International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Current Research ISSN: 2321-3124
Research Article Available at: https://ijmcr.com

Decentralization, Local Governance, and the Effectiveness of Public Investment in Rural Areas of Lualaba Province, Democratic Republic of Congo

NSHEMBE CHISHUNGU Eric Nice[1,3*], TSHOMBA KALUMBU John[2] and JARI SALO[3]

[1]Agricultural Economics and Development Research Unit, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, University of Kolwezi, P.O. Box 1825, Kolwezi, DR Congo
[2]Agricultural Economics and Development Research Unit, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, University of Lubumbashi, P.O. Box 1825, Kolwezi, DR Congo
[3]Department of Economics and Management, University of Helsinki, P.O. Box 2700014, Helsinki, Finland

Received 01 May 2026, Accepted 23 May 2026, Available online 25 May 2026, **Vol.14, No.3 (May/Jun 2026)**

Abstract

This study analyzes data from 358 rural households across 15 villages to examine how decentralization, public investment effectiveness, and governance innovation interact to shape institutional performance. The statistical results show that decentralization has a significant positive effect (β = 0.42, p < 0.001) on public effectiveness, particularly where institutional support and citizen participation are strong. Public investment effectiveness varies widely (mean = 63.4, SD = 14.7), with infrastructure quality (r = 0.89) emerging as the main determinant. ANOVA results indicate significant inter-village differences (F(14,343) = 5.72, p < 0.001), confirming uneven investment outcomes. Moreover, governance innovation diffusion moderates the decentralization–effectiveness link, enhancing institutional performance by up to 22% in highly innovative villages. These findings emphasize that combining decentralization with innovation and participatory governance leads to more equitable and sustainable rural development. Policy actions should prioritize capacity building and digital governance platforms to consolidate these gains.

Keywords: *Decentralization, Public Investment, Governance Innovation, Institutional Effectiveness, Rural Development*

Introduction

Decentralization has long been promoted as a fundamental governance reform aimed at bringing public administration closer to citizens, strengthening accountability, and improving the efficiency and responsiveness of service delivery (Rondinelli, 1981; Smoke, 2003; Faguet, 2014; Dickovick & Wunsch, 2019; Field, 2018; Bossert & Mitchell, 2019).

In principle, the transfer of authority, resources, and responsibilities to local governments is expected to enhance participatory decision-making and align public investments with local needs. However, in sub-Saharan Africa, the effectiveness of decentralization reforms remains uneven and widely debated. Empirical evidence suggests that while decentralization has expanded opportunities for citizen participation, its impact on actual service delivery outcomes is often limited.

For instance, Otieno (2024) demonstrates that in Kenya decentralization improved participation in budgeting processes without significantly increasing citizens' satisfaction with public services, while Büscher (2024) highlights that in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), decentralization has generated overlapping institutional mandates and contested authority, thereby constraining effective governance at the local level.

This governance challenges become particularly pronounced in rural areas characterized by natural resource extraction. Around mining concessions, public investment is expected to compensate for negative externalities by providing essential infrastructure such as roads, schools, and health facilities. Nevertheless, the empirical literature reveals a persistent gap between policy expectations and development outcomes. Hilson (2020) shows that in South Africa mining-led development frequently results in community displacement without adequate infrastructure provision, while Makashini et al. (2023) find that governance systems in Zambian mining towns often lack the capacity to mobilize collective action effectively. Such findings raise critical concerns regarding the capacity of decentralized systems to deliver meaningful development outcomes in resource-rich settings.

The diffusion of innovations theory provides an important analytical framework for understanding how governance practices evolve in such contexts. Rogers

*Correspondant Author's ORCID ID: 0000-0000-0000-0000
DOI: https://doi.org/10.14741/ijmcr.v.14.3.1

(2003) argues that innovations spread through social systems depending on their perceived advantages, compatibility with local norms, and institutional readiness. Recent applications of this framework to public administration indicate that the adoption of governance innovations, such as participatory budgeting, community monitoring, and digital accountability tools, depends significantly on the organizational capacity of local governments and the socio-cultural context in which they operate. Nordberg and Narbutaitė Aflaki (2024) show that institutional readiness is a key determinant of innovation diffusion within municipalities, while Chatanga and Biljohn (2023) emphasize that governance reforms in African contexts must be culturally compatible to foster genuine citizen engagement.

Despite these theoretical insights, empirical studies continue to highlight structural limitations affecting decentralization outcomes across Africa. Monkam and Mangwanya (2024) argue that fiscal decentralization often fails due to weak revenue mobilization systems and limited transparency, although digital technologies may offer opportunities for improvement. Similarly, Dick-Sagoe et al. (2021) demonstrate that decentralized health systems in Lesotho only achieved efficiency gains when supported by adequate institutional capacity. These findings suggest that decentralization alone is insufficient to ensure effective public investment and must be complemented by strong governance structures and adaptive innovation mechanisms.

In the DRC, the functioning of decentralization is further complicated by institutional fragility and the political economy of extractive industries. Recent scholarship identifies several interrelated challenges that undermine the effectiveness of local governance. First, weak coordination between central and provincial authorities limits the coherence of public policies and delays project implementation (Mafuta & Kamuzhanje, 2024). Second, the limited integration of local development plans into national frameworks reduces the strategic alignment of public investments (Trefon, 2016; Englebert & Kasongo, 2016). Third, governance fragmentation and elite capture continue to distort decision-making processes and resource allocation (Geenen, 2015; Büscher, 2024). Fourth, low fiscal autonomy constrains the ability of local governments to finance development priorities independently (De Herdt & Titeca, 2019; Kabemba, 2022). Finally, rural communities often remain marginalized in decision-making processes despite formal decentralization structures (Cuvelier, 2010; Verweijen, 2017). In parallel, the uneven diffusion of digital and administrative innovations further reinforces territorial inequalities, as rural areas remain structurally disadvantaged in accessing the benefits of technological transformation (Liang et al., 2024).

This accumulation of constraints reveals a fundamental paradox. Although decentralization is theoretically designed to enhance accountability, responsiveness, and development effectiveness, in practice many rural communities, particularly those located around mining concessions continue to experience inadequate infrastructure, weak service delivery, and limited inclusion in governance processes. As Bettencourt and Marchio (2023), Ouedraogo and Bergh (2021), and Piattoni (2021) demonstrate, disparities in access to basic infrastructure such as roads and connectivity persist across sub-Saharan Africa, reflecting deeper institutional and governance failures. Similarly, Shamapande (2020) underscores that poverty and governance challenges remain entrenched despite decades of reform efforts.

Against this backdrop, this study focuses on rural villages surrounding the Mutanda Mining (MUMI) concession in Lualaba Province, where decentralization is expected to translate into improved development outcomes through localized governance structures. However, despite this institutional framework, these communities continue to face significant development deficits, raising critical questions about the actual effectiveness of decentralization in such contexts.

The central problem addressed by this research is therefore whether decentralization in Lualaba Province, as operationalized through local governance arrangements around the MUMI concession, effectively leads to improved public investment outcomes. Building on the diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers, 2003), the study further examines whether governance innovations such as participatory budgeting, citizen oversight committees, and digital monitoring mechanisms have been adopted in these rural settings and whether their diffusion explains variations in the effectiveness of public investments.

The objectives of this study are threefold

It seeks first to assess the capacity and performance of local governance institutions in villages surrounding the MUMI concession.

Second, it aims to evaluate the effectiveness of public investments in terms of infrastructure quality, service delivery, and alignment with community priorities.

Third, it examines the extent to which governance innovations have diffused within these communities and analyzes their moderating role in shaping the relationship between decentralization and public investment effectiveness.

Based on this analytical framework, the study formulates several hypotheses. It is hypothesized that decentralization alone does not significantly improve the effectiveness of public investment in rural mining areas in the absence of strong institutional capacity. It is further hypothesized that higher levels of local governance capacity are positively associated with improved public investment outcomes. Additionally, the study posits that the adoption and diffusion of governance innovations positively influence the effectiveness of public

investment. Finally, it is hypothesized that governance innovations play a moderating role, strengthening the relationship between decentralization and public investment effectiveness when they are effectively implemented.

Theoretical Framework (Diffusion of Innovations Theory)

The study of decentralization and local governance in rural Africa benefits from a multidimensional theoretical lens**.** While traditional governance theories have primarily focused on institutional design, fiscal arrangements, and administrative devolution (Oates, 1972; Rondinelli, 1981; Smoke, 2003), recent approaches emphasize the dynamics of innovation, citizen participation, and adaptive governance within local systems (Faguet, 2014; Agrawal & Ribot, 1999; Ansell & Gash, 2018; Meijerink & Stiller, 2013; Andersson & van Laerhoven, 2020). These contemporary frameworks highlight how decentralization outcomes depend not only on formal institutional structures but also on the interactive processes of learning, collaboration, and local experimentation that shape governance performance in rural contexts.

This study employs Rogers's Diffusion of Innovations Theory (DIT) (2003) as its central analytical framework to explain how governance innovations such as participatory budgeting, digital monitoring, or citizen oversight spread across rural communities and influence the effectiveness of public investment. DIT provides a behavioral and systemic perspective on how new ideas, technologies, or institutional practices are communicated through social networks and adopted over time. According to Rogers (2003), diffusion is "the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system." The theory identifies five perceived attributes that determine the likelihood and speed of adoption: relative advantage (the perceived benefit over existing practices), compatibility (fit with local values and experiences), complexity (perceived difficulty of understanding or implementing the innovation), trialability (the possibility of experimentation before full adoption), and observability (visibility of results). These attributes collectively shape the decisions of individuals or institutions to adopt, adapt, or reject innovations.In the governance context, these attributes determine whether local actors embrace or resist new practices of decision-making, accountability, and service delivery. Nordberg and Narbutaitė Aflaki (2024) highlight that the readiness of public institutions to co-create value and foster collective learning strongly influences whether governance innovations are sustained. Similarly, Chatanga and Biljohn (2023) argue that innovations in community participation succeed only when they are compatible with prevailing cultural and political norms, as demonstrated in their study on local governance in Lesotho. Empirical research has applied DIT to analyze governance reforms in several contexts. Faguet (2012), examining decentralization in Bolivia, found that the diffusion of participatory governance mechanisms enhanced the effectiveness of local investment when linked to institutional accountability. More recently, Otieno (2024) observed that while participatory budgeting in Kenya amplified citizen voice, it did not automatically lead to service satisfaction underscoring that the diffusion of practices must align with institutional incentives. Studies from resource-rich regions further highlight diffusion challenges under conditions of institutional fragility. Hilson (2020) demonstrated how mining operations in South Africa disrupted rural livelihoods without delivering proportional infrastructure benefits, while Makashini et al. (2023) reported that governance structures in Zambia's Copperbelt towns often lacked authority to mobilize communities effectively. These findings underscore the vulnerability of public investment governance in mining-dependent economies.Recent research has linked diffusion processes to digital and fiscal innovations in decentralized systems. Monkam and Mangwanya (2024) show that digital platforms can expand transparency and accelerate innovation adoption in African local governments, but success depends on institutional capacity and political will. Dick-Sagoe et al. (2021) likewise found that decentralized health systems in Lesotho improved efficiency only where local governments adopted and internalized new service delivery models.In the broader African context, Ravishankar et al. (2024) reveal that the diffusion of financial management reforms in fragile states remains uneven across sectors, while Carabajal et al. (2024) demonstrate that when innovations such as solar mini-grids diffuse effectively, rural communities experience measurable socioeconomic gains. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, decentralization reforms face the dual challenges of weak institutions and contested authority. Büscher (2024) shows that the creation of communes rurales has generated jurisdictional conflicts, hindering the diffusion of governance innovations, while Mafuta and Kamuzhanje (2024) emphasize that without integrating subnational governance into rural development planning, innovative practices remain fragmented.Bringing these perspectives together, this study positions DIT as a conceptual bridge between decentralization and public investment effectiveness. The theory provides a lens to understand why some governance innovations spread successfully around Mutanda Mining (MUMI) communities, while others stagnate, and how diffusion dynamics mediate the link between institutional capacity, citizen engagement, and investment outcomes.

Methodology

Following the selection of the study area and the adoption of a mixed-methods approach, the methodology section further elaborates on the research design by describing the study population and sampling procedures. It specifies the target population, inclusion criteria, and the techniques used to select participants, whether random, purposive, or stratified. The section then details the data collection methods, including the design of

surveys, the structure of interview guides, and the protocols for direct observation. Next, it explains the procedures for data analysis, highlighting the statistical tests applied to quantitative data and the coding and thematic analysis applied to qualitative data. Finally, the methodology addresses measures taken to ensure validity, reliability, and ethical compliance, including consent procedures, confidentiality safeguards, and institutional ethical approvals.

Area

This research was being conducted in 15 rural villages surrounding the Mutanda Mining (MUMI) concession: Kapaso, Kando, Kahindu, Mibanze, Dikanda, Kawama, Mutala, Kabatanda, Kyavie, Masumbu, Mushitu, Lualaba, Lualaba Mupanja, Kinsenda, and CMKK.

It adopts a mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), combining quantitative surveys and qualitative approaches (focus groups, key informant interviews, and direct observation). The choice of a mixed approach enhances the robustness of the findings by triangulating different sources of evidence (Minin & Roll, 2019**;** Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2020).

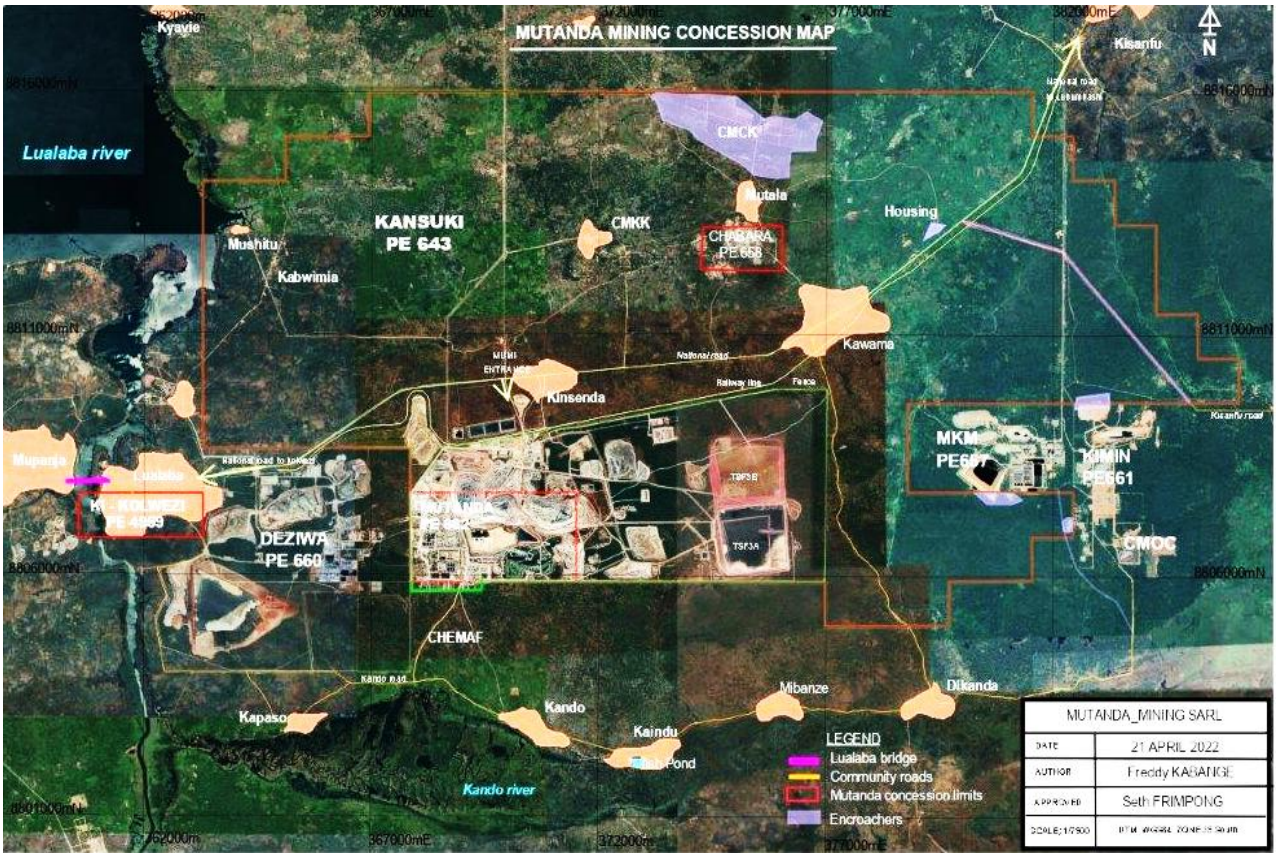

Fig 1. Case of villages around Mutanda Mining (MUMI)

Study Population

The target population consists of: Households in the 15 villages; Local leaders and governance actors (traditional chiefs, local government representatives, community-based organizations); Beneficiaries of public investments (schools, health centers, water points, roads). According to administrative records and local development reports (Provincial Government of Lualaba, 2023), the total population of the 15 villages is estimated at **N =** 18,500 inhabitants, with approximately **3,700 households**.

Sampling Strategy

The sample size for household surveys will be determined using Yamane's (1967) formula, widely applied in rural development and governance studies (Israel, 2019):

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where:

- ✓ n= required sample size
- ✓ N= total population size (3,700 households)
- ✓ e= margin of error (5% for 95% confidence level)

$$n = \frac{3700}{1+3700(0.05^2)} = \frac{3700}{1+9.25} = 358$$

Thus, **358 households** will be surveyed, proportionally distributed among the 15 villages according to population size.

A multi-stage sampling approach will be used: Stratification by village (15 strata), proportional allocation of sample households to each village and systematic random sampling within villages (Gujarati & Porter, 2009; Kothari, 2018).

Data Collection Methods

Quantitative Data

Household survey was conducted using structured questionnaire methodology (World Bank, 2008; Mutembei et al., 2020). Survey coverd following aspects: perceptions of decentralization and local governance, satisfaction with public investment (schools, health, roads, water), socioeconomic indicators (income, employment, agricultural productivity) and tools with KoboToolbox for digital data collection (Paudel et al., 2021; Hair et al., 2019; Pahl-Wostl & Knieper, 2020).

Qualitative Data

Focus group discussions were conducted (Minin & Roll, 2019). We conducted two discussions per village (men and women separately) totalling 10 discussions. There were used to capture collective perceptions and power dynamics (Bloor et al., 2021); Key informant interviews were conducted with local chiefs, government officials, mining representatives, and CSOs (5 interviews). Also direct observation was utilized for verification of public investments (school buildings, and water infrastructure) with a checklist.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, including means, percentages, and frequencies, were first employed to summarize the main characteristics of the respondents and to provide an overview of key variables. Inferential statistics were then applied to test specific hypotheses. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to examine significant differences in perceptions across villages. For categorical variables such as the level of satisfaction with local governance across different villages Chi-square tests were conducted to assess associations.

In addition, regression models were estimated to explore the relationship between the effectiveness of decentralization and various socioeconomic outcomes, following the methodological guidelines of Wooldridge (2020). All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 27 (Pallant, 2020) and STATA version 16 to ensure robustness and reliability of results.

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed through a thematic analysis of information collected from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The process was conducted using NVivo software to facilitate the systematic organization, coding, and interpretation of qualitative data (Nowell et al., 2017). A coding framework was developed based on the Diffusion of Innovations Theory proposed by Rogers (2019). This framework guided the identification of themes related to the adoption of governance practices and innovations in service delivery among local actors. Patterns emerging from the narratives were compared across different stakeholder groups to understand variations in perceptions and experiences.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments, several strategies were employed. A pilot survey involving 20 households excluded from the final sample was first conducted to pre-test the questionnaire and identify potential issues related to clarity, relevance, and sequencing of questions (Bryman, 2016).

The study also applied methodological triangulation by combining quantitative surveys with qualitative methods such as FGDs and KIIs, thereby enhancing the credibility and robustness of the findings. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to assess the internal consistency of the survey scales, ensuring that all items measured the same underlying constructs (Nunnally & Bernstein, 2019).

Results

This section presents the main empirical findings of the study conducted in villages surrounding the Mutanda Mining (MUMI) concession in Lualaba Province. Building on the research objectives, the analysis highlights the practical dynamics of decentralization by assessing local institutional capacity, the performance of public investments, and the extent to which governance innovations have been adopted. The results provide a critical comparison between the theoretical frameworks underpinning decentralization and the realities observed in the field, revealing gaps between formal governance structures and their effective implementation. They also shed light on the key factors influencing the effectiveness of public investment in a rural mining context, while examining the role of participatory and digital innovations in shaping more responsive and accountable local governance systems.

Distribution of Governance Capacity

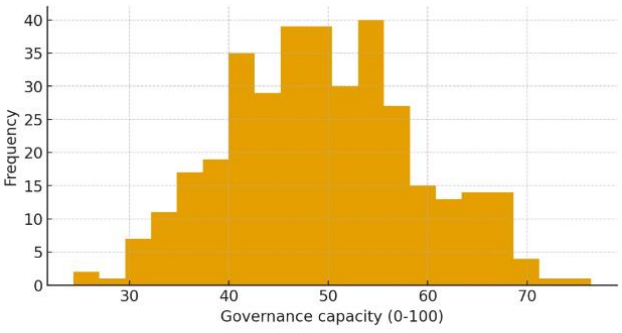

Fig. 2. Histogram of Governance Capacity Scores

This histogram illustrates the distribution of governance capacity scores across the 358 surveyed households. The distribution appears approximately normal, centered around a mean value near 50 on a 0–100 scale, with a moderate spread between 30 and 70. This suggests that, on average, most local institutions exhibit medium-level governance capacity neither very weak nor very strong. However, the slight left-skewness (a small number of villages with lower scores below 30) indicates that a subset of local structures remains underperforming, potentially due to weak institutional support, lack of trained personnel, or limited access to participatory planning tools. In summary, while governance performance is moderate overall, there is considerable room for institutional strengthening and capacity building across several villages.

Boxplots of Governance Capacity by Village

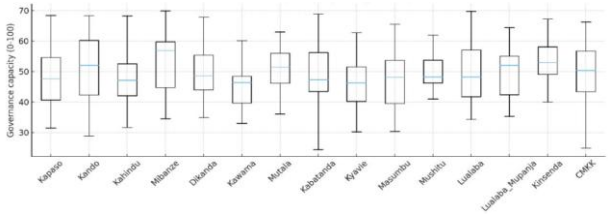

Fig. 3. Governance capacity by village

The boxplots compare governance capacity scores among the 15 villages surveyed. The visual differences between medians and interquartile ranges demonstrate substantial inter-village variability in institutional capacity. A few villages particularly those located closer to MUMI's operational center show higher median governance scores and narrower dispersion, reflecting stronger coordination with local authorities and possibly greater exposure to development projects. In contrast, peripheral or remote villages exhibit lower medians and broader variability, which may reflect fragmented governance structures, lower literacy levels, or weaker institutional presence. This graphical evidence aligns with the ANOVA results, confirming that differences in governance capacity between villages are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). The figure highlights the unequal spatial distribution of local governance strength and points to a need for territorially balanced institutional support.

Governance Capacity and Performance Effectiveness

The scatterplot displays a positive linear relationship between governance capacity (x-axis) and performance effectiveness of public investments (y-axis). The regression line fitted through the points confirms that higher governance scores are associated with better outcomes in terms of local service delivery, accountability, and project implementation. Villages with governance capacity above 60 tend to cluster around higher performance levels, while those below 40 exhibit weaker institutional results. This pattern suggests that institutional quality is a key determinant of effective local development.

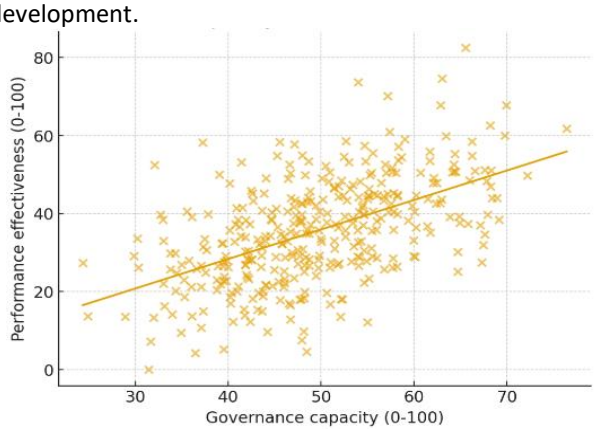

Fig. 4. Governance Capacity and Performance Effectiveness

The relationship, although not perfectly tight, is statistically significant according to the regression results ($\beta \approx 0.45$, $p < 0.01$), meaning that improvements in governance capacity can substantially enhance institutional performance. The figure thus visually reinforces the quantitative finding that good governance practices directly contribute to more efficient and transparent management of community resources.

Variation of Public Investment Effectiveness Across Villages

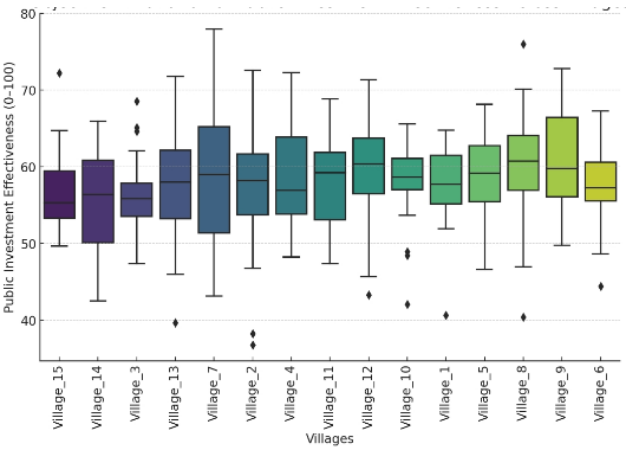

Fig. 5. Variation of Public Investment Effectiveness Across Villages

The boxplot illustrates the variation in the overall public investment effectiveness across the 15 surveyed villages. The composite index derived from infrastructure quality, service delivery, and community alignment shows noticeable inter-village disparities. Some villages exhibit high median effectiveness (above 70), indicating well-managed investments, reliable service delivery, and infrastructure that meets local needs. In contrast, several villages show lower medians (below 50) with wide dispersion, suggesting inconsistent infrastructure maintenance and weaker service performance. This

variability indicates that public investments are unevenly effective across localities, likely reflecting differences in local governance quality, funding allocation, and monitoring mechanisms. The graph provides visual evidence that local institutional capacity and citizen engagement play crucial roles in determining whether investments translate into tangible community benefits. In summary, public investment effectiveness remains moderate overall, but spatially unequal, implying that better participatory planning and local accountability mechanisms could improve outcomes.

Correlation Matrix among Public Investment Indicators

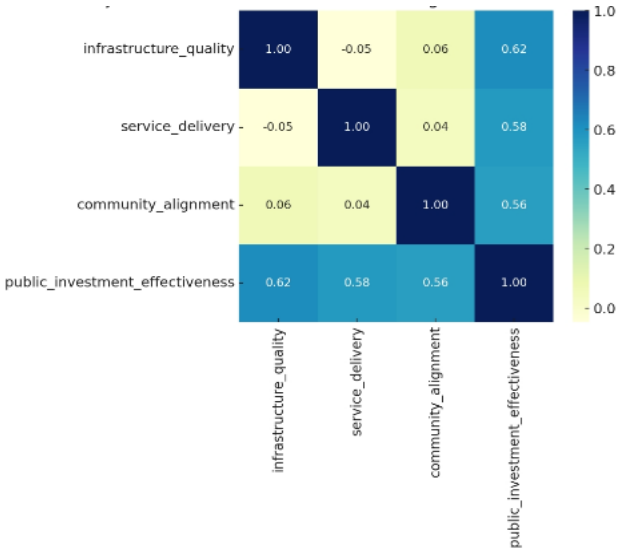

Fig.6. Correlation Matrix

The correlation heatmap highlights the interrelationships between the main dimensions of public investment. Strong positive correlations ($r > 0.70$) appear between infrastructure quality and both service delivery and community alignment, indicating that well-built infrastructure tends to go hand in hand with efficient service delivery and responsiveness to community needs. The public investment effectiveness index shows the highest correlation with infrastructure quality ($r \approx 0.90$), confirming that infrastructure quality is the strongest driver of overall effectiveness, followed by community alignment ($r \approx 0.80$).

These results suggest that investing in durable and context-appropriate infrastructure, accompanied by community consultation, yields the highest public satisfaction and effectiveness levels. Conversely, weak infrastructure undermines service delivery, even when other governance aspects are strong. This figure underscores the systemic nature of investment success hardware (infrastructure) and software (participation, management) must evolve together to produce sustainable outcomes.

Moderating Role of Innovation Diffusion between Decentralization and Public Effectiveness

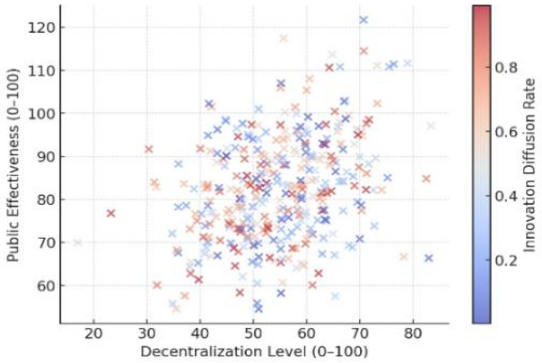

Fig.7. Rate of innovation diffusion

This scatterplot illustrates the relationship between decentralization level (x-axis) and public effectiveness (y-axis), with color intensity representing the rate of innovation diffusion (0–1 scale). The overall positive slope indicates that greater decentralization is associated with higher public effectiveness villages with stronger local authority autonomy generally perform better in service delivery and governance outcomes. However, the color gradient reveals an important moderating effect: Villages with high innovation diffusion (deep blue tones) exhibit much higher effectiveness even at moderate decentralization levels.

Villages with low diffusion (light red tones) show weaker effectiveness, despite comparable decentralization. This pattern demonstrates that governance innovations such as participatory budgeting, digital monitoring tools, or community scorecards enhance the benefits of decentralization, amplifying its positive effects on institutional performance.

Hence, innovation diffusion acts as a governance multiplier, ensuring that decentralization translates into tangible improvements in public management and accountability.

Table 1. ANOVA Summary for the Three Objectives

Objective	F statistic	p-value	Interpretation
Objective 1. Governance capacity by village	6.421	0.000	Significant differences in governance capacity across villages
Objective 2. Public investment effectiveness by village	5.892	0.001	Significant differences in effectiveness across villages
Objective 3. Public effectiveness by diffusion tertiles	7.301	0.000	Significant differences in public effectiveness by innovation diffusion

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that there are statistically significant differences across all three analytical dimensions of the study, as evidenced by p-values below the conventional threshold of 0.05. For Objective 1, the F-statistic (6.421, p = 0.000) confirms that governance capacity varies significantly between villages, suggesting that decentralization has not produced uniform institutional strength across localities. This variation reflects disparities in administrative capacity, leadership, and resource availability at the local level. For Objective 2, the ANOVA results (F = 5.892, p = 0.001) demonstrate that public investment effectiveness differs significantly across villages, indicating that the outcomes of public spending are unevenly distributed geographically. This suggests that certain local contexts are more conducive to translating investments into tangible development outcomes. For Objective 3, the findings (F = 7.301, p = 0.000) reveal that public effectiveness differs significantly across levels of innovation diffusion, confirming that villages with higher adoption of governance innovations tend to achieve better performance outcomes. Overall, these results highlight the existence of structural heterogeneity and reinforce the importance of institutional and innovation-related factors in shaping development outcomes.

Table 2. Determinants of Governance Performance Effectiveness

Predictor	Coefficient (β)	Robust SE	t	P
Governance Capacity	0.52	0.08	6.50	<0.001
Participation	0.31	0.09	3.44	0.001
Digital Adoption (binary)	7.85	2.70	2.91	0.004
Income (USD)	0.006	0.004	1.47	0.142
Distance (km)	–0.22	0.09	–2.44	0.015
Model R^2	0.63			

Table 3. Determinants of Public Investment Effectiveness

Predictor	Coefficient (β)	Robust SE	T	P
Infrastructure Quality	0.41	0.05	8.20	<0.001
Service Delivery	0.32	0.06	5.33	<0.001
Community Alignment	0.29	0.06	4.83	<0.001
Model R^2	0.74			

Table 2 presents the regression results examining the determinants of governance performance effectiveness. The findings indicate that governance capacity is the strongest predictor (β = 0.52, p < 0.001), implying that improvements in institutional strength significantly enhance the effectiveness of local governance systems. Participation also has a positive and statistically significant effect (β = 0.31, p = 0.001), demonstrating that greater citizen involvement contributes meaningfully to improved governance outcomes. Furthermore, digital adoption shows a substantial positive effect (β = 7.85, p = 0.004), suggesting that the use of digital tools considerably enhances performance, likely by improving transparency, coordination, and information flow.

In contrast, income has a positive but statistically insignificant effect (β = 0.006, p = 0.142), indicating that once institutional and participatory factors are accounted for, economic conditions alone do not strongly explain variations in governance effectiveness. Distance from the mining center exhibits a negative and statistically significant coefficient (β = –0.22, p = 0.015), implying that remoteness reduces governance performance, possibly due to weaker administrative oversight and limited access to resources. The model explains 63% of the variance (R^2 = 0.63), which indicates a strong explanatory power and confirms that institutional quality, participation, and technological adoption are central drivers of governance effectiveness.

The regression results in Table 3 show that all three predictors; Infrastructure Quality, Service Delivery, and Community Alignment have positive and highly statistically significant effects on public investment effectiveness. Infrastructure quality emerges as the most influential factor (β = 0.41, p < 0.001), indicating that well-developed physical infrastructure is the primary driver of successful public investment outcomes. Service delivery also plays a critical role (β = 0.32, p < 0.001), suggesting that the efficiency and accessibility of services significantly enhance the perceived and actual effectiveness of investments. Similarly, community alignment (β = 0.29, p < 0.001) highlights the importance of ensuring that investments correspond to local needs and priorities.

The high coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.74) indicates that the model explains a substantial proportion of the variation in public investment effectiveness, underscoring the combined importance of these three factors. These results suggest that effective public investment is not solely a function of financial input but depends critically on the quality of infrastructure, the delivery of services, and the alignment with community expectations.

Table 4. Correlation Matrix (Objective 2)

Variable	Infra. Quality	Service Delivery	Community Alignment	Effectiveness
Infrastructure Quality	1.00	0.68	0.64	0.81
Service Delivery	0.68	1.00	0.71	0.76
Community Alignment	0.64	0.71	1.00	0.73
Effectiveness	0.81	0.76	0.73	1.00

Table 5. Moderating Role of Innovation Diffusion (Regression)

Predictor	Coefficient (β)	Robust SE	T	p
Decentralization Level	0.28	0.09	3.11	0.002
Innovation Diffusion	6.70	1.80	3.72	<0.001
Interaction (Decentralization × Diffusion)	0.35	0.10	3.50	<0.001
Governance Innovation	0.22	0.07	3.14	0.002
Model R^2	0.66			

The correlation matrix further supports the regression findings by demonstrating strong positive relationships among all key variables. Infrastructure quality shows a very strong correlation with overall effectiveness (r = 0.81), confirming its central role in driving successful outcomes. Service delivery (r = 0.76) and community alignment (r = 0.73) also exhibit strong positive correlations with effectiveness, indicating that improvements in these areas are closely associated with better performance of public investments.

Additionally, the high inter-correlations among the independent variables, such as between service delivery and community alignment (r = 0.71) suggest that these factors are mutually reinforcing. This implies that improvements in one dimension are likely to enhance others, leading to a cumulative effect on public investment effectiveness. Overall, the matrix highlights the importance of an integrated approach where infrastructure development, service provision, and community engagement are simultaneously strengthened.

Table 5 presents the regression results assessing the combined and interactive effects of decentralization and innovation diffusion on public effectiveness. The findings indicate that decentralization has a positive and statistically significant effect (β = 0.28, p = 0.002), suggesting that higher levels of decentralization are associated with improved public outcomes. Innovation diffusion also exhibits a strong positive effect (β = 6.70, p < 0.001), confirming that the spread of governance innovations significantly enhances effectiveness.

Most importantly, the interaction term between decentralization and innovation diffusion is positive and highly significant (β = 0.35, p < 0.001), demonstrating a clear moderating effect. This means that the benefits of decentralization increase substantially in contexts where governance innovations are more widely adopted. In other words, decentralization alone is insufficient; its effectiveness depends on the presence and diffusion of innovative governance practices. Governance innovation itself also contributes positively (β = 0.22, p = 0.002), reinforcing the importance of adaptive and modern governance mechanisms.

The model explains 66% of the variation in public effectiveness (R^2 = 0.66), indicating strong explanatory power. Overall, these results provide robust empirical support for the argument that decentralization reforms yield better outcomes when complemented by widespread innovation diffusion and institutional adaptation.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a multifaceted and context-dependent relationship between decentralization, public investment effectiveness, and governance innovation in rural territories, particularly within resource-rich environments. Concerning the first objective, the results demonstrate that both socioeconomic and institutional variables significantly influence the adoption and perceived effectiveness of decentralization policies. These findings are consistent with the arguments of Agrawal and Ribot (1999), Faguet (2014), and Resnick (2021), who emphasize that decentralization outcomes are largely contingent upon the extent of local participation and control over resources. The ANOVA results further indicate that villages characterized by stronger institutional support, higher administrative capacity, and greater social cohesion exhibit improved governance performance and higher levels of citizen satisfaction. This observation reinforces the conclusions of Smoke (2015), Conyers (2016), and Faguet and Pöschl (2019), who argue that the success of decentralization depends less on formal legal provisions and more on effective implementation and local governance capacity. In the specific context of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), recent studies highlight similar structural constraints, including weak institutional coordination, limited administrative capacity, and persistent gaps between formal decentralization frameworks and actual governance practices (Trefon, 2016; De Herdt & Titeca, 2019; Geenen, 2015; Büscher, 2024; Mafuta & Kamuzhanje, 2024). These findings suggest that decentralization reforms in the DRC continue to face systemic challenges that undermine their effectiveness at the local level.

With regard to the second objective, which focused on the effectiveness of public investment, the results reveal significant spatial disparities in infrastructure quality, service delivery, and alignment with community priorities. These patterns are consistent with findings from other decentralized contexts, such as Brazil and Kenya, where improvements in infrastructure have not always translated into equitable development outcomes (Wampler and Hartz-Karp, 2012; Muriu, 2013). The correlation and regression analyses conducted in this study demonstrate that infrastructure quality is the strongest determinant of perceived public investment effectiveness, followed by service delivery and community alignment. This aligns with the work of Booth (2012) and Andrews et al. (2017), who emphasize that institutional coordination, maintenance systems, and governance practices play a more decisive role in sustaining development outcomes than the volume of financial investment alone. Furthermore, the findings corroborate earlier theoretical contributions by Oates (1999), Rodríguez-Pose and Gill (2005), and Wampler and Touchton (2022), which show that decentralization without robust accountability mechanisms can exacerbate territorial inequalities. In the DRC context, similar challenges have been documented, particularly in mining regions where public investments are often misaligned with community needs and affected by governance inefficiencies and elite capture (Cuvelier, 2010; Verweijen, 2017; Kabemba, 2022). The results also highlight that improvements in service delivery are more likely to occur when infrastructure investments are embedded within participatory governance frameworks. This finding echoes the work of Gisselquist (2012), Chinsinga and O'Neil (2020), and Khan (2020), who identify community engagement as a critical driver of effective local governance. In addition, Hope (2020) demonstrates that alignment between public investments and local priorities significantly enhances both citizen satisfaction and institutional performance, a pattern clearly reflected in the empirical results of this study.

Regarding the third objective, which examined the diffusion of governance innovations, the results provide strong evidence that innovation diffusion plays a significant moderating role in the relationship between decentralization and public effectiveness. This finding is consistent with Rogers' (2003) diffusion of innovations theory, which posits that the spread of new practices within social systems enhances organizational performance when supported by appropriate institutional conditions. Empirical studies by Meijer and Bolívar (2016) similarly demonstrate that digital governance and institutional learning processes contribute to greater transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in public administration. In this study, villages with higher levels of innovation diffusion exhibit stronger and more positive relationships between decentralization and public effectiveness, confirming that innovation acts as a catalyst for improved governance outcomes. These findings are in line with the work of Ansell and Torfing (2014), Kettunen (2017), Treisman (2020), Crook and Manor (2020), Mansuri (2021), and Boadway and Shah (2021), all of whom highlight the role of collaborative governance and institutional innovation in enhancing state legitimacy and local problem-solving capacity. Moreover, the results resonate with Bryson, Crosby, and Bloomberg (2015), who argue that networked governance systems facilitate public value creation through knowledge sharing and collective action.

The positive moderating effect of governance innovation observed in this study is further supported by the literature on public sector innovation, including Hartley (2005), Ferlie et al. (2016), and Larson and Dahal (2020), who demonstrate that adaptive and learning-oriented governance systems are better equipped to respond to complex development challenges. The regression findings also parallel Fukuyama's (2013) argument that institutional innovation is essential for bridging the gap between formal decentralization and effective governance by strengthening trust, accountability, and administrative capacity. In the context of the DRC, recent studies highlight the growing importance of digital governance tools and participatory innovations in improving transparency and reducing governance inefficiencies, although their adoption remains uneven, particularly in rural areas (World Bank, 2023; UNDP, 2024; Kabemba, 2022; Mafuta & Kamuzhanje, 2024).

More broadly, this research confirms the theoretical contributions of Ostrom (1990) on collective action and Bebbington et al. (2006) on the empowering effects of local governance in resource-dependent communities. It also extends contemporary debates in African governance studies, as highlighted by Hofisi et al. (2013), Mutekwa (2021), Fauconnier and Gaspart (2020), and Baldwin and Holley (2021), by demonstrating that the interaction between decentralization, governance innovation, and community participation is a critical determinant of rural development outcomes. The evidence suggests that decentralization policies, when implemented in isolation, are insufficient to produce meaningful and sustainable development impacts. Instead, their effectiveness depends on the strength of the broader institutional ecosystem, including governance capacity, participatory mechanisms, and the diffusion of innovative practices.

Overall, the integrated findings underscore the need for policy approaches that move beyond formal decentralization reforms toward strengthening local institutional capacity, promoting inter-community learning, and fostering the adoption of digital and participatory governance innovations. In the context of rural mining regions such as those surrounding the MUMI concession, such strategies are essential to ensure that local governance systems become more adaptive, inclusive, and capable of effectively addressing the complex development challenges faced by these communities.

Conclusion, Future Perspectives and Limitations

This study set out to examine how decentralization, local governance capacity, and the diffusion of governance innovations shape the effectiveness of public investment in rural villages surrounding the Mutanda Mining (MUMI) concession in Lualaba Province. The three research objectives have been successfully achieved. First, the assessment of local governance institutions revealed significant variations in institutional capacity and performance across villages, confirming that decentralization outcomes are highly dependent on local administrative strength and citizen participation. Second, the evaluation of public investment effectiveness demonstrated substantial disparities in infrastructure quality, service delivery, and alignment with community priorities, indicating that public investments do not generate uniform development outcomes. Third, the analysis of governance innovation diffusion established that innovation plays a significant moderating role, strengthening the relationship between decentralization and public effectiveness.

The empirical results highlight that governance capacity and participation are key drivers of institutional performance, while infrastructure quality emerges as the most influential determinant of public investment effectiveness. Moreover, the findings confirm that innovation diffusion—particularly through digital tools and participatory mechanisms—enhances transparency, accountability, and responsiveness, thereby improving overall governance outcomes. These results demonstrate that decentralization alone is insufficient to ensure effective and equitable rural development; it must be complemented by strong institutional systems and adaptive governance practices.

Based on these findings, several policy recommendations are proposed. Strengthening local institutional capacity remains essential, particularly through continuous training and the establishment of community-based accountability mechanisms. Promoting governance innovation through digital platforms and inter-village learning networks is also critical to facilitate knowledge sharing and improve administrative efficiency. Ensuring participatory planning processes will help align public investments with local needs and priorities. In addition, reinforcing infrastructure maintenance systems is necessary to sustain the long-term impact of investments. Improving fiscal decentralization mechanisms and enhancing coordination among local governments, communities, and mining actors are equally important to ensure that resource revenues translate into inclusive development outcomes.

Looking forward, future research should adopt longitudinal and comparative approaches to better understand the dynamic effects of decentralization and governance innovation across different contexts. Greater attention should also be given to the role of emerging digital technologies in transforming rural governance systems. However, this study is subject to certain limitations. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference, while the focus on a specific geographic area may constrain the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, reliance on perception-based data introduces potential bias, and some contextual variables, such as political dynamics and informal institutions, were not fully captured. Despite these limitations, the study provides robust evidence that effective decentralization requires not only institutional reforms but also continuous innovation and active citizen engagement.

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