



## Decentralization and sustainable development: The case of Commune VI of Bamako

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### Abstract

Decentralization is one of the major levers of local governance and citizen participation in Mali. In a context marked by growing environmental, social, and economic challenges, its articulation with sustainable development is of strategic importance. This thesis, entitled "Decentralization and Sustainable Development: Case of Commune VI of Bamako," is part of this perspective. The primary objective of this research is to examine the impact of the decentralization process on promoting sustainable development in Commune VI. To achieve this, a mixed-methodological approach was adopted, combining a questionnaire survey of the population, interviews with municipal officials, and a documentary analysis of legislative texts and institutional reports. The results indicate that decentralization has led to a certain strengthening of local governance, increased citizen participation, and improved management of development initiatives. However, limitations persist, particularly in terms of environmental management, insufficient financial resources, weak involvement of private and associative actors, as well as a lack of monitoring and evaluation. These constraints mitigate the process's impact on achieving sustainable development objectives. The study shows the need for capacity building of elected officials and technical services, better mobilization of local financial resources, increased integration of civil society and the private sector, as well as a clear strategy for participatory monitoring and evaluation. Thus, decentralization, if consolidated, remains a relevant instrument for driving sustainable development at the local level, particularly in urban municipalities such as Commune VI of Bamako.

**Keywords:** Decentralization, development, sustainable development, Commune VI of Bamako

### Introduction

Mali is a landlocked country in the heart of West Africa, with an area of 1,241,238 km<sup>2</sup>, two-thirds of which is desert. Mali is expected to have a population of 22 million in 2022 (INSAT, 2023) [4].

Decentralization in Mali is the culmination of a very long quest, the beginnings of which date back to the pre-colonial era. Since then, the various regimes that have succeeded one another have worked on developing a decentralization model tailored to the country's sociocultural realities. Several formulas have thus been initiated and some tested. All sought, to varying degrees, the adaptation of the Administration to the political context, aiming for a better harmony between the State and its citizens (DAKOUO A., 2012) [2]. Mali currently has 761 local authorities, divided into three categories: the commune (703 in number, including 666 rural communes and 37 urban communes), the cercle (49), and the Region/District (9), all of which are functional.

Since its independence, the Republic of Mali has faced a centralization of its state, economic, and social structures (CSLP, 2016) [1]. This concentration of powers and services in the capital, Bamako, has led to notable disparities between the capital and the rest of the country. Employment opportunities, educational infrastructure, and health services are historically more developed in these areas, creating a territorial imbalance that encourages rural exodus and overloads existing urban structures.

It is within this framework that decentralization policies were designed, with the hope of transferring skills and resources to local authorities, thereby enabling more harmonious and autonomous development of the regions. The challenge is significant: it involves bringing decision-making closer to citizens and adapting public policies to

local realities, particularly in key areas of sustainable development.

However, despite these reforms, many uncertainties remain regarding the real effectiveness of decentralization. Does the transfer of skills translate concretely into an improvement in living conditions? Commune VI of Bamako, as a local entity facing significant urban challenges (waste management, access to water, and local economic development), constitutes an ideal field of study for analyzing this issue. It is crucial to examine the extent to which decentralized management has succeeded in addressing these challenges and promoting sustainable development, or whether it remains hampered by structural obstacles.

### Method and materials

The research methodology is employed in this chapter to better address our research questions, thereby confirming or refuting the hypotheses presented in the general introduction. The approach of our study is a mixed one; it involves both questioning and interviewing our subjects to address the research questions.

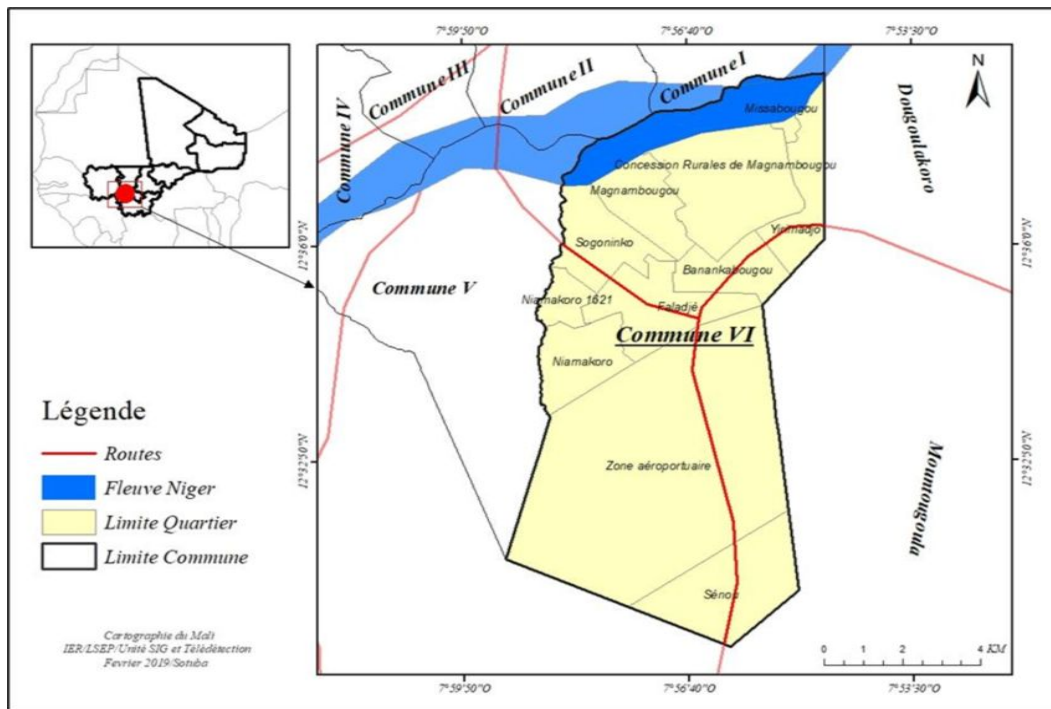
### Presentation of the Study Area

Bamako, the capital of Mali, is a rapidly expanding city situated on the banks of the Niger River in the southwestern part of the country. According to the results of the fifth general population and housing census, Mali's population is expected to reach 22 million in 2022 (INSTAT, 2023). Divided into six communes, the city spans an area of 267 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population exceeding 3 million.

Commune VI is one of the six urban communes that make up the Malian capital, Bamako. Located on the left bank of the Niger River, in the southwest part of the city, it is the

largest of the communes with an area of approximately 88.82 km<sup>2</sup>. Its population is estimated at nearly 600,000 inhabitants, making it one of the most densely populated areas of Bamako. This commune is made up of about ten main districts, which are: Sogoniko, Magnambougou, Sokorodji, Missabougou, Faladié, Banankabougou, Sénou,

Yirimadio, Djandjigoula, and Niamakoro (Mairie de la commune VI de Bamako, 2020). It has a mixed profile with residential districts, industrial and commercial zones, as well as a dense and varied road network. The following map illustrates the location of commune VI in the Bamako metropolitan area.



Map 1: The occupation map of commune VI of Bamako.

Commune VI is experiencing rapid urbanization, a consequence of the rural exodus and population growth, which is leading to neighborhood expansion and an increase in road infrastructure. Its road network includes major axes connecting the city center to the outskirts, as well as numerous secondary roads, often in poor condition. Due to its economic and demographic importance, Commune VI is a hub for road transport in Bamako, with heavy traffic consisting of private cars, taxis, sotramas, trucks, and motorcycles.

**Documentary research**

For any scientific work, consulting books and websites is essential for its success. For this review, we utilized research from the internet and school libraries, as well as dissertations and books related to our theme, to obtain scientific information. The information obtained contributed to the development of our survey questionnaire.

Data collection employed two complementary approaches to understand the environmental impacts of road transport in commune VI of Bamako, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods.

**Sampling**

Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents (25 people), taking care to represent different socio-economic profiles and geographical areas within the municipality. The target population includes elected municipal officials (mayor, deputies, and municipal councilors), managers of municipal technical services, and residents of various districts within the municipality.

**Data processing and analysis**

**Data collection**

Data collection took place in Commune VI of the Bamako District from May to July 2025.

**Data processing**

The collected data were verified for consistency and reliability. Responses to Google Forms were coded and processed in Excel for statistical analysis. Interviews were fully transcribed to facilitate qualitative analysis.

**Data analysis**

**Quantitative analysis:** The numerical data were analyzed using Excel to calculate frequencies, percentages, and create graphic representations illustrating residents' perceptions and access to services.

**Qualitative analysis:** The interviews were organized according to different themes (such as the environment, economic development, or social progress) in order to group together and understand more easily what local actors say about decentralized management and sustainable development.

**Results**

**Impact of decentralized management on the environment in commune VI**

**Impact of decentralized management on neighborhood cleanliness**

These results indicate that, despite decentralized management efforts, the majority of residents believe that the quality of the urban environment, particularly in terms

of sanitation, remains insufficient. This situation can be explained by a lack of logistical and financial resources.

**Table 1:** Opinions of respondents on the cleanliness of the districts of Commune VI

Answer	Number	%
Positive	9	36%
Negative	15	60%
Neutral	1	4%
Total	25	100%

Source: Personal surveys, 2025

Table 1 shows that 60% of respondents believe that the cleanliness of the neighborhoods of Commune VI has not improved, while only 36% perceive an improvement. A small proportion of 4% remains neutral.

The predominance of negative opinions suggests that decentralization has not yet produced tangible effects on neighborhood cleanliness.

**Perception of initiatives for access to drinking water**

Table 2 shows that 76% of residents believe that initiatives have been taken to improve access to drinking water, indicating a predominantly positive perception of municipal action in this area. However, 20% of respondents consider these initiatives to be insufficient, and 4% remain neutral.

**Table 2:** Perception of initiatives for access to drinking water

Answers	Number	%
Yes	19	76%
No	5	20%
I Don't Know	1	4%
Total	25	100%

Source: Personal surveys, 2025

These figures reveal that, although the municipality has made notable efforts, these actions do not yet appear to be universally effective for all residents, which may reflect disparities in access between central and peripheral districts or issues with service continuity.

**Opinion on the protection of green spaces**

Table 3 shows that 56% of respondents consider the protection of green spaces in Commune VI to be insufficient, while only 32% perceive positive actions and 12% remain neutral.

**Table 3:** Opinions on the protection of green spaces

Answer	Number	%
Positive	8	32%
Negative	14	56%
Neutral	3	12%
Total	25	100%

Source: Personal surveys, 2025

These figures suggest that the majority of residents believe that the municipality has not yet succeeded in effectively preserving or developing green spaces, which are a crucial element of quality of life and the urban environment.

**Participation in civic sanitation and reforestation activities**

Table 4 shows that 72% of residents report not having participated in civic activities, such as sanitation or

reforestation, while only 28% have. No respondents fall into the "don't know" category. These figures reveal very low citizen participation, which limits the effectiveness of local environmental management actions.

**Table 4:** Participation in civic sanitation and reforestation activities

Answer	Number	%
Yes	7	28%
No	18	72%
I don't know	0	0%
Total	25	100%

Source: Personal surveys, 2025

The low participation can be attributed to several factors, including a lack of awareness, insufficient coordination between the municipality and residents, or personal and economic constraints faced by citizens.

**Contribution of municipal management to economic development**

**Perceptions of economic changes in neighborhoods**

Table 5 shows that 56% of respondents perceive positive economic changes in their neighborhoods, while 36% do not notice any improvement and 8% remain neutral.

**Table 5:** Perception of economic changes in neighborhoods

Answer	Number	%
Yes	14	56%
No	9	36%
I don't know	2	8%
Total	25	100%

Source: Personal surveys, 2025

These results reveal a mixed perception of municipal actions regarding economic development. More than half of residents perceive a positive impact, suggesting that some local initiatives have indeed contributed to improving economic conditions. However, a significant proportion (36%) believes that the changes are insufficient.

**Observations of initiatives to support local businesses**

Table 6 reveals that only 36% of respondents perceive initiatives from the municipality to support local businesses, while 56% believe that no action has been taken, and 8% are unsure.

**Table 6:** Observation of initiatives to support local businesses

Answer	Number	%
Yes	9	36%
No	14	56%
I don't know	2	8%
Total	25	100%

Source: Personal surveys, 2025

These results show that the majority of residents do not perceive significant efforts on the part of municipal authorities to stimulate the local economy through business support. This may be explained by a lack of communication about existing programs or by a lack of measures that have actually been implemented.

**Perception of efforts to attract investment**

Table 7 shows that 36% of respondents believe efforts have been made to attract investment to Commune VI, while 56% consider that no significant action has been taken, and 8% are unsure.

**Table 7:** Perception of efforts to attract investment

Answer	Number	%
Yes	9	36%
No	14	56%
I don't know	2	8%
Total	25	100%

Source: Personal surveys, 2025

These figures reveal a predominantly negative perception of the municipality's economic attractiveness and the effectiveness of decentralized initiatives in encouraging private investment. This may result from a lack of clear strategies, insufficient monitoring, or limited communication about investment projects.

**Participation in the economic development program**

Table 8 reveals that only 16% of residents in Commune VI participated in economic development programs, while an overwhelming majority of 84% did not. No respondent remained neutral.

**Table 8:** Participation in economic development programs

Answer	Number	%
Yes	4	16%
No	21	84%
I don't know	0	0%
Total	25	100%

Source: Personal surveys, 2025

These figures highlight very low citizen participation in local economic initiatives, which limits the effectiveness and impact of decentralization on economic development. Several factors may explain this situation, including a lack of information about programs, the absence of incentives for participation, or insufficient coordination between the municipality and local economic actors.

**Perception of transparency of economic actions**

Table 9 shows that 56% of respondents consider the economic actions carried out in Commune VI to be transparent, compared to 32% who consider the opposite, while 12% do not express an opinion.

**Table 9:** Perception of transparency of economic actions

Answer	Number	%
Yes	14	56%
No	8	32%
I don't know	3	12%
Total	25	100%

Source: Personal surveys, 2025

These results suggest that, despite some shortcomings in citizen participation (as indicated in Table 10), a relative majority of residents perceive economic initiatives as being carried out in a transparent manner. This positive perception may foster citizens' confidence in municipal programs and ultimately encourage their involvement.

**Consequences of communal actions for social progress**

**1. Satisfaction with social infrastructure**

Table 10 shows that only 36% of respondents reported being satisfied with the social infrastructure in Commune VI, while 64% expressed dissatisfaction. No respondent chose the answer "I don't know."

**Table 10:** Satisfaction with social infrastructure

Answer	Number	%
Yes	9	36%
No	16	64%
I don't know	0	0%
Total	25	100%

Source: Personal surveys, 2025

These results indicate that the majority of residents perceive the social infrastructure as insufficient to meet the population's needs, whether in terms of education, health, or recreation. This dissatisfaction can be attributed to a lack of targeted investment, inadequate planning, or insufficient maintenance of existing facilities.

**Observation of initiatives for access to social services**

Table 11 shows that 68% of respondents observed initiatives to improve access to social services, while 28% did not, and 4% remained undecided.

**Table 11:** Observation of initiatives for access to social services

Answer	Number	%
Yes	17	68%
No	7	28%
I don't know	1	4%
Total	25	100%

Source: Personal surveys, 2025

These results reveal that a majority of residents perceive efforts on the part of local authorities to facilitate access to social services, such as education, health, and community services. However, the presence of a significant minority (28%) who do not perceive any initiatives highlights that these actions are not uniformly visible or effective in all neighborhoods of Commune VI.

**Perception on the fight against poverty and social inequalities**

Table 12 shows that only 28% of respondents believe that Commune VI is taking effective action in the fight against poverty and social inequality. A majority of 52%, on the other hand, considers the actions to be insufficient, while 20% of respondents remain undecided.

**Table 12:** Opinions on social programs

Answer	Number	%
Yes	5	20%
No	20	80%
I don't know	0	0%
Total	25	100%

Source: Personal surveys, 2025

These results suggest that the population perceives a deficit in local social policies and in the implementation of poverty reduction programs. The low proportion of favorable opinions reflects a lack of visibility or real impact of the municipality's interventions.

**Conditions of women**

Table 13 shows that 44% of respondents consider the conditions of women in Commune VI to be good, while 28% consider them average, and 28% consider them poor.

**Table 13:** Opinions of respondents on the conditions of women

Answer	Number	%
Good	11	44%
Average	7	28%
Bad	7	28%
Total	25	100%

**Source:** Personal surveys, 2025

These results reflect a mixed perception of the situation of women. Although a significant proportion of residents acknowledge progress or a favorable framework, a significant number still highlight shortcomings. This indicates that, despite certain measures or initiatives in favor of women, challenges persist, particularly in terms of access to resources, social and economic participation, and protection against inequalities.

**Discussion**

These results indicate that, despite decentralized management efforts, the majority of residents consider the quality of the urban environment, particularly in terms of sanitation, to be insufficient. This situation can be explained by a lack of logistical and financial resources. This corroborates the results obtained by Torset (2003) [7]. Similarly, Haidara (2018) [3] emphasizes that local planning and population mobilization are essential for the effectiveness of sustainable development projects in Malian municipalities, in the context of planning and management of local development in Mali. The author emphasizes the importance of structured programs and effective coordination between elected officials, technical services, and citizens, which still appears to be limited in Commune VI.

Furthermore, the results of this research show that the majority of residents do not perceive significant efforts on the part of municipal authorities to stimulate the local economy through business support. This may be explained by a lack of communication on existing programs, or by an insufficiency of the measures actually implemented. This finding aligns with the results reported by TOGOLA, K. (2017) [8] and UNDP (2022) [6].

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