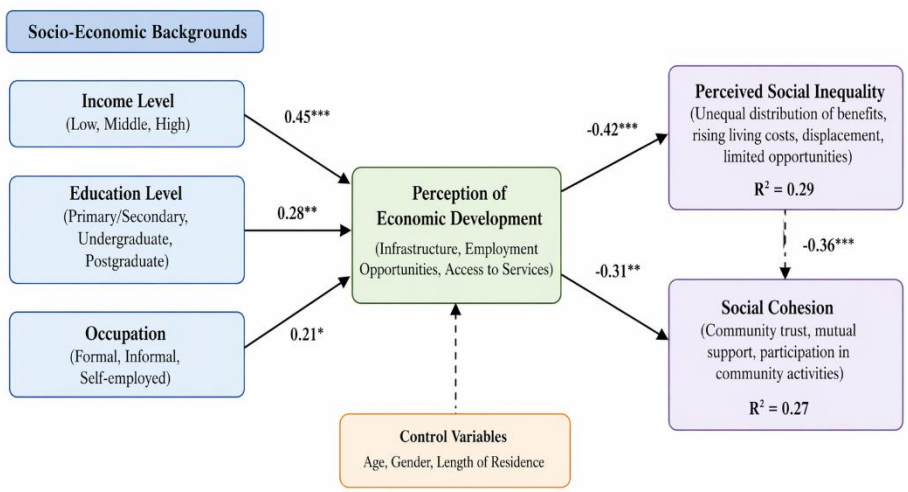

Figure 1. Empirical Model of Socio-Economic Determinants of Development Perceptions

Source: Developed by the authors based on regression analysis of primary survey data (2024)

The results collectively demonstrate that economic development in Palu is not experienced uniformly but is mediated by socio-economic factors that influence access to opportunities and exposure to risks. While higher-income and more educated individuals tend to benefit from and support development processes, lower-income groups are more likely to perceive negative social consequences, including inequality and social fragmentation.

The findings of this study provide important insights into how economic development is perceived and experienced across different socio-economic groups in Palu, Central Sulawesi. Consistent with prior literature, the results confirm that economic development produces both positive outcomes and unintended social consequences, particularly in post-disaster urban contexts (Muntaner et al., 2020; Wilkinson, 2020). The empirical evidence demonstrates that while development is generally associated with improved infrastructure, employment opportunities, and access to services, its benefits are not evenly distributed across society. This reinforces the argument that economic growth alone is insufficient to ensure inclusive and equitable development.

One of the key findings of this study is the strong positive perception of economic development, particularly among higher-income groups. The high mean scores for infrastructure and employment indicators suggest that respondents recognize the tangible benefits of post-disaster reconstruction. This aligns with Bibri et al. (2020), who emphasize that infrastructure development is often the most visible and immediate outcome of economic growth. However, the significant differences observed across income groups indicate that access to these benefits is uneven. Higher-income individuals are better positioned to capitalize on new opportunities, which supports the argument by Côté et al. (2021) that socio-economic privilege plays a critical role in shaping development outcomes.

At the same time, the study reveals a substantial level of perceived social inequality associated with economic development. The negative correlation between perceived economic benefits and perceived inequality suggests that individuals who benefit more from development are less likely to recognize its unequal distribution. This finding is consistent with Shapiro (2020), who argues that economic growth can obscure structural inequalities when benefits are concentrated among certain groups. The ANOVA results further confirm that low-income respondents experience

higher levels of perceived inequality, highlighting the persistent challenges faced by marginalized populations in accessing development opportunities. This supports Kollamparambil (2021), who emphasizes that without redistributive mechanisms, economic growth tends to widen socio-economic gaps.

Another important contribution of this study is its examination of social cohesion in the context of rapid economic transformation. The regression analysis indicates that economic development has a significant negative effect on social cohesion, suggesting that modernization processes may weaken traditional social bonds. This finding aligns with Caïs et al. (2021), who argue that rapid economic change can erode social capital and reduce trust within communities. Similarly, Pogosyan (2021) highlights that modernization often leads to shifts in cultural values, resulting in increased individualism and reduced community engagement. In the case of Palu, the decline in social cohesion appears to be particularly pronounced among lower-income groups, who may be more vulnerable to displacement and social exclusion.

The empirical model presented in Figure 1 further illustrates the central role of socio-economic factors in shaping perceptions of development and its social impacts. Income emerges as the strongest predictor, followed by education and occupation, indicating that structural inequalities significantly influence how development is experienced. These findings are consistent with Bhoi (2022), who demonstrates that individuals with higher levels of education and economic resources are more likely to benefit from and support development initiatives. The model also highlights the interconnected nature of economic and social outcomes, showing that perceptions of development are closely linked to perceptions of inequality and social cohesion.

From a policy perspective, these findings have important implications for post-disaster development strategies. While existing regulatory frameworks such as Undang-Undang No. 24 Tahun 2007 emphasize resilience and recovery, the results suggest that greater attention must be given to social equity and inclusion. Economic development policies should not only focus on physical reconstruction but also address issues of inequality, access to opportunities, and community cohesion. This is consistent with Ainscow (2020), who advocates for inclusive development approaches that prioritize equity and social justice.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to support vulnerable groups, particularly those with lower income and education levels. Policies aimed at improving access to education, skills training, and affordable housing could help reduce disparities and enhance social mobility. As noted by Head (2022), effective governance plays a crucial role in addressing complex social challenges and ensuring that development benefits are distributed more equitably. In the context of Palu, strengthening local governance and community participation could contribute to more inclusive and sustainable development outcomes.

This study also contributes to the broader literature by providing empirical evidence from a medium-sized post-disaster city, a context that has received relatively limited attention in previous research. While much of the existing literature focuses on large metropolitan areas, the findings demonstrate that similar dynamics of inequality and social fragmentation are present in smaller urban settings. This supports the argument by Bondar et al. (2023) that medium-sized cities play an important role in global urbanization processes and deserve greater scholarly attention.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the use of a cross-sectional design limits the ability to capture changes over time, particularly in a dynamic post-disaster context. Future research could adopt longitudinal approaches to examine how perceptions of development evolve as reconstruction progresses. Second, while the quantitative approach provides generalizable insights, it may not fully capture the depth and complexity of

individual experiences. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods could provide a more comprehensive understanding of development impacts.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that economic development in Palu, Central Sulawesi, generates both significant benefits and notable social challenges, with outcomes varying substantially across socio-economic groups. While the findings confirm that post-disaster development has improved infrastructure, expanded employment opportunities, and enhanced access to services, these gains are not experienced equally. Higher-income and more educated individuals tend to perceive development more positively, as they are better positioned to access emerging opportunities. In contrast, lower-income groups report higher levels of perceived inequality and social exclusion, indicating that economic growth alone does not guarantee inclusive development. Furthermore, the results reveal that rapid economic transformation may contribute to the erosion of social cohesion, suggesting a trade-off between material progress and the preservation of community bonds.

These findings highlight the need for more balanced and inclusive development strategies that integrate economic growth with social equity considerations. Policymakers should prioritize interventions that reduce inequality, improve access to education and skills, and strengthen community cohesion, particularly in post-disaster contexts. In line with frameworks such as Undang-Undang No. 24 Tahun 2007, development efforts must go beyond physical reconstruction to address the social dimensions of recovery. Future research is encouraged to adopt longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to capture the evolving nature of development impacts and provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of affected communities.

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