

**CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND THE MANAGEMENT OF
MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS IN THE COMMUNITY OF ZOGBODOMEY**

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ABSTRACT

Citizen participation in city governance is essential to the democratic functioning of urban society. Local government is the level of government closest to residents, and it is here that many important decisions are taken that have a direct impact on residents' quality of life. The aim of this study is to analyze citizen involvement in municipal management in Zogbodomey. Data were collected through individual interviews with 350 people belonging to sociolinguistic groups. The population of Zogbodomey has a good understanding of the concept of participatory governance, highlighting citizen participation options, communication, and inclusion in the design of development action programs, mutual trust and legislation on citizen participation. For them, the idea of participation is an inclusive process for building and carrying out development actions. According to the respondents, participation offers a number of opportunities. The investigations showed that the public was partly aware of the wide range of opportunities for civic participation. These include community media, opinion forums, development associations, professional associations, etc., taking into account the traditional councils of chiefs, etc. It should also be noted that traditional chiefdoms are involved in community development in a number of ways.

Keywords: Participation, citizen, management, municipal, Zogbodomey

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Citizen participation in the management of municipal affairs is a crucial element in ensuring effective and transparent local governance. It involves the active engagement of citizens in the decision-making processes and activities of their municipality (Bryant et al., 2003; Bryant & Desroches, 2008). Citizen participation in the management of municipal affairs constitutes an essential element of the democratic functioning of our local societies. Municipalities are the

level of government closest to citizens, and it is where many crucial decisions are made, having a direct impact on the quality of life of residents (Fortier, 2014; Simard & Leclerc, 2008). In this context, citizen participation takes different forms, ranging from municipal elections to public consultations, including involvement in neighbourhood councils, working groups and community initiatives (Boyer-Gendron, 2015). This active involvement of citizens in municipal management can strengthen the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of local authorities, but it also raises complex challenges, such as representativeness, diversity of voices and mobilization (Brouard et al., 2010).

At the heart of democratic development is the active participation of citizens in local governance. Municipalities, as epicentres of community life, play an essential role in this participatory dynamic. In this context, the commune of Zogbodomey, located somewhere between Benin's rich history and the promise of a prosperous future, offers a captivating study setting. Within this small community, citizen participation takes on a particular meaning, because it represents a vital link between the aspirations of residents and the political decisions that affect them on a daily basis. This article aims to explore in depth the complex fabric of citizen participation in the management of municipal affairs in Zogbodomey.

1.1 Methodological approach

In the context of this study, we carefully selected a sample with the aim of exploring the phenomena and obtaining information representative of the entire study population. Our goal in making this informed choice was to leverage the respondents' experience to gather relevant information. In total, 350 citizens were included in our survey. The data was collected through a survey itself using a previously developed questionnaire. For data analysis, we employed two techniques: discourse analysis and content analysis, as part of this research.

2.0 RESULTS

2.1 Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents

Table 1 below sets out the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents in the commune of Zogbodomey

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of

Variables		Total	Pourcentage (%)
Sexe	Masculin	189	54
	Féminin	161	46
Ethnie	Mahi	175	46,67
	Goun	62	16,53
	Xlwa	138	37,80
Niveau d'instruction	Primaire partiel	62	17,71
	Primaire complet	33	9,43
	1er cycle secondaire	69	19,71
	2nd cycle secondaire	53	15,14
	Licence	34	9,71

	Master	21	6
	Doctorat	6	1,71
	Alphabétisation	17	4,86
	Aucun	55	15,71
Nombre d'années de séjour dans la commune	1 à 5 ans	57	16,29
	5 à 15 ans	107	30,57
	16 à 20 ans	89	25,43
	Plus de 20 ans	97	27,71
Profession	Commerçant.es	38	10,86
	Jeunes hommes entrepreneurs	35	10
	Jeunes femmes entrepreneures	41	11,71
	Agriculteurs.trices	79	22,57
	Agents d'ONG	17	4,86
	Environnementalistes	7	2
	Elus locaux	26	7,43
	Chercheurs	4	1,14
	Artisan.es	54	15,43
	Conducteurs/taxi	39	11,14
	Responsables religieux	10	2,86

Source: Fieldwork

This table shows that the activity rate of men is higher than that of women. Thus, the proportion of men is 54%, or 189 out of 350 people questioned, compared to 46% for women. This statistic suggests that male political participation is observed in Zogbodomey town. However, the proportion of women is not minimal, at 46%. This demonstrates our commitment to widely taking women into account in participatory approaches to regional and community development.

In terms of ethnicity, analysis of the table reveals three large ethnic groups: Mahi (46.67%), Shura (37.80%) and Goun (16.53%). This means that the study primarily targets the Mahi and Shuwa people, who are an integral part of the ethnic majority in the study area. Therefore, we can say that the people who contributed to the research are from that area or region.

In addition to the fact that the interviewees were from the area, it was important for the study to know how many years the interviewees had lived in Zogbodomey. We therefore see that most of the respondents have at least 5 years of experience in the community. In fact, 30.57% of them have been in the industry for 5 to 15 years. 27.71% are over 20 years old. 25.43% were between 16 and 20 years old. Only 16.29% have lived there for 1 to 5 years. This means that respondents are likely to have unparalleled knowledge of their surroundings since the average length of residence is 10.5 years. The education level of the respondents is average, with a high proportion of lower secondary graduates. H. 19.71% (n=69), 17.71% (n=62) without primary education, and 15.71% (n=55) without secondary education. Secondary education represented 15.14% (n=53). However, 9.71% (n=34) had a bachelor's degree, 6% (n=21) had a master's

degree, and 1.71% (n=6) had a doctorate. Although some people are less proficient in the language, 4.86% (n=17) of those surveyed are fluent in the national language of their region.

Analysis of the same table shows that the study fully took into account the participation of both urban and rural participants. We note that the number of actors working in the agricultural sector is 79 people, followed by 54 artisans, 41 young women entrepreneurs, 39 taxi drivers, 38 traders and 35 young men entrepreneurs. Other stakeholders include 26 local elected officials, 17 NGO agents, 10 religious figures, 7 environmental activists and 4 researchers. We conclude that research on socio-professional categories is numerous and diverse.

2.2 Participation and appreciation of town hall services

2.2.1 Visit within the municipality

Figure 1 below shows the frequency of citizens visiting Zogbodmey Town Hall. Respondents therefore use the services of the town hall and their neighborhood. 35.14% or 123 people go there temporarily. 27.43% go there often. 21.71% go there often and finally, 15.71% go there rarely. We can deduce that the services of the town hall and its territory are in high demand by residents.

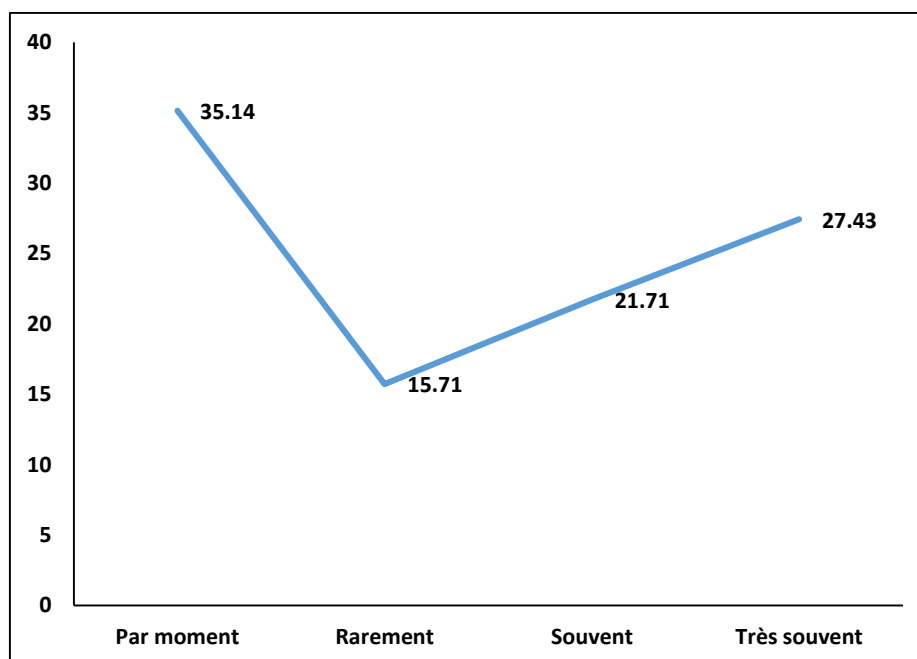


Figure1: Frequency of citizens visiting Zogbodmey town hall

Source: Fieldwork

2.2.2 Reasons for visits

Figure 2 presents the different reasons which could push the citizens of the commune of Zogbodomey to attend the town hall.

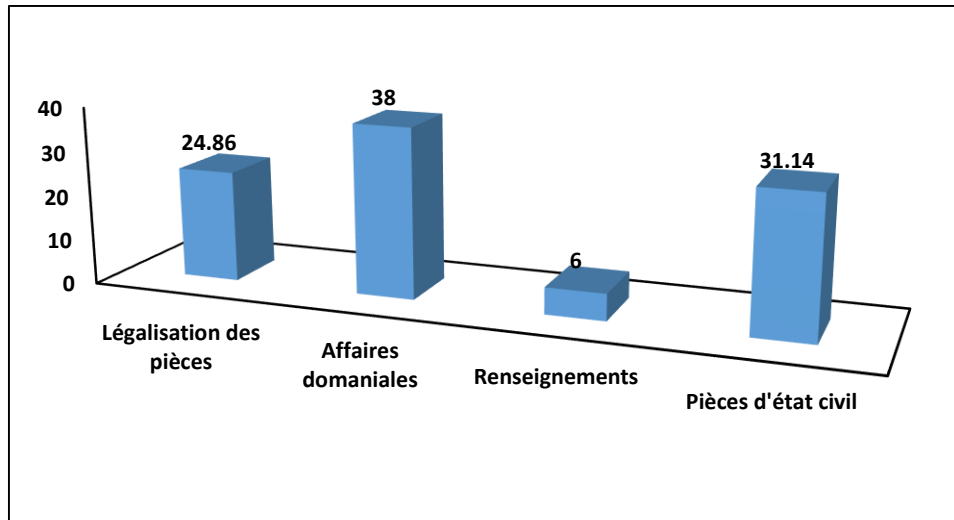


Figure 2: Reason for attendance

Source: Fieldwork

Figure 2 shows that requests are strongly linked to national affairs (38%, n=133), followed by civil acts (31.14%, n=109), then the legalization of documents (24.86%, n =87), and finally information. This shows that they are connected. (6%, n = 21). The results highlight the superiority of two important services: the Civil Service and the Civil Service. This is entirely justified as civil status instruments require citizens to exercise their civil rights before entering into real estate transactions.

2.2.3 Level of satisfaction with the services requested

The following Figure 3 shows information on the public's evaluation of the services provided.

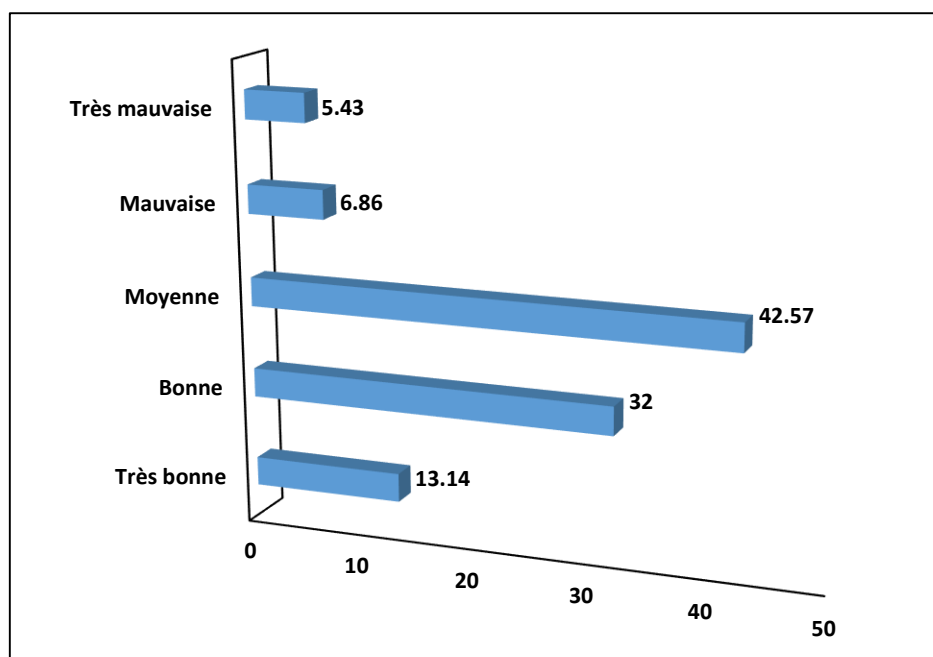


Figure 3: Level of satisfaction with the services requested

Source: Fieldwork

In general, the ratings are moderately good (42.57%), good (32%), very good (13.14%), poor (6.86%), and very poor (5.43%). This rating means that the service provided to residents is still not very satisfactory, so the service manager and the town of Zogbodomey need to improve the service.

2.3 Participatory governance and municipal management

2.3.1 Population perceptions of participatory governance

Figure 4 below helps us understand citizens’ perceptions of the participatory approach in the municipality of Zogbodomey.

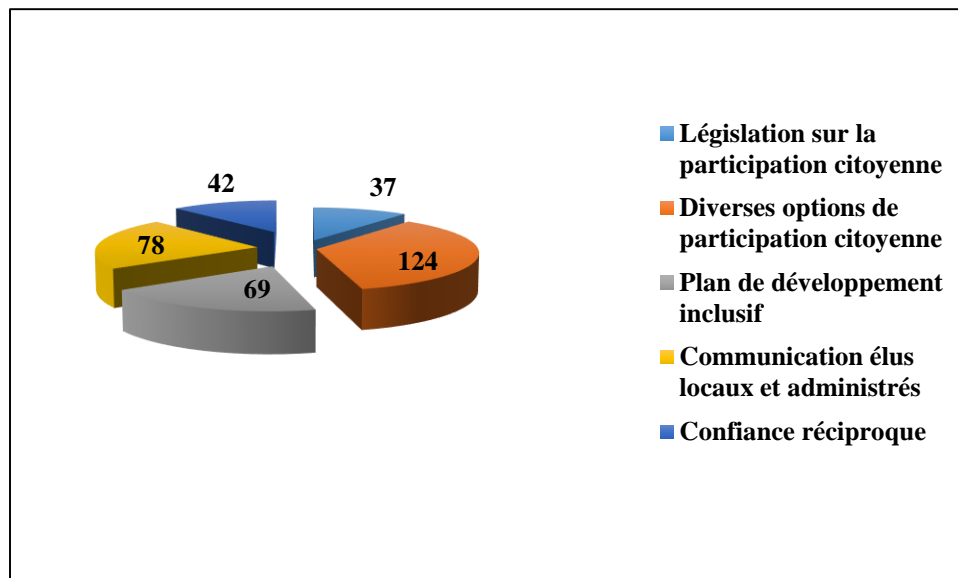


Figure 4: Concept of participatory governance seen by informants

Source: Fieldwork

The figure shows that the interlocutors have a good understanding of the concept of participatory governance by highlighting the options for citizen participation (35%, n= 124), communication (22%, n= 78), inclusion in the design of development action programs (20%, n=69), mutual trust (12%, n=42) and legislation on citizen participation (11%, n=37). We can say that the idea of participation is, for the actors, an inclusive process of construction and implementation of development actions. Although legislation occupies a decisive place in the concept, it should be remembered that the interlocutors do not have a good understanding of its importance.

Regarding opportunities for participation, the survey showed that the public was partly aware of the wide range of opportunities for civic participation. These include community media,

opinion spaces, development associations, professional associations, etc., taking into account traditional advice from chiefs, etc. Concerning communication, we also emphasize the reissuance of accounts. If participatory governance persists in the development of development programs, the “inclusion” aspect is no longer a reality for the informants. In addition, trust has disappeared from the collective consciousness since electoral promises have no longer been kept. This very complex diagnosis of citizen perceptions of participatory governance calls into question local authorities and their control of local power.

2.3.2 Development status and problems

Figure 5 below shows some development measures put forward by local respondents.

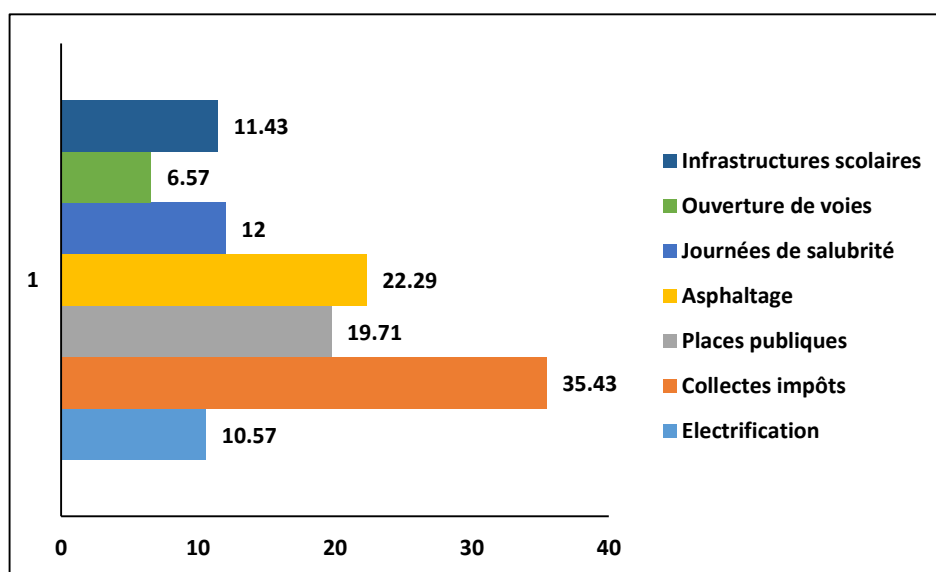


Figure 5: Development actions

Source: Fieldwork

Thus, 35.43% of those questioned responded that tax collection is the first development measure. Additionally, 22.29% said that asphalt paving projects are also development measures. Other development measures include public spaces (19.71%), hygiene days (12%), school infrastructure (11.43%), electrification (10.57%) and opening of roads.

Efforts continue, but the interlocutors share different points of view on the level of development (figure 6). So, based on the following graph, we can see that 46.57% have a good understanding of the current development status of the community. 42% give it a fair rating, 4.57% give it a poor rating and 6.86% give it a very good rating.

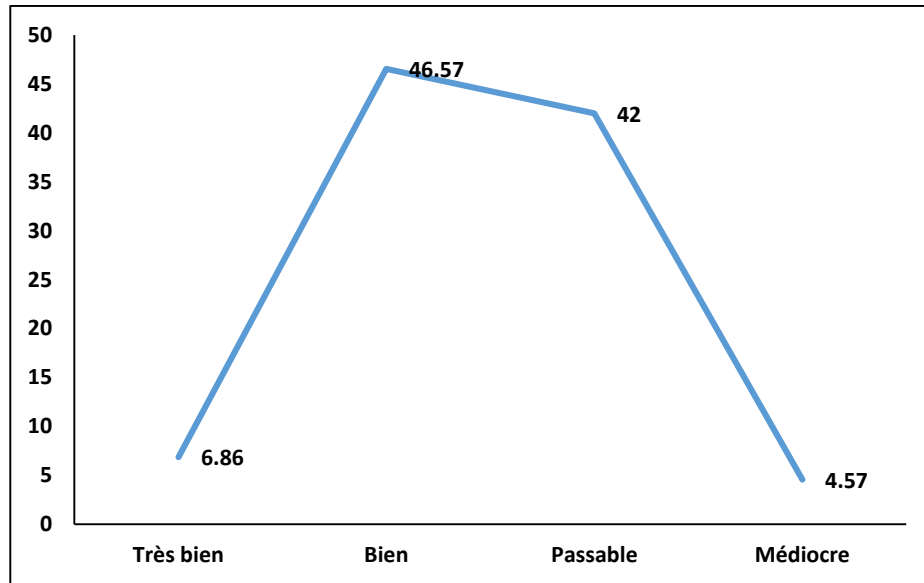


Figure 6: Stage of development according to respondents

Source: Fieldwork

Several challenges are mentioned by citizens in terms of development of the municipality of Zogbodomey (figure 7)

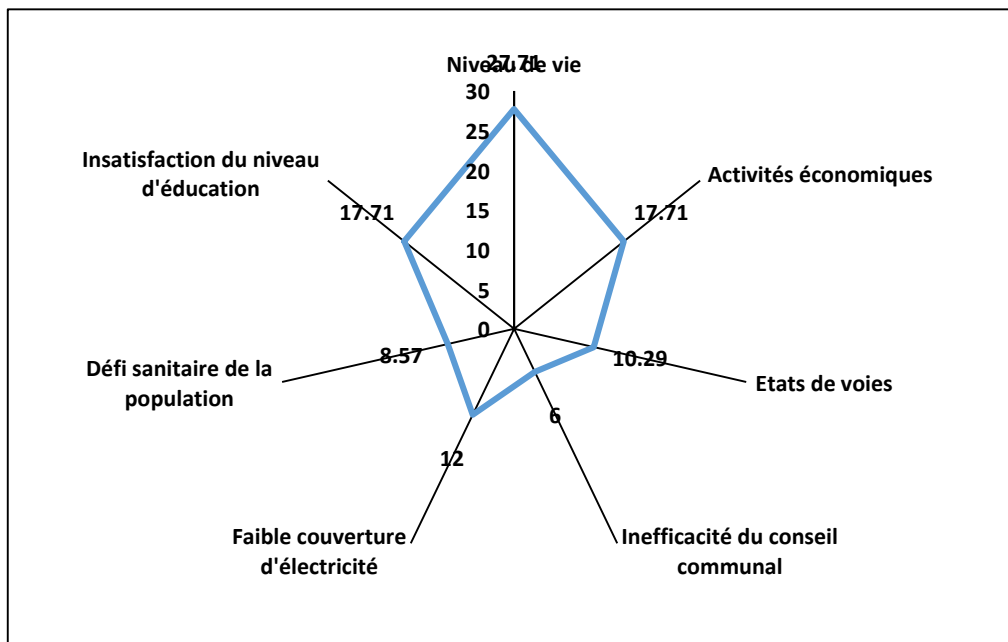


Figure 7: Challenges linked to municipal development in Zogbodomey

Source: Fieldwork

The following figure shows that the first challenge remains on the human side, and in particular that the standard of living of the population must still be improved by measures based on human

ideals. Second, respondents agree to improve the nation's economic performance. This means that the business environment in the community is unfavorable. Education also remains a key issue for stakeholders. These factors create requirements for electrification coverage, transportation route development, health concerns, and municipal energy management strategies.

2.3.3 Traditional chieftom and territorial governance in Zogbodomey: What to remember?

In many African societies, traditional authorities retain significant influence, although modern governments take a different perspective on the exercise of power and its administration. However, this study reveals that 25.43% of concentrated individuals do not know whether traditional leaders are engaged in these issues. Among those associated, 38.29% said they were not involved in development initiatives, while 36.29% said they were involved in development projects.

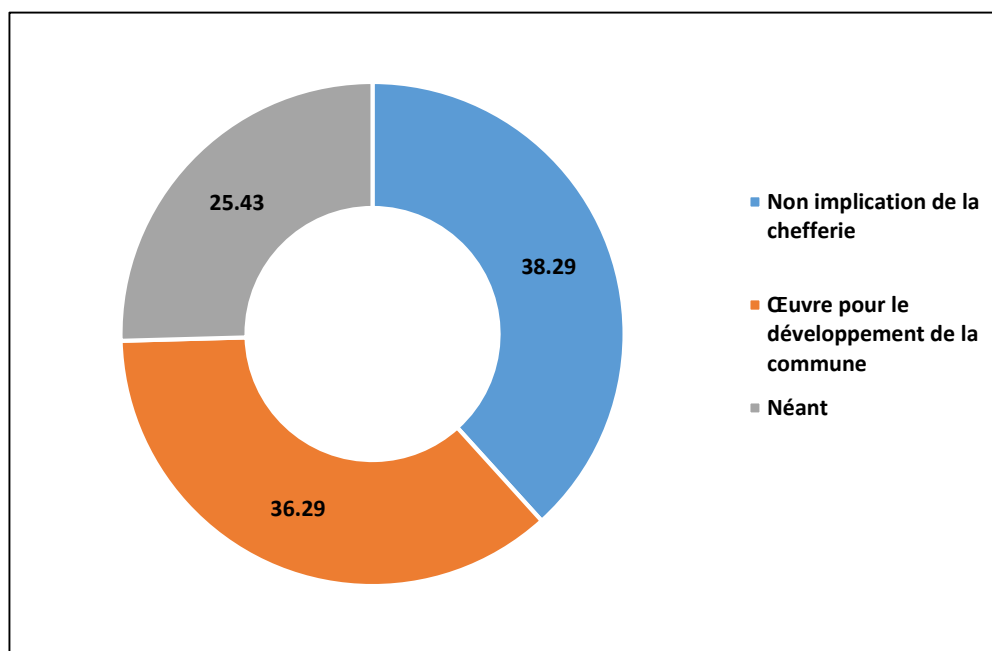


Figure 8: Traditional chieftaincy in local governance

Source: Fieldwork

Traditional chiefdoms are involved in community development in several aspects, as shown in the diagram below. Traditional leaders play a role in African societies, whether their importance is recognized in specific areas such as culture, religion or entrenched cults, or the resolution of land-related conflicts. Therefore, the respondents were asked about the elements of participation of traditional leaders in the community life of Zogbodomey. The answers are diverse and depend on opinions and positions.

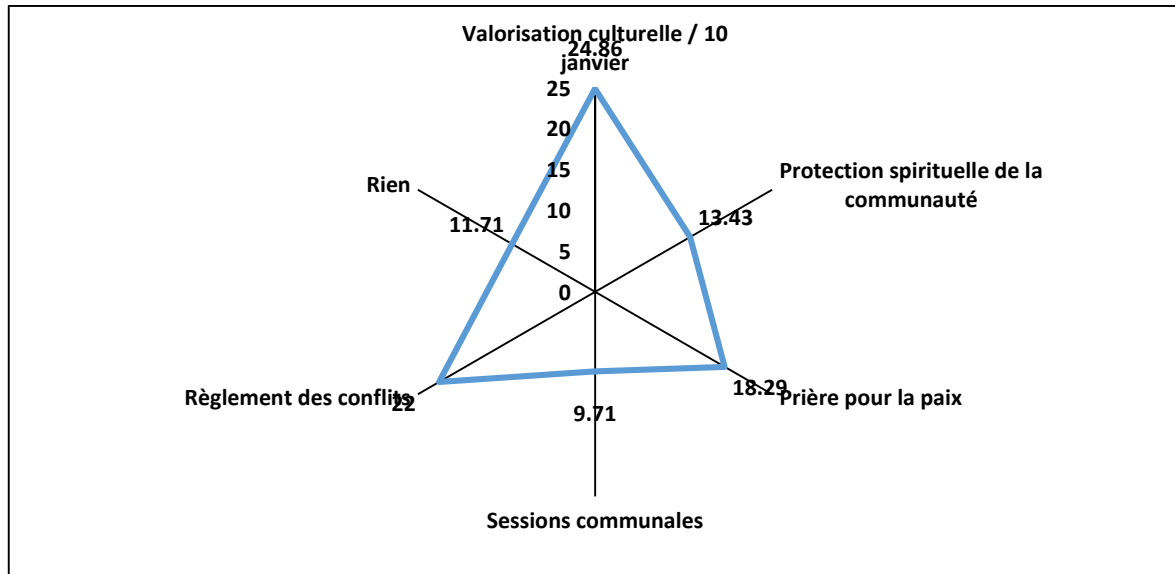


Figure 9: Nature of the involvement of traditional leaders

Source: Fieldwork

In general, traditional emirates promote endogenous cultural and religious values, resolve conflicts, establish social peace with the local community and ancestral gods, and physically participate in community gatherings. Traditional chiefdoms will therefore play an important role in giving new impetus to participatory development in Zogbodomey.

2.3.4 Municipal affairs management indicators

The elements of corporate governance concern basic social infrastructure and services, their availability, use and maintenance by the public. The assessment of municipal government operations produces the answers shown in Figure 10 below

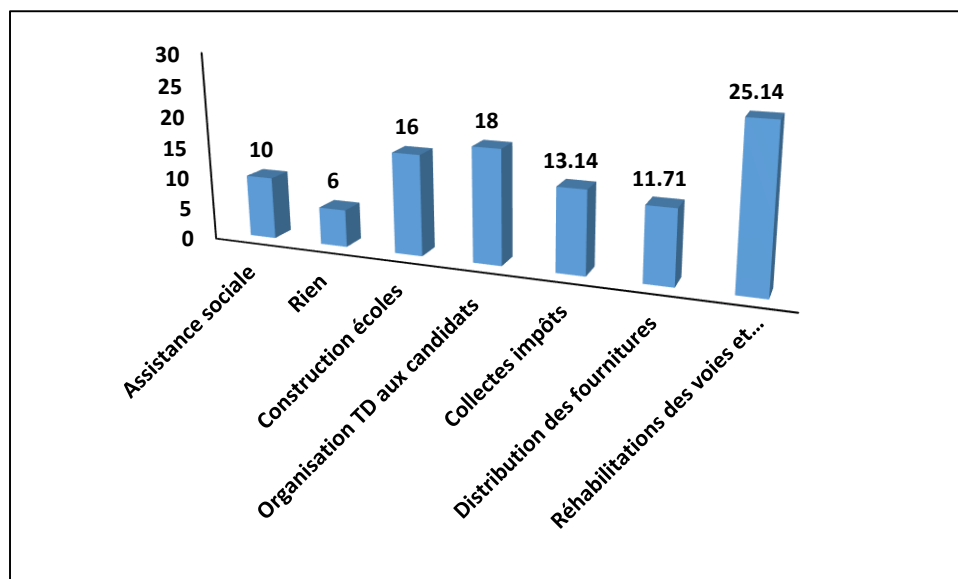


Figure 10: indicators of good management of municipal affairs in Zogbodomey

Source: Fieldwork

The factors that interest respondents seem to be education, taxes and social protection. Thus, the measures previously implemented at the time of the survey included the repair of access roads and classrooms, the organization of the work of end-of-cycle learners, candidates for the various school exams, the construction of schools and the donation of school supplies. It was about. Tax collection and social assistance.

2.4 Requirements linked to the evolution of the locality of Zogbodomey

Figure 11 shows the restrictions that can slow down the development of Zogbodomey town. These include the lack of communication and citizen participation in municipal management (29.14%), embezzlement of funds (26.29%), the invention of new taxes (23.71%), bad governance (10%) and corruption (5.71%). The main obstacles cited by those surveyed are the slowness of administration (5.15%) and the lack of initiative towards the authorities (3.71%).

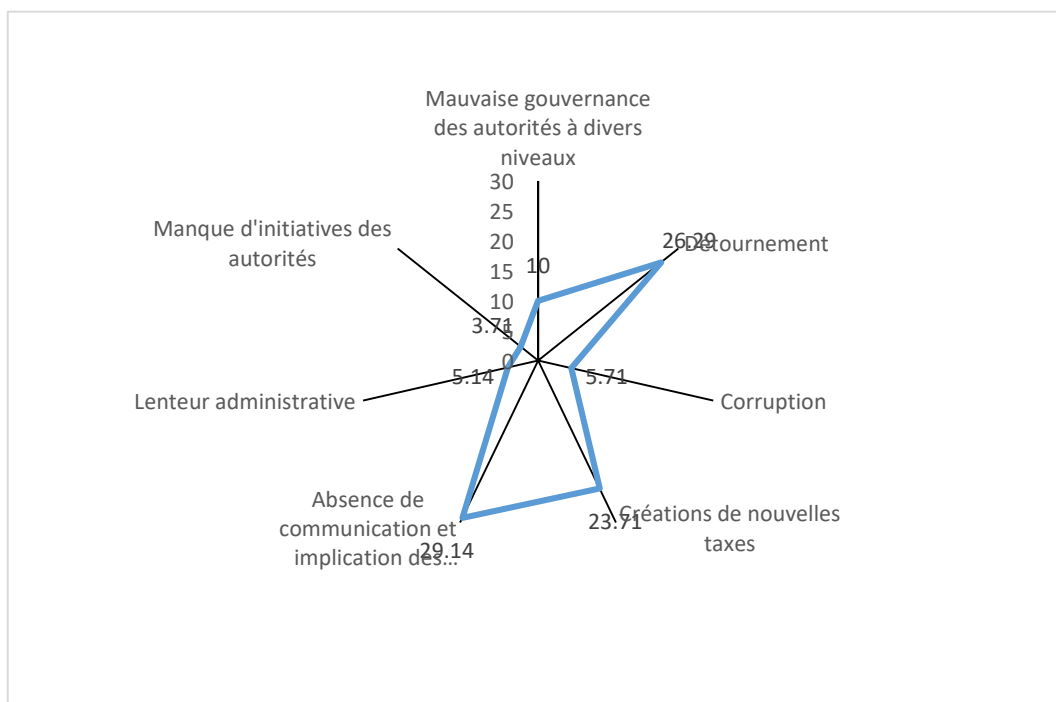


Figure 11: Restrictions linked to the development of the commune of Zogbodomey

Source: Fieldwork

3.0 DISCUSSION

The requests are closely related to state affairs, then civil identity documents, then legalization of documents and finally information. This result clearly illustrates the dominance of two essential services: the state service and that of civil status. This is well justified to the extent that the population is called upon to enjoy civil rights through civil status documents before entering into a land transaction. This information corroborates that of Chatelain-Ponroy (2003);

Guibert (2012) and Ploux (2010) which state that the civil status service in town halls is a government department that manages civil registrations such as births, marriages, divorces and deaths. This service is essential because it maintains a population register, allowing citizens to obtain official documents such as birth, marriage or death certificates. These authors noted several reasons which push the population to frequent the municipalities. Initially, they identified the delivery of copies of documents as their primary service. The civil status service is also responsible for issuing copies of birth, marriage or death certificates to the persons concerned, as well as to administrations or authorized organizations. Next we have birth registration. When a child is born, his parents must declare his birth to the town hall of the place of birth. A birth certificate is then drawn up and kept in the town hall archives.

Zogbodomey residents understand well the concept of participatory governance, emphasizing possibilities such as citizen participation, communication, involvement in the design of development action programs, mutual trust and participatory legislation. People. The idea of stakeholder participation can be described as a global process of construction and implementation of development measures. Even if the law occupies an important place in this notion, it must be kept in mind that the interlocutors are not fully aware of its importance. These results relate to those of Joiris et al. (2014) ; Rajan et al. (2022) and Rwanyiziri (2009) who in their research affirm that participatory governance from the point of view of the population, refers to a governance model in which citizens are actively involved in the decision-making process and have a significant role in the formulation of public policies. This model is based on the idea that citizens have the right to participate in decisions that concern them and that their contribution is valuable in creating effective and legitimate policies. For them, participatory governance is a concept which is based on the idea that citizens should play an active role in political decision-making and in the management of public affairs. The main objective of participatory governance is to give citizens the opportunity to contribute to the formulation of policies, the implementation of government programs and the monitoring of the actions of public authorities (Rajan et al., 2022).

Regarding opportunities for participation, the survey showed that the public is partially aware of the wide range of opportunities for civic participation. These include community media, opinion spaces, development associations, professional associations, etc., taking into account traditional advice from chiefs, etc. Concerning communication, we also emphasize the reissuance of accounts. If participatory governance insists on the development of development programs, the "inclusion" aspect is no longer a reality for the informants. In addition, trust has disappeared from the collective consciousness since electoral promises have no longer been kept. This very complex diagnosis of citizen perceptions of participatory governance calls into question local authorities and their control of local power. The theory of deliberative democracy of Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson is in the same direction as our results. These authors emphasized deliberation as a means of involving citizens in the democratic decision-making process. They emphasized the importance of diversity of viewpoints and the inclusion of minority voices. On the other hand, Chantal Mouffe's theory of agonism considers political conflict as inevitable and desirable. According to this theory, participatory governance should provide space for political differences to be discussed constructively.

In most African societies, traditional chiefdoms play an important and essential role, even if modern states have a different perspective on power and its administration. However, in this study, a significant proportion of respondents (25.43%) do not know whether traditional leaders

are involved or not. Of the rest, 38.29% said they were not working on development, and 36.29% said they were working on development. For Mahier Bah et al. (2018), the place of traditional chieftaincy in territorial governance is complex and multifaceted. It can play an important role in cultural preservation, conflict resolution and local development, but it can also raise questions about democracy and equal rights. According to (Rey, 2016), traditional leaders may sit on advisory councils or be involved in consultation processes on issues important to the community during decision-making at the local level. Traditional leaders can thus play a role in community development by facilitating local projects, mobilizing resources and representing the interests of their community to local and national authorities.

The development of the town of Zogbodomey faces several challenges. The first challenge remains a human problem and, in particular, the standard of living of the population must be further improved through measures based on human ideals. Second, respondents agree to improve the nation's economic performance. This means that the business environment in the community is unfavorable. Education also remains a key issue for stakeholders. These factors create requirements for electrification coverage, transportation route development, health challenges, and municipal energy supply management strategies. Authors have approached the issue of development challenges from various angles. For example Koutchade et al. (2013) talks about poverty and access to education as a challenge for development. For him, poverty reduction remains one of the most pressing development challenges. Many people around the world still live in precarious living conditions, without adequate access to food, clean water, education and health care. Access to quality education is essential to break the cycle of poverty and stimulate development. Many countries face problems of unequal access to education, particularly in rural areas. Hérin (2011) in turn addresses inequality as a main challenge for development. Economic, social and gender inequalities are major obstacles to sustainable development. The income disparity between rich and poor, as well as discrimination based on gender, ethnicity and other factors, hinders equitable economic growth.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Citizen participation is an essential pillar of local democracy, providing residents with the opportunity to become actively involved in the management of their community. In the case of the municipality of Zogbodomey, we note that citizen participation has a significant impact on the management of municipal affairs. By encouraging citizen engagement, the municipality was able to benefit from innovative ideas, greater transparency and more informed decision-making. Citizen participation in the municipality of Zogbodomey plays a vital role in local development and the quality of life of residents. By continuing to encourage this active participation, the municipality can thrive as a dynamic, inclusive and democratic community, where citizens are truly partners in building a better future for all. However, to ensure effective and sustainable citizen participation, it is crucial to ensure access to information, build citizen capacity and create an environment conducive to the free and open expression of opinions. Municipal authorities must continue to promote open dialogue with residents, facilitate access to necessary resources and recognize the added value that citizen participation brings to municipal management.

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