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REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-56512

Title: ELEMENTS FOR A REDESIGN OF DECENTRALIZATION IN BENIN

Recommendation:

Accept after minor revision

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality		✓,		
Techn. Quality		✓,		
Clarity	✓,			
Significance	✓,			

Reviewer Name: Dr Abdul Haseeb Mir

Detailed Reviewer's Report

The article "Elements for a Redesign of Decentralization in Benin" provides a critical and timely evaluation of the institutional reforms initiated in Benin during the early 2000s. Approached through the lenses of the sociology of public action and social change theory, the research moves beyond a mere administrative audit to explore the complex interplay of political will, financial constraints, and local autonomy. The author effectively argues that while decentralization was intended to bring governance closer to the citizenry, the current model suffers from a lack of coherence and persistent structural dependencies that necessitate a comprehensive overhaul. This study is particularly valuable for its ability to synthesize literature reviews with empirical data to highlight the ruptures and continuities in Beninese local governance.

The analysis is logically structured around four key themes: the partial achievement of original objectives, the complexities of the legal and administrative architecture, the limitations of local initiatives, and the pathways for reform. One of the manuscript's primary strengths is its focus on the "professionalization of actors." The author correctly identifies that without a skilled and autonomous municipal workforce, even the most well-designed decentralization policies remain hollow. The discussion on the "FADeC" (Communal Development Support Fund) and the financial dependence of municipalities on the central state provides a sobering look at the "recentralizing" tendencies that often undermine local democracy. By critiquing the lack of real financial autonomy, the paper addresses a core tension in West African public administration.

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The theoretical grounding in social change theory is another high point of the paper. It allows the author to examine decentralization not as a static legal framework, but as a dynamic process of social transformation. This perspective helps explain why certain "top-down" reforms face resistance or fail to trigger the expected level of citizen participation. The paper's call for a "redesign" is supported by concrete observations regarding the overlapping jurisdictions between different levels of power, which often lead to inefficiency and conflict. The author's emphasis on "territorial development" as a balanced objective provides a necessary spatial dimension to the political discussion.

However, the manuscript could be improved by a more detailed exploration of the recent 2021 structural reforms in Benin (the Structural Reform of the Decentralization Sector). While the paper alludes to the need for redesign, specifically addressing the creation of the position of "Executive Secretary" and the separation of political and administrative functions would make the article more current and practically relevant. Providing a comparative glance at how these newer mechanisms are attempting to solve the "professionalization" and "coherence" issues mentioned in the text would significantly strengthen the analysis. Additionally, the inclusion of a case study from a specific Beninese municipality—contrasting a high-resource commune with a low-resource one—would ground the theoretical arguments in localized reality.

From a methodological standpoint, the paper is robust, though more clarity on the specific "empirical data" collected—such as the number of interviews or the specific regions surveyed—would enhance its transparency. The writing is academic and precise, though some of the longer sentences in the discussion of "institutional mechanisms" could be simplified for better readability. The author should also ensure that the conclusion offers a more prioritized list of recommendations, distinguishing between short-term administrative fixes and long-term constitutional or social shifts.

Ultimately, this article represents a sophisticated contribution to the study of African local governance. It successfully captures the "fatigue" of the first generation of decentralization and provides a roadmap for a more inclusive and efficient second generation. The focus on the sociology of public action ensures that the human and political elements of reform remain at the forefront of the discussion.

Recommendation for the Editor

With a few minor updates to reflect the most recent legislative shifts in Benin, this paper will be an essential resource for scholars and practitioners alike.

I recommend this article for publication with minor revisions.