

Managerial Innovation and Local Development in Developing African Countries: The Case of Local Governments in Mali

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Abstract This article first examines the forms and key success factors of local managerial innovations. It then analyzes the contribution of these innovations to the local development process in Mali. The study adopts a qualitative and exploratory approach based on a multiple case study. The results reveal that the managerial innovations implemented by the six communes of the Bamako district take various forms. They highlight several key success factors, three of which are essential in the Malian context: the political will and technical skills of managers, the availability of resources, and incentive or support measures. The results also show that, despite their diversity, these innovations contribute only modestly to the local development process, and more specifically to improving the socio-economic well-being of local communities.

Keywords: Public innovation, Managerial innovation, Local development, Malian local governments, Post-New Public Management system, New Public Management in Local Government

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1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, Mali, like many other sub-Saharan countries, has embarked on decentralization reforms. In this context, traditional managerial practices characterized by bureaucracy, rigidity, and top-down structures are being called into question [1]. Furthermore, the capacity of local governments to address multiple crises [2], significant financial and budgetary constraints [3,4], and to promote sustainable local development is being put to the test.

Public management innovation is presented as a potential solution to these challenges. It constitutes a form of public innovation [5,6]. Its emergence coincides with post-New Public Management (Post-NPM) practices [7,8]. It is considered one of the drivers of modernization in the public sector [9]. It has been introduced in the local public sector to optimize resources and improve the quality of citizen services [1]. In this context, it is seen as a driver of sustainable local development, improving the quality of life for local residents.

As for the concept of local development, it emerged in rural, marginalized, and isolated communities that did not benefit from local public initiatives related to growth and development [10]. It is presented as a new opportunity for

the least developed countries, particularly those in West Africa [11]. However, it should be noted that its emergence varies from one context to another [12], and is also not easily transferable [11].

Several studies show that, when adapted, local managerial innovation practices can have a significant impact on the functioning and organizational structures of local governments [1] and, consequently, contribute to local development by improving the socioeconomic well-being of the region [13]. However, in the context of local communities in the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa, not only is research addressing the links between managerial innovation and local development scarce, but these communities also face significant climatic, economic, and socio-political challenges. This article addresses these gaps by answering the following questions:

Q: What are the forms and key success factors of the managerial innovations implemented by municipal authorities?

Q: How can these innovations contribute to local development in the Malian context?

To address these questions, following the introduction, this article is divided into four sections. The first section presents a review of the literature. The second section outlines the research methodology. The third section focuses on the main findings. The fourth section presents the discussion. Finally, the study concludes.

2. Literature Review

2.1. From the Concept of Innovation to Managerial Innovation in the Private Sector

Innovation is a concept whose origins can be traced back to the work of Schumpeter [14]. Subsequently, research on innovation focused solely on the technological dimension has proliferated. For example, the findings of the study by [15], reveal more than 12,000 scientific articles addressing the term “technological innovation,” compared to more than 100 addressing other forms of innovation. Based on these findings, the authors decided to focus their analysis on types of innovation that are not technological in nature [16].

Publications introducing new terms such as “administrative” or “organizational” innovation have proliferated [16,17,18]. More specifically, the origins of the concept of managerial innovation coincide with the work of authors such as in [19,20]. Since this concept is a multidimensional phenomenon [9], it has been the subject of numerous studies [15,16].

2.2. Outlines and Theoretical Framework of Public Managerial Innovation

As mentioned above, public management innovation is multidimensional [9]. There is a wealth of research on this type of innovation [1,16,21,22,23,24,25]. However, reference [22] noted that most of this research mainly focused on the local public sector [1,24]. In this regard, reference [23] introduces the concept of “New Territorial Public Management.”

There is a wealth of research on the factors underlying local managerial innovations [24,26,25]. For example, reference [24] highlight several key success factors for local managerial innovations, including environmental and contextual factors, organizational factors, factors related to the innovation process itself, and individual factors related to leadership.

Furthermore, local managerial innovation beyond its polysemic and multidimensional nature draws on several theoretical frameworks. Reference [27] proposed the neo-institutional theory, which is based on the adaptation of organizations to their institutional environment through isomorphism and legitimacy. As for [28], they analyze the nature of territorial managerial innovation from the perspective of agency theory, in order to highlight the relationships among stakeholders who may not share the same core interests. Reference [29] propose public choice theory to understand political behavior based on the individual preferences of those involved in the process within local governments.

2.3. Links between Managerial Innovation and Local Development

Research on the role of innovation in the process of territorial development is not a recent phenomenon [30]. Indeed, reference [4] emphasize that managerial innovation serves as a lever for improving local public

performance. It is one of the fundamental conditions for development [31]. Its purpose is to contribute to local development and, more specifically, to improve the economic and social well-being of local populations. There are multiple paths to achieving this, which can be summarized as follows: sound local financial management, effective management of information and communication systems, improved human resource management, managerial leadership, and a better range of services offered by local governments.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Methodological Approach of the Study

This study takes a qualitative approach to explore the perceptions of participants involved in managerial innovation and local development processes. This approach is relevant because it provides rich, well-supported descriptions and explanations of the processes, grounded in a local context [32]. The field strategy is based on multiple case studies. This type of strategy allows for an in-depth analysis of a phenomenon to understand its specific characteristics and complexity [33], while also ensuring that the results can be generalized and reducing selection biases [34].

3.2. Sampling, Data Collection, and Analysis Protocol

Data collection took place between December 2025 and July 2026. The six municipalities of the Bamako district were selected as study sites. These municipalities were chosen using the theoretical sampling method [35], notably because they have been the subject of numerous publications and their financial resources are significantly greater than those of the other municipalities.

For data collection, a triangulation of methods and participants' discourse was used. This triangulation helps ensure the validity of the results [33]. It also provides a stronger justification for the conceptual frameworks and hypotheses [34]. Indeed, in addition to a literature review (websites, official documents, press reviews), semi-structured interviews [36], were conducted with key informants, focusing on the interview guide. This guide comprised three main themes. The first theme concerned forms of local managerial innovation. The second theme addressed the key success factors of local managerial innovations. The final theme focused on the contribution of innovations to the local development process.

Respondents were selected using the theoretical sampling method [35]. This approach made it possible to identify key informants for this study. A total of sixty-two (62) semi-structured interviews were conducted. Each semi-structured interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. All interviews were recorded and notes were taken, and they were subsequently transcribed. The data underwent qualitative and thematic content analysis following the four stages outlined by Vaismoradi et al. [37], namely: (1) initialization; (2) construction; (3) rectification; and (4) finalization. The analysis utilized percentage-based techniques.

4. Results

4.1. Description of the Six Cases

Decentralization in Mali, like in other Sahelian countries, emerged from the institutional reforms of the 1990s, following widespread public dissatisfaction with central government agencies and their style of governance [38]. It led to the reorganization of local government units in the Republic of Mali as follows: the commune, the circle, the region, and the district (Article 1, Law No. 2017-052 of October 2, 2017). As for the District of Bamako, it is divided into six communes. Table 1 presents the six cases based on the 2009 General Population and Housing Census.

Table 1. Characteristics of the six municipalities in the Bamako District

Municipalities in the Bamako District	Characteristics
Municipality 1	It has a population of over 256,216, covers an area of 34.26 km ² , and consists of nine neighborhoods.
Municipality 2	It has a population of over 160,680, covers an area of 16.81 km ² , and consists of eleven neighborhoods.
Municipality 3	It has a population of over 119,287, covers an area of 23 km ² , and consists of twenty neighborhoods.
Municipality 4	It has a population of over 200,000, covers an area of 36,768 hectares, and consists of eight neighborhoods.
Municipality 5	It has a population of over 414,668, covers an area of 41 km ² , and consists of eight neighborhoods.
Municipality 6	It has a population of over 600,000, covers an area of 8,882 hectares, and consists of ten neighborhoods.

Source: Creation of authors

4.2. Profile of Respondents

Table 2. Breakdown of responses by area of responsibility

Land Coding	Respondent Profile	Number of responses	Frequency (%)
A	Mayors and Deputy Mayors	16	25,81
B	Secretaries-General	06	09,68
C	Local government technicians	14	22,58
D	Community Development Directors	06	09,68
E	Senior officials of the Directorate General for Local Authorities (DGCT)	03	04,84
F	Chiefs of Staff	08	12,90
G	Heads of Finance	04	06,45
H	IT Managers	05	8,06
TOTAL		62	100 %

Source: Creation of authors

The results show that the majority of respondents are mayors and deputy mayors (25.81% of respondents) or local government technicians (22.58% of respondents) (Table 2). This finding can be explained by the technical nature of the questions asked and the respondents'

involvement in managerial innovation and development processes. In addition, the results show that the majority of respondents have at least ten (10) years of experience (84% of respondents) (Figure 1).

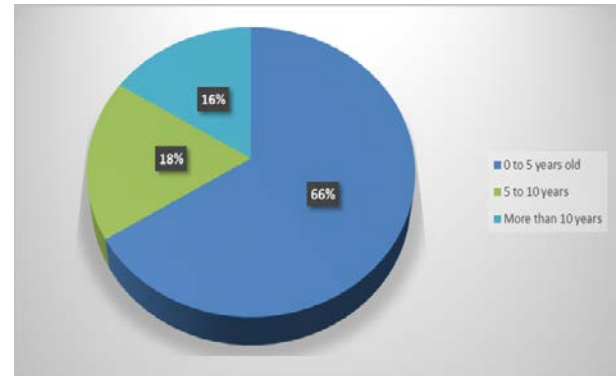


Figure 1. Distribution of responses by years of service

4.3. Forms of Managerial Innovation in the Six Municipalities of the Bamako District

According to the respondents, several types of managerial innovations are being implemented within their municipal communities (Table 3).

Table 3. Characteristics of the managerial innovations implemented by the participating municipal authorities

Local governments	Types of managerial innovations
Municipality 1	Human Resources; Information and Communication Systems; Strategies
Municipality 2	Human Resources; Organization; Information and Communication Systems
Municipality 3	Human Resources; Information and Communication Systems; Organization
Municipality 4	Human Resources; Organization; ICT
Municipality 5	Human Resources; Information and Communication Systems
Municipality 6	Human Resources; ICT; Strategies/Organizations

Source: Creation of authors

The field study reveals a wide range of managerial innovations implemented in the six (06) municipal authorities. In total, three (03) types of innovations were identified: human resources-related innovations, ICT-focused innovations, and innovations based on strategies and/or organizational structures.

4.3.1. Human Resources Management Innovations

The results of the field study in the six municipalities examined reveal models of managerial innovation focused on human resources. For example, respondents highlighted training and capacity-building initiatives, as well as other models of human resources innovation, as demonstrated by the three excerpts below:

“In recent years, several capacity-building sessions have been organized for elected officials, government representatives, civil society organizations, and decentralized government agencies... in the field of management. We are doing everything we can to ensure the continuity of these training programs.” (Site E)

“It is through training programs, workshops, and capacity-building initiatives that we will be able to enhance our staff’s skills and, in turn, create frameworks for local development” (Site D)

“Our managers demonstrate great adaptability and often act as mediators to resolve conflicts among staff members, because the community’s development depends on it” (Site C)

However, some respondents pointed out that these training programs or capacity-building initiatives are intended solely for elected officials, thereby excluding other stakeholders. In addition, other respondents lamented the lack of support measures or incentives associated with the training programs, as well as the disconnect between the training and local realities, as illustrated by the two excerpts below:

“Training sessions are usually organized exclusively for elected officials. We’ve always brought this to the attention of the relevant authorities, but unfortunately, it’s always the same story nothing changes.” (Site F)

“There are no support measures, so it’s hard to make time for all the training sessions, even though we know they’re important and necessary for our careers. Also, it’s very important to tailor the training content to the needs and realities of the municipality; otherwise, it will be a waste of time and financial resources” (Site H)

4.3.2. Management Innovations Centered on ICT Technologies

The results of the field study reveal managerial innovations related to ICT (information and communication technology) in certain municipal groups (Municipalities 1, 2, 3, and 6), as demonstrated by the excerpts below:

“Today, the urban municipalities in the Bamako district have either a website or a Facebook page for disseminating information, with the aim of facilitating the sharing of information both internally and with the public” (Site H)

“To my knowledge, all municipalities in the Bamako district have implemented digital systems that allow residents to pay taxes via mobile money” (Site B)

On the other hand, some respondents highlighted several limitations, including those related to resources, a shortage of computers, unexpected power outages, lack of computer maintenance, or connection issues:

“It’s sad to say, but we face frequent outages, poor computer maintenance, connection issues, and there aren’t enough computers for everyone.” (Site A)

4.3.3. Managerial Innovations Based on Strategies and/or Organizational Structures

The findings highlight examples of legislative and regulatory measures related to strategic and/or organizational innovations. For instance, the legislation provides for collective planning in cases involving the living conditions of local populations or issues related to land use planning or the environment, as well as annual public debates on municipal budgets. However, the interviews conducted reveal that public participation in strategies or organizational structures related to local development is largely lacking, or even nonexistent, often

resulting in the stalling of municipal projects, as demonstrated by the two excerpts below:

“It’s true that the laws call for ongoing consultation with local communities regarding the functioning of local governments. But in practice, such local consultation is rare due to a lack of financial resources.” (Site A)

“There is virtually no relationship between local residents and their municipal council members. In other words, council members are not in the habit of consulting residents on development strategies. This situation leads some citizens to try to block the municipality’s development projects by using their influence” (Site E). On a different note, other respondents highlighted citizens’ lack of interest in the life of their communities:

“Most citizens are unaware of their rights and responsibilities. They know very little about how local governments operate if not to say that they don’t attach enough importance to it.” (Site B).

4.4. Factors Contributing to the Success of Managerial Innovations in the Six Municipalities

The results highlight multiple key factors for the success of managerial innovations. However, three essential factors stand out in the Malian context: the political will and technical capacity of managers (35%), the availability of resources (25%), and incentives or support measures (25%) (Figure 2).

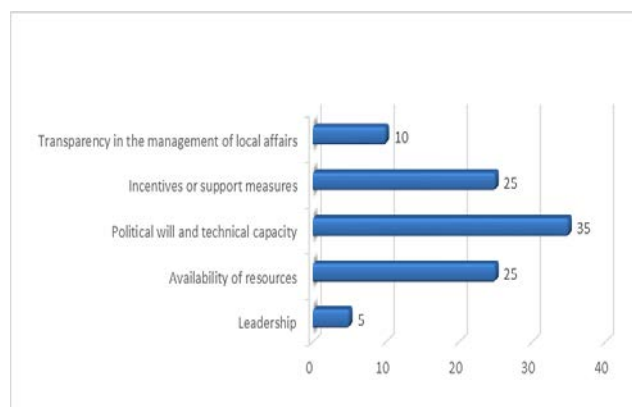


Figure 2. Success Factors for Managerial Innovations

4.5. The Role of Managerial Innovations in Local Development

The findings regarding the contribution of managerial innovations to local development focus on five key areas: sound local financial management, improved human resources management, effective management of information and communication systems, managerial leadership, and improved service delivery by local governments.

4.5.1. Local Financial Management

Field research conducted in the six municipalities under study shows that the managerial innovations implemented have had little impact on local financial management. While these innovations have led to the introduction of a

few new budget management mechanisms, they have not resulted in increased revenue or reduced capital expenditures, as the excerpts below demonstrate:

"We're doing the best we can. There are too many expenses to cover. Unfortunately, the town hall's internal resources are far from sufficient to cover the community's expenses" (Site A)

"In 2024, the town hall had planned for capital expenditures of over a billion, but it only spent 214 million. Given this situation, it's very difficult to achieve any kind of development" (Site G)

In addition, the results reveal a lack of transparency in the financial management of municipalities:

"It's sad, but we have to admit that our municipalities' financial resources aren't being used properly if we're being honest." (Site F)

4.5.2. Human Resources Management

All respondents emphasized the importance of human resources in the context of the managerial innovation initiatives underway in the six municipalities:

"The success of any innovation requires higher-quality human resources capable of taking action to promote sustainable local development" (Site D)

Similarly, other respondents emphasized the importance of human resources management in improving the local development process:

"Effective human resources management can be a key driver of local organizational performance. When we talk about performance, we're talking about development" (Site A)

However, the results reveal average and even poor human resources management, which consequently has little impact on local development strategies, as demonstrated in the excerpt below:

"Nepotism has gone too far. Some elected officials run our municipalities as if they were family property. For example, there are enough qualified staff to carry out activities related to the municipality's development, but unfortunately, employees are not always hired as they should be. More often than not, holding staff accountable for their duties remains a serious problem. This situation strains relationships among staff and frequently leads to conflicts. Yet it is very difficult to achieve genuine development without harmony among colleagues and peace" (Site D)

4.5.3. Management of Information and Communication Systems

The interviewees placed particular emphasis on the critical importance of information and communication systems in local development strategies:

"In the pursuit of performance, information systems particularly ICT are important tools, especially for financial services in our communities" (Site G)

"Communication helps build trust among stakeholders. This trust is essential to community development processes" (Site D)

"Teamwork requires communication; without it, there can be no innovation or development" (Site A)

However, the results of the field study reveal a low level of communication:

"Often, official information that should be accessible to

everyone information that can help the community function smoothly remains confidential" (Site C)

"We have a serious problem with information sharing. Information isn't provided in a timely manner. Often, some people are informed about a situation, while at the same time others are not, and this lack of information undermines collaboration" (Site F)

4.5.4. Managerial Leadership

The findings of this research highlight the importance of managerial leadership (both political and administrative) in driving managerial innovation and, consequently, in achieving the ultimate goal of local development: improving the living conditions of communities:

"Political will and the enthusiasm of administrative staff are essential prerequisites for the implementation of new practices" (Site D)

"Elected officials and government executives in local governments play a key role in driving territorial reforms. The contribution and leadership of each of these individuals are essential to the development of the municipality" (Site B)

Similarly, the results highlight examples of leadership behavior (Municipalities 1, 4, and 6), as demonstrated by the three excerpts below:

"I usually use participatory management, because it's important to give all stakeholders a voice before making a decision" (Site A)

"We must avoid imposing our will at all costs, especially since we have the opportunity to give our employees a certain amount of responsibility, while ensuring that the municipality's operations run smoothly" (Site B)

"For me, empowering employees is crucial. This will allow them to play a major role in achieving our goals. However, it's important to know how to guide them back on track when necessary" (Site E)

On the other hand, other respondents lamented the lack of support from policymakers for local social initiatives:

"We are in a situation where elected officials are significantly underinvolved. They generally have difficulty maintaining good relationships with city hall staff, as well as with stakeholders in development processes" (Site D)

Similarly, some respondents highlighted the inconsistency in managerial practices between national and local policymakers, pointing to a problem with leadership or communication:

"More often than not, our municipalities suffer from a lack of interaction between stakeholders at the national and local levels; without that, there can be no local development." (Site D)

4.5.5. Services Offered by Local Governments

It is clear from the majority of the interviews conducted that, overall, managerial innovations contribute moderately to improving the provision of services to citizens and, consequently, to local development. For example, in the area of basic services (legalization of diplomas and other certificates, issuance of birth certificates), local residents most often complain about the high costs of the services provided, as shown in the excerpt below:

"When we talk about innovation and the smooth

running of the municipality, we need financial resources; yet most of our fellow citizens complain about the cost of our services. That's understandable some simply don't have enough money but for others, it's more a matter of unwillingness, and that's something we cannot tolerate." (Site A)

In the sanitation sector, household waste management is largely the responsibility of private companies rather than municipal authorities, which often results in poor service for residents:

"We are involved in household waste management, but in reality, it is the economic interest groups (EIGs) that handle waste collection. Unfortunately, these small businesses are more interested in their profits than in truly improving the environment." (Site C)

5. Discussion

The findings revolve around three key points. First, the findings demonstrate a variety of managerial innovations implemented by the six municipalities in the Bamako district: human resources; information and communication systems; and strategies and/or organizational structures. These findings support the view of authors such as in [1,39,21], that there are multiple managerial innovations within public organizations, particularly local governments. Second, the findings reveal multiple factors contributing to the success of local managerial innovations: the political will and technical capacity of managers; the availability of resources; incentives or support measures; transparency in the management of local affairs; and leadership. These findings are consistent with those of authors such as in [3,40,41], who have highlighted factors driving public managerial innovation, such as human, technical, environmental, contextual, and organizational factors.

Third, the results show that the impact of innovations on the local development process is mixed. On the one hand, the managerial innovations implemented by the six municipalities studied have generally facilitated the adoption of new management systems or ICT technologies [42]. As a significant example, internal communication within the six municipalities has improved significantly thanks to new technological tools and administrative social networks [1]. These findings are consistent with those of [43], who emphasize that communication can improve coordination among stakeholders; or those of [44], who view it as another strategy for local engagement; or those of [45], who argue that it could help mitigate the drawbacks associated with uncertainty and change; or those of [46], who note that it appears to be a factor in preventing and/or reducing negative organizational deviance. On the other hand, the managerial innovations implemented by the six municipalities studied have had little impact on improving the economic and social well-being of local populations, particularly in terms of the services offered to citizens. This situation can be explained by the fact that these municipalities, in their pursuit of territorial development or local development [12], frequently face a shortage of resources [22], particularly human, natural, and financial resources. Similarly, the findings reveal shortcomings related to

policy and decision-making issues at the municipal council level, leading to inappropriate political and administrative leadership [47]. "The ineffectiveness of local managerial innovations regarding local development strategies can also be explained by a lack of cooperation and interaction among stakeholders, causing the region to remain a passive space that is subject to the changes and constraints of its external environment" [48].

6. Conclusion

The objective of this study was to understand and explain new management practices and their contribution to local development processes in the Sahelian context, particularly within municipal governments in Mali. Our findings reveal a variety of managerial innovations being implemented in Malian municipalities. These innovations relate to human resources, ICT technologies, and strategies and/or organizational structures. Our findings also show that while these innovations certainly represent progress and have consequently facilitated the implementation of new management, communication, IT, and other systems, they do not contribute significantly to local development processes in Mali. This situation can be explained by the fact that local management innovations, like other public innovations, continue to face several obstacles, such as a lack of resources, weak incentives or support measures, a lack of political will, technical limitations, and a lack of transparency in the management of affairs (particularly corruption).

Recommendations

The recommendations in this article are based on the summary of results presented in Figure 3 below:

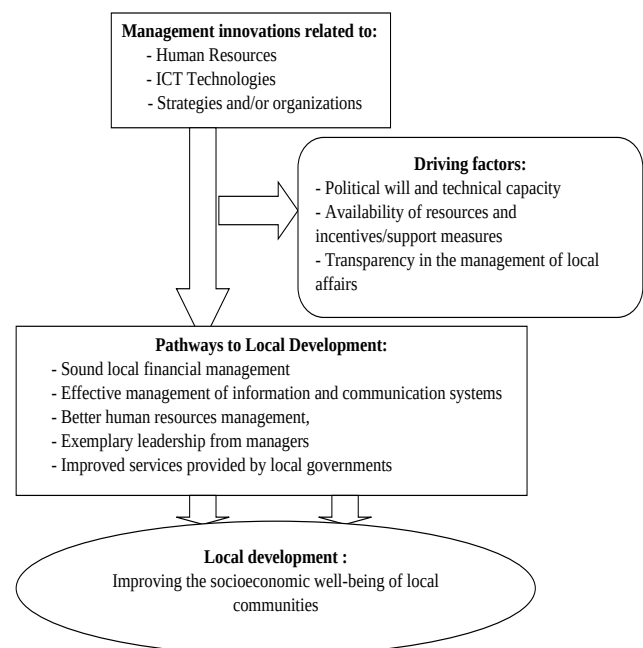


Figure 3. Integrated model of managerial innovations that promote local development

Implications

In terms of managerial implications, our research helps identify forms of local managerial innovation. It provides local managers, local actors, and other stakeholders with a framework for analyzing their practices and methods, with the aim of improving them and, consequently, influencing local development. From a scientific perspective, research on local managerial innovation and local development, particularly in the sub-Saharan context, is scarce. Our research helps to fill this gap to some extent. In addition, our research has contributed to expanding our understanding of the concepts of local managerial innovation and local development.

Limitations and Prospects for Future Research

The findings of this study are based on a case-study methodology and are therefore subject to limitations in terms of generalizability. In terms of future research, we should aim to expand the study to all local governments in Mali.

Disclosure Statement

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Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the conclusions of this study are presented in the main article

Declarations of Ethics Approval and Informed Consent

The research process complied with the ethical standards of the University of Social Sciences and Management in Bamako (USSGB). Ethical considerations were taken into account from the start, after getting approval from the Research Ethics Approval Committee under reference 2025_CURES_121, dated December 02, 2025. The research was carried out strictly following the rules for protecting participants' rights, in line with the Helsinki Declaration. Human participants gave their verbal consent for the use of their data.

Author contributions: Mahamadou Sidibe: Writing—original draft, Software, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis. Bakary Koné: Data curation, Conceptualization. Soboua Thera: Writing—review & Editing, Supervision.

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