The New Governance Mechanisms for Improving Public Service in Local Communities in Algeria

Dr. Mettai Elhadj [1], **Dr. Zahoufi Noureddine** [2], and **Dr. Chihab Ilimi** [3]

[1] Khemis Miliana University, Algeria.
  Email: elhadj.mettai@univ-dbkm.dz
[2] Laboratory of Local Development and Entrepreneurship in Ain Defla Province, Khemis Miliana University, Algeria.
  Email: n.zahoufi@univ-dbkm.dz
[3] MQEMADD Research Laboratory for Quantitative Methods in Economics, Business Administration and Applications for Sustainable Development; Faculty of Economics, Commercial Sciences and Management.
  Email: c.ilimi@univ-djelfa.dz

Abstract---This study aims to determine the extent to which governance mechanisms contribute to improving public service in local communities and eliminating administrative bureaucracy. This is achieved by adopting modern work methods, leveraging information and communication technology (ICT), applying modern technologies to deliver public services, and involving civil society in administrative decision-making and strategic planning to deliver public services that meet citizens' aspirations. By adopting a deductive approach using descriptive and analytical tools, this study concluded that the implementation of governance mechanisms in local communities has effectively contributed to improving public services and eliminating administrative bureaucracy. The study recommended investing in human resources by attracting qualified personnel and training workers.

Keywords---Governance, local communities, e-governance, civil society, public service.

Introduction

Local communities represent the pivotal interface upon which development processes and the improvement of public services are based. This has become an urgent necessity, as they constitute the fundamental pillar in providing citizens with public services of the required quality that meets their

expectations. The aim is to achieve comprehensive and sustainable local development while facilitating easy and smooth access to public services. The progress of states depends largely on the strength of their local administration, since the state, at its core, derives its power from this essential and decisive link in its structural organization.

The application of governance mechanisms in different countries of the world is among the main requirements, especially in the current era of rapid change, particularly in the management of public affairs. This involves adopting modern tools and methods with the aim of improving public services, which represent the ultimate goal of any political system in the world. Among these mechanisms are the introduction of modern technologies, strengthening partnerships between the public and private sectors, involving civil society in decision-making and the supervision of government operations, as well as engaging it in the formulation of public policies while encouraging creativity and innovation.

Governance requires constant and continuous interaction from this society so that the state can improve the quality of public services in order to safeguard citizens' lives and ensure their well-being. These services are neither limited nor bound by time; rather, they are permanent and ongoing. Therefore, the state must remain committed to improving, developing, and providing them to citizens in the best and most complete form.

From this perspective, and in line with the reforms adopted by the Algerian state to improve public services through the use of modern mechanisms and methods that have proven effective in some countries—governance being one of the most important modern approaches to managing public affairs—we put forward the following research problem:

What are the components of this approach, and what mechanisms has Algeria adopted to improve public services in local communities?

To answer this research problem, we chose to rely on both the descriptive and inductive methods, supported by the analytical approach, in order to fully grasp the subject of the study.

I. The Nature of Local Communities

Decentralization is considered a fundamental pillar for the development of the administrative system by delegating certain tasks from central authorities to locally elected institutions. These institutions are entrusted with all necessary powers and provided with all the means to manage local affairs and stimulate development in all fields, since local citizens are more aware of their priority needs. At the same time, decentralization facilitates the central state's ability to exercise its sovereignty and achieve development across all regions of the country.

I – 1 Definition of Local Communities

The definitions explaining the concept of local administration vary according to researchers and perspectives. The French writer Vallin defined it as: *"the transfer of the authority to issue administrative decisions to freely elected councils by those concerned".*[1]

It has also been defined as an administrative method by which the state is divided into units of local character, each of which is managed by a body representing the general administration of its inhabitants. This body works to optimize the use of its own resources and is linked to the central government through the state's general policy and the relations defined by the constitution and the law [2]. In this sense, it represents a local authority while at the same time remaining an extension of the central state [3]. Thus, local administration can be defined as a method of administrative organization that aims at decentralization by assigning certain tasks to local administrative units endowed with legal personality, specific organization, and financial autonomy. These units obtain their financial resources from their own revenues as well as from subsidies and various grants, with their efficiency depending on their ability to achieve effective outcomes.

I – 2 Objectives of Local Communities

The move toward decentralization, embodied in local communities, seeks to achieve several objectives, including the following:

2–1 Political Objectives

Practicing democracy at the local level by involving citizens in the management of local affairs through elected councils motivates citizens of the region to engage in public matters and strengthens ties between them and the government. These practices foster in residents a sense of their role within the community, enhance their awareness of their rights and national duties, uphold their dignity, and consolidate democracy and participation in local governance. This is achieved through free choice in elections for their local representatives, allowing each person to express their opinions and aspirations [4]. Consequently, this ensures national integration and limits the monopoly of certain groups over political activity.

2–2 Administrative Objectives

Local administration ensures speed and accuracy in responding to the needs and requirements of residents, enhances the quality of services, reduces the inflation of central administrative structures and bodies, and creates opportunities to test different administrative systems on a small and limited scale in order to assess the feasibility of their generalization within the broader state framework [5].

2–3 Social Objectives

Local administration meets the needs and desires of local populations in accordance with their priorities, encourages and engages citizens to influence and contribute to decision-making and implementation, and strengthens trust between them and the central administration through their participation in public affairs—thereby reinforcing the spirit of citizenship.

II. Manifestations of Governance in Local Communities in Algeria

Public service is considered a vital source and a fundamental pillar of society. Its development and improvement in ways that align with the needs and aspirations of the community have become a necessity, particularly in light of the rapid global changes and transformations affecting all fields. These changes increase society's need for high-quality public services. For the relevant authorities to achieve this level of quality, they must adopt methods and approaches to enhance the public services provided to individuals. Among these approaches is *good governance*, which aims to improve and develop performance through appropriate and effective methods for implementing plans and objectives, defining responsibilities, and regulating relationships between public service providers and their beneficiaries.

The emergence of governance and the growing attention it receives highlight its importance and role in societies, as it seeks to achieve a set of goals such as transparency, justice, equality, and the granting of the right to accountability.

II. 1 Definition of Governance

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defined governance as: *"the rules that regulate the activities of various sectors—economic, social, and political—and the ways in which they are managed. These rules determine the rights and responsibilities of the different stakeholders. It is a form of governance that includes effective democratic rule based on participation, accountability, and transparency"* [6]. From an accounting perspective, governance emphasizes achieving transparency and broadening the scope of disclosure of accounting data and financial statements [7].

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), governance is: *"a set of values, standards, procedures, and institutions through which societies manage their development processes"* [8]. It operates within society at the local and national levels across economic, political, and administrative dimensions, enabling citizens to express their interests, exercise their legal rights, and fulfill their obligations.

Based on the above, governance can be defined as the method adopted by administrative authorities, according to specific rules, to manage their affairs effectively. It regulates and defines the relationships between the different stakeholders, while also determining responsibilities and safeguarding the rights of all parties involved.

II. 2 Objectives of Governance

The adoption of governance principles by governments has become a societal and international demand, in addition to being an organizational requirement. Providing services of high quality, efficiency, and effectiveness is a necessity for individuals before it is even a governmental goal. The emergence of the concepts of good governance and governance resulted from shortcomings and deterioration in the management of state affairs, as well as the failure of public institutions to deliver services in modern and effective ways. Thus, the application of the modern administrative model (governance), particularly at the local level, has long been pursued by successive governments in managing public affairs.

The manifestations of governance are reflected in the following mechanisms:

1. Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of managing operations and exploiting public resources, directing them toward areas that generate returns for society and contribute to achieving strategic objectives.
2. Building a culture of participation among employees and stakeholders in data design, decision-making, service distribution, and adherence to laws.
3. Developing a culture of institutional loyalty and a sense of responsibility toward achieving strategic goals.
4. Responding to stakeholders' needs and requirements with high quality and appropriate standards to ensure their satisfaction.
5. Promoting a culture of accountability and transparency by establishing foundations for defining responsibility in decision-making and outcomes.
6. Combating and preventing corruption in all its forms and practices.
7. Establishing systems and regulations that ensure the documentation of procedures and structures, clarify responsibilities, rights, powers, and relationships within a clear working methodology.
8. Ensuring the optimal use of available resources.

III. E-Governance

The world is witnessing an unprecedented leap and transformation from a material-based reality to a digital world operating in a virtual environment. Consequently, governments are required to keep pace with these changes and innovate new concepts compatible with them. This has given rise to the concept of *e-governance*, which primarily aims to improve the relationship between government and citizens by facilitating communication and providing electronic public services.

The Algerian government has given special attention to the process of digitalization. On numerous occasions, through meetings of the Council of Ministers, it has consistently emphasized the importance of *"shifting the model of public management toward e-governance, as it represents the optimal approach to ensuring transparency and bringing administration closer to citizens."*

Among the sectors that have witnessed significant development and progress in electronic administration is the sector of local communities and urban planning. The implementation of this administrative model has been reflected in the creation of numerous digital platforms and the issuance of various legislative and regulatory texts to support them. The government initiated the application of electronic administration within the civil status services, as they represent the first point of contact for citizens, and then gradually began extending it to other services, including the most important ones:

1. The National Automated Civil Status Register:

This register enabled citizens to obtain civil status documents from any municipality within the country and even through the official website of the Ministry of Interior and Local Communities online. This

new electronic service was launched on **24/12/2020**, allowing citizens to extract their own civil status documents (*birth certificate, marriage certificate, and death certificate*) as well as those of their relatives.

It exempted citizens from providing civil status documents already available in the National Automated Civil Status Register for administrative files required by certain institutions connected to this register. This was in line with the provisions of **Executive Decree No. 15/204 of 27 July 2015** [9], which obligated such institutions, within administrative procedures, not to require citizens to submit civil status documents that they could directly access from the register.

Furthermore, **Article 25 bis of Law 14-08 of 09/08/2014**, amending and supplementing Ordinance 70-20 on civil status [10], stipulates the creation of a National Automated Civil Status Register under the Ministry of Interior, Local Communities, and Urban Planning. This register is linked to municipalities, their administrative annexes, as well as diplomatic and consular missions. It is also connected to other relevant public institutions, particularly the central services of the Ministry of Justice. This system has enabled citizens to obtain birth certificates, marriage contracts, and death certificates from any municipality nationwide, thereby eliminating the burden of traveling to specific locations to extract these documents.

2. Decentralization of Issuing Administrative Documents at the Municipal Level

- **Electronic Counter for Biometric Documents:**

Through this system, all municipalities in the country were connected to the internet, and the necessary material and human resources were provided to deliver a range of electronic services to citizens. These include the issuance of biometric identity cards, biometric passports, and biometric driving licenses nationwide.

- **Issuance of Biometric Identity Documents (Passport and National Identity Card):**

Starting in 2010, identity documents began to be issued in biometric form. Initially, this process was launched at the district level, then transferred to the municipalities. In 2018, the procedure was expanded to include driving licenses, which also became biometric. These could first be issued by municipalities that are district headquarters and are now delivered by all municipalities across the country. This is in line with the latest instruction from the Minister of Interior, Local Communities, and Urban Planning, which allows municipalities to issue biometric driving licenses when renewing expired classic licenses. Additional measures have also been taken by the ministry to digitize vehicle registration cards (the "grey card") to be issued later by municipalities.

- **Program for Managing Urban Planning Permit Applications:**

This modern electronic program was launched in 2021. Its purpose is to allow central and provincial authorities to monitor compliance with legal deadlines for the issuance of urban planning permits by municipalities, as well as to track the handling of appeals concerning objections to submitted files.

- **Application for Associations:**

This application is installed at the central administration level (the Ministry of Interior and Local Communities) and also deployed at municipal and provincial levels. It is used to monitor the status of local associations—municipal and provincial—in terms of their numbers and activities.

- **Application for Managing the Solidarity Operation during Ramadan:**

This database, set up at the Ministry of Interior, provincial authorities, and municipalities, was created to provide accurate statistics on the number of underprivileged citizens eligible for solidarity grants during Ramadan. It records information on beneficiaries, updates these records annually, and verifies their eligibility based on the required conditions.

- **Remote Service Counter Application:**

This application is available on the official website of the Ministry of Interior through the platform www.Interieur.gov.dz. It allows citizens and economic operators to submit different administrative files online after scanning their documents and sending them remotely.

The platform processes 63 remote services: 17 files at the central level of the Ministry of Interior, 20 files at the provincial level, 3 files at the district level, and 23 files at the municipal level. This system has

received strong interaction and participation from citizens and has greatly facilitated file processing for employees [11].

- **Citizen Complaints Register:**

Since assuming office, the President of the Republic has made citizens' concerns a central priority of his governance policy. This commitment to protecting rights and consolidating the rule of law has been demonstrated by improved handling of citizens' concerns.

In this context, the institution of the Médiateur de la République (Republic Mediator) was established in 2020 to provide more flexibility in processing citizens' petitions and concerns, fostering a strong relationship of trust between administration and citizens based on respect and responsibility.

In line with this, Instruction No. 4218 of 16/03/2023, issued by the Minister of Interior, Local Communities, and Urban Planning, reactivated the complaints register and established coordination and monitoring mechanisms at the provincial level to support the Mediator in following up on citizens' concerns. A monitoring unit was created in each province to manage complaints registers and petitions, ensure compliance with deadlines, and avoid superficial responses to citizens' requests.

As part of the state's modernization efforts to digitize citizen–administration relations, an electronic platform called TANSIK.DZ was launched. Through this platform, citizens' complaints and petitions are scanned and entered by the relevant administrative bodies.

To reaffirm its commitment to addressing citizens' concerns, the Algerian government organized regional meetings in several provinces under the theme: "The Citizen at the Core of the President of the Republic's Priorities and Transparency as the Basis of Public Service Quality." These meetings, organized by the Republic Mediator in coordination with the Ministry of Interior, the High Authority for Transparency and the Fight against Corruption, produced recommendations focusing on: improving the quality and modernization of public services, strengthening transparency mechanisms, enhancing communication between administration and citizens, upgrading human resources and valuing competencies and developing frameworks for coordination and cooperation.

These outcomes are to be implemented through a clear methodology to be adopted across all public administrations and institutions at the provincial level.

IV.   Involving Civil Society in the Management Process (Participatory Democracy)

To activate the role of civil society and involve it in managing public affairs, whether at the local or national level, the approach of participatory democracy has been adopted as an innovative mechanism within the framework of public service governance. Its purpose is to achieve comprehensive development in all fields, since development requires the design and implementation of inclusive plans that address citizens' needs and the creation of mechanisms for effective and genuine citizen participation alongside all civil society actors.

In this context, the Algerian state, within the governance of public affairs, has established several mechanisms and public bodies, notably the **Municipal Advisory Council**, the **National Observatory of Civil Society**, and the **Republic Mediator**.

IV. 1 The Municipal Advisory Council

Participatory democracy is characterized by continuous and active interaction between citizens and officials. Accordingly, the Municipal Advisory Council was established in line with constitutional amendments that introduced the concept of participatory democracy. It provides a space for participation between citizens and civil society in all its forms in managing municipal public affairs.

The council derives its credibility from the representativeness of its members. It is one of the most important new governance mechanisms for establishing sound local governance, which the Algerian state aims to consolidate across sectors and levels of public affairs. Through it, civil society actors are integrated into participatory local management via a formal body, the Municipal Advisory Council.

This body—an unprecedented initiative in local government practices—works alongside the Municipal People's Assembly to develop the Municipal Development Plan through an innovative and comprehensive methodology expected to bring qualitative progress to local governance practices.

Main objectives of the council include:

- Supporting local administration in improving its services and analyzing its performance through its responsiveness.
- Simplifying and modernizing public services at the municipal level.
- Strengthening the capacities of local actors, particularly youth and women, and involving them in local planning.
- Preventing and responding quickly to risks and disasters to mitigate their impact.
- Promoting strategic planning that serves the main objectives of local development and generating economic resources without relying solely on government subsidies [12].

IV. 2 The National Observatory of Civil Society

The constitutional amendment of 2020 introduced a new gain for civil society: the establishment of the National Observatory of Civil Society. Its missions, composition, and functioning were defined by Presidential Decree No. 21-139 of April 12, 2021.

It is an advisory body to the President of the Republic, serving as a framework for dialogue, consultation, and proposals on all matters related to civil society. It contributes to promoting national values, activating civil society's role, and practicing democracy by supporting local and national development goals.

Its main tasks include:

- Evaluating and developing civil society performance in Algeria based on needs and available resources, while proposing a general vision of its role in sustainable national and local development and identifying shortcomings that hinder effective participation.
- Giving opinions and proposals on civil society participation in designing and implementing public policies at all levels, in line with participatory democracy, while providing guidance to civil society actors to strengthen their capacities in fieldwork.
- Effectively contributing to establishing dialogue and consultation between all civil society actors and public authorities in Algeria, and taking part in initiatives launched by public institutions linked to civil society activities, ensuring its active role in sustainable development.
- Involving the national community abroad in activities and programs related to civil society, integrating them into the national development process, and strengthening communication with them.
- Promoting national principles and values, proposing mechanisms to encourage volunteer work for the public good, and reinforcing belonging by enhancing individuals' communication and cooperation skills.

IV. 3 The Republic Mediator

As part of reforms aimed at building an active civil society and laying the foundations of a new state, the institution of the Republic Mediator was created by Executive Decree No. 20-45 of February 15, 2020. Its goal is to establish a solid framework for a new relationship between administration and citizens, based on participation in a rule-of-law state grounded in justice and fairness.

Its assigned missions include:

- General oversight and monitoring to ensure the best response to citizens' needs and to improve relations between the administration and citizens.
- Receiving citizens, organizing hearings using methods of dialogue and persuasion, processing their complaints, and studying petitions fairly, while seeking appropriate solutions in coordination with relevant public institutions and bodies.
- Settling disputes: any individual who feels wronged by a public service can appeal to the Republic Mediator—through correspondence, email, phone, or in-person meeting—to resolve the conflict between them and the administration.

- Contributing to the protection of citizens' rights and freedoms as a non-judicial grievance body, while ensuring the proper functioning of public administrations and institutions.

V. Conclusion

To facilitate citizens' access to high-quality public services, the Algerian state has undertaken the modernization of local administration. This was achieved by supporting it to sustainably and effectively meet citizens' needs on the one hand, and by involving civil society to enable it to support the administration in delivering public services on the other hand, with the aim of achieving outstanding performance. This has been accompanied by profound practical reforms covering several aspects of public affairs management through the application of governance mechanisms for the administrative development of the local administration system.

These reforms include modernizing and simplifying administrative services through the creation of a one-stop municipal public service desk, enhancing the use of modern information and communication technologies to simplify administrative procedures, and promoting cooperation between the administration and civil society to strengthen complementarity in delivering public services at the regional level. They also include reinforcing synergies in the workplace by introducing certain mechanisms and creating public bodies to support citizens, as well as strengthening consultation frameworks to reform the administrative system.

Despite these efforts, some shortcomings remain and must be addressed by updating the legal framework, revising the organizational structure of local communities in accordance with support requirements, and investing in human resources by attracting competent individuals and training staff.

Recommendations:
- Governance has become a necessary requirement in management and an important international standard by which the progress of states is measured, as well as an indicator of genuine democracy. Therefore, its mechanisms should be activated in a manner consistent with the nature and values of the society in which they are applied.
- Drawing on international expertise, particularly from countries that have adopted governance principles and made significant progress in improving public services.
- Granting adequate importance to civil society representatives and relying on qualified individuals in order to achieve genuine representation of society, enabling them to perform oversight and accountability over the performance of public facilities.
- Developing the necessary infrastructure for the proper implementation of e-governance in the public sector, as it contributes to the effectiveness of programs and strengthens individuals' sense of belonging and loyalty to the state.
- Issuing new legal texts that align with this new approach in public management.

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FOOTNOTES

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