

REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-56808

Title: **Gouvernance locale et inégalités d'accès à l'eau potable dans la commune de Zagnanado**

Recommendation:

Accept after minor revision.....

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

Reviewer Name: Faheem Abdul Muneeb

This manuscript examines the relationship between local governance and inequalities in access to drinking water in the commune of Zagnanado (Benin). Using a mixed-methods approach that combines household surveys, interviews with local actors, and infrastructure assessment, the study seeks to explain why significant disparities persist despite relatively dense hydraulic infrastructure.

The topic is highly relevant within the fields of development studies, environmental governance, and public policy, particularly in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa where decentralization reforms have produced uneven outcomes. The manuscript is well grounded in theoretical debates on decentralization, governance, and environmental justice, and clearly articulates its research objective.

Scientific Contribution and Empirical Strength

The manuscript makes a strong empirical contribution by combining quantitative, qualitative, and spatial analyses to examine water access inequalities. The dataset is robust, including 250 households, 85 interviews, and a detailed inventory of infrastructure, which enhances the credibility of the findings.

One of the key strengths lies in the identification of a structural paradox: despite the presence of 179 boreholes and several village water systems, more than 70% of households depend on non-potable water

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sources (page 1). The empirical analysis convincingly demonstrates that inequalities are not simply due to lack of infrastructure but are rooted in governance failures.

The statistical and spatial analyses are particularly effective. For example, the table on page 10 shows that only 56.42% of boreholes are functional, with significant disparities between areas such as Kpédékpo (77.14%) and Don-Tan (28.57%). The territorial typology presented on page 11 further strengthens the analysis by classifying regions into “well-served,” “vulnerable,” and “critical” categories, offering a clear and policy-relevant interpretation of spatial inequality.

The discussion successfully links empirical findings to broader theoretical debates, particularly the concept of “hollow decentralization,” and highlights how institutional fragmentation, lack of maintenance funding, and weak regulatory frameworks contribute to persistent inequalities.

However, while the empirical material is rich, some sections remain descriptive, and the manuscript could further deepen its analytical contribution by more explicitly linking findings to theoretical frameworks throughout the results section.

Methodology and Analytical Approach

The use of a mixed-methods convergent design is a major strength of the study. The integration of quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, focus groups, and GIS-based spatial analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

The sampling strategy is clearly explained, including the use of proportional sampling across villages (pages 6–7), which enhances representativeness. The use of tools such as KoboCollect and QGIS demonstrates methodological rigor and modern data practices.

The triangulation of data sources—documentary, statistical, spatial, and qualitative—is particularly commendable and aligns well with best practices in case study research.

Nevertheless, the methodology section is quite dense and could be streamlined for better readability. Some technical explanations (e.g., sampling formula details) could be simplified or moved to an appendix. Additionally, while the study claims a convergent mixed-method design, the integration between qualitative and quantitative findings could be made more explicit in the analysis.

Structure, Style, and Presentation

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The manuscript is well structured and follows a clear academic progression from introduction to methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion. The literature review is strong and demonstrates engagement with key scholarly debates.

The use of tables, maps, and figures significantly enhances the clarity of the findings. For instance, the infrastructure tables and territorial classification (pages 10–11) effectively summarize complex data.

However, the manuscript would benefit from language refinement. There are minor grammatical inconsistencies and some long, complex sentences that affect readability. Certain sections, particularly in the methodology and results, are overly detailed and could be condensed without losing substantive content.

Final Recommendation

Overall, the manuscript presents a rigorous and well-developed study on an important issue in development and environmental governance. The combination of empirical depth, methodological rigor, and theoretical relevance makes it a valuable contribution to the literature.

With minor revisions focusing on improving analytical integration, refining language, and streamlining certain sections, the manuscript is suitable for publication.

Decision: Accepted with minor revisions.