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REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-56808

Title: GOUVERNANCE LOCALE ET INEGALITES D'ACCES A L'EAU POTABLE DANS DE LA COMMUNE DE ZAGNANADO,

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 titled "Gouvernance locale et inégalités d'accès à l'eau potable dans la commune de Zagnanado" (Local Governance and Inequalities in Access to Drinking Water in the Commune of Zagnanado) provides a critical and timely examination of the disconnect between hydraulic infrastructure development and actual water security in rural Benin. By focusing on the paradox of a high density of boreholes alongside a 70% household dependency on non-potable sources, the author addresses a fundamental challenge in sub-Saharan African development: the transition from infrastructure provision to sustainable service management. This research is highly relevant for scholars of public administration, rural development, and environmental sociology, as it highlights how decentralized governance often fails to translate into equitable resource access.

The methodology is a significant strength of this manuscript, employing a robust mixed-methods approach that includes a quantitative survey of 250 households, semi-structured interviews with 85 local stakeholders, and a technical evaluation of existing infrastructure. This triangulation of data allows the author to move beyond mere statistical reporting to capture the "lived reality" of water vulnerability. The use of a SWOT analysis and spatial typology to map hydric vulnerability provides a sophisticated analytical framework that clearly illustrates the territorial disparities within the commune, such as the functionality gap between Don-Tan and Kpédékpo.

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The author's analysis of the structural weaknesses in local governance is particularly insightful. The paper identifies a "maintenance vacuum" where the lack of a standardized monitoring system and the irregular collection of user fees lead to the rapid deterioration of expensive infrastructure. The argument that the "local water committee" model is struggling due to a lack of technical training and financial transparency is well-supported and echoes broader critiques of community-based resource management in the Global South. By documenting how 70% of households remain vulnerable despite having 179 boreholes in their vicinity, the author effectively demonstrates that water access is a political and administrative problem rather than a purely technical one.

The paper also excels in its treatment of spatial and social inequalities. The finding that proximity to a water point does not guarantee access—due to seasonal functionality issues or prohibitive costs—adds a necessary layer of complexity to the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 6) discourse. The author's observation that water scarcity disproportionately affects the poorest households, who are forced to revert to contaminated surface water during pump failures, provides a compelling social justice dimension to the study. This link between governance failure and public health risk is articulated with clarity and professional rigor.

To enhance the manuscript for publication in a high-impact academic journal, a few minor revisions are recommended. First, the author could provide more detail on the specific "financial mechanisms" used for infrastructure repair. A brief discussion on the potential for Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) or digital payment systems to improve fee collection transparency would add a forward-looking, practical dimension to the paper. Second, while the SWOT analysis is useful, integrating a "Power Interest Grid" or a stakeholder map would help the reader better understand the conflicting priorities between the municipal council, the water committees, and the traditional local authorities.

Furthermore, from a structural perspective, the author should ensure that the transition between the technical infrastructure assessment and the socio-political interviews is more seamless. Including a few direct, anonymized quotes from the local actors would help illustrate the "human factor" behind the governance failures. The bibliography is impressive and current, featuring works by Swyngedouw and Sultana, though the author might consider referencing more recent studies (2024-2025) on the role of solar-powered water systems in West African rural governance.

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In summary, this article represents a vital contribution to the study of local governance and water rights in Benin. It successfully captures the systemic hurdles that prevent decentralization from achieving its intended developmental outcomes. By highlighting the gap between physical infrastructure and functional service, the author provides a clear roadmap for reforming rural water management. With the addition of more specific policy recommendations and a slightly more detailed stakeholder analysis, this paper will be an excellent resource for both academics and development practitioners in the region.

Recommendation: Recommend for publication with minor revision.