

## REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: **IJAR-53275**

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**Title: VILLAGE HYDRAULICS: EXCLUSIVE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURING THE PROTEST OF LOCAL ACTORS IN THE COMMUNES OF ATHIEME AND BOPA IN SOUTHWESTERN BENIN**

### Recommendation:

**Accept as it is .....YES.....**

Accept after minor revision.....

Accept after major revision .....

Do not accept (*Reasons below*) .....

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

Reviewer Name: Mir Jaffar

### Reviewer's Comment for Publication.

#### General Overview

The article addresses an important socio-political and governance issue in rural Benin: the centralization of water management and its implications for local actors. By situating the study within the communes of Athiémé and Bopa in the Mono Department, the research provides a grounded, context-specific analysis while engaging with broader themes of public policy, social exclusion, and resource governance. The work is anchored in the hypothesis that non-inclusive governance, through a leasing-based management system, fosters protest among excluded stakeholders.

#### Abstract Evaluation

The abstract is comprehensive, outlining the policy context, the research hypothesis, methodological approach, and key findings. It clearly identifies the main actors—local elected officials, decentralized structures, former management committees, members of the diaspora, rural populations—and explains how they are excluded from decision-making by the centralized bodies, namely the National Agency for Rural Drinking Water Supply and the OMILAYE Company. The link between social exclusion and the emergence of disputes is clearly articulated, and the emphasis on water as a community asset adds conceptual weight to the analysis.

#### Introduction Evaluation

The introduction effectively situates the research within the broader global and African challenges of access to safe drinking water. It draws on relevant sources, such as C. Gauthier (2004), A. Briand and A. Lemaître (2004), and international policy references like the European Framework Directive (2000). The text connects public health concerns with infrastructure development while underlining the importance of governance models in ensuring sustainable access. The framing of water as both a heritage resource and a governance challenge aligns the study with established theoretical perspectives in resource management and social policy.

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### **Methodological Framework**

The research adopts a qualitative approach informed by grounded theory, employing semi-structured interviews, documentary research, and observation. The triangulation of data sources strengthens the credibility of the findings. The reasoned selection of 50 respondents provides a substantive base for thematic and content analysis. The methodological transparency allows readers to understand how data were generated and analyzed.

### **Findings and Theoretical Integration**

The findings reveal that exclusive management through leasing arrangements effectively sidelines local stakeholders, resulting in a governance gap and fueling protests. The application of the theory of social exclusion provides a robust analytical lens, connecting micro-level community dynamics with broader institutional structures. The emphasis on the communal ownership of village hydraulics reinforces the argument that governance decisions need to reflect the socio-cultural and historical dimensions of resource ownership.

### **Relevance and Contribution**

The study contributes to the literature on resource governance, decentralization, and social inclusion by offering empirical evidence from rural Benin. It highlights the socio-political consequences of centralizing resource management in contexts where local engagement has historically been integral to service delivery. Its insights are relevant not only to water governance debates in West Africa but also to global discussions on inclusive management of essential services.

### **Overall Assessment**

The article is coherent, well-structured, and firmly rooted in both theoretical and empirical foundations. It offers a compelling analysis of how governance models shape community dynamics, particularly in essential service sectors like rural water supply. The integration of public policy analysis, grounded field data, and social theory makes it a substantive contribution to the study of rural resource management and social exclusion.