Activating Local Development Mechanisms in Shadow Areas in Algeria

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Received: 02/04/2026 *Accepted: 04/06/2026* *Published:10/06/2026*

Abstract:

This study aims to achieve balanced and sustainable local development by improving living conditions in shadow areas and reducing developmental disparities between different regions of the country. The findings indicate a noticeable improvement in the level of basic services and infrastructure, which has contributed to enhancing the quality of life for residents in some shadow areas and strengthening social and economic integration.

Keywords : local developent , shadow areas, economic recovery program.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of activating local development mechanisms in "shadow areas" in Algeria is considered one of the most prominent development challenges that the state seeks to address within the framework of achieving social justice and regional balance. These areas, which are often located in rural and remote regions, have suffered from a lack of infrastructure and basic services such as healthcare, education, transportation, and water, which has led to a widening development gap between them and urban areas.

In this context, Algeria has, in recent years, adopted new approaches based on a precise diagnosis of the needs of these areas, involving local actors in the formulation and implementation of development projects, in addition to allocating significant financial resources to improve the living conditions of the population. These efforts also aim to stabilize populations in their regions, reduce migration toward cities, and promote sustainable development based on the exploitation of local potentials.

Research Problem:

Based on the above, this study raises the following main question:

How can local development mechanisms be activated in shadow areas in Algeria?

To answer this main question, the following sub-questions can be raised:

- What is the concept of shadow areas and what are the criteria for their classification?
- What are the foundations for achieving local development in these areas?

- What are the outcomes of the shadow areas program within the economic recovery plan (2020–2024)?

Importance of the Study:

The importance of this study is reflected in the following:

The importance of local development mechanisms in shadow areas in Algeria lies in:

- Reducing disparities between regions and achieving social justice;
- Improving living standards by providing basic services;
- Breaking isolation and strengthening infrastructure;
- Supporting the local economy and creating job opportunities;
- Enhancing social stability and reducing migration;
- Achieving sustainable and comprehensive development.

2. Concept of Local Development

Local development is defined as the **process through which effective cooperation between popular efforts and government initiatives is achieved**, raising the economic, social, cultural, and civilizational levels of local communities and administrative units, with the overarching goal of improving the quality of life for residents at any level of local administration within an integrated system.

This concept of local development emphasizes **two main elements**:

- **Popular participation** in local development efforts, meaning that residents themselves are involved in all initiatives aimed at improving their living standards and quality of life, relying as much as possible on their own initiatives;

- **Provision of services and local development projects** in a manner that encourages initiative, self-reliance, and active participation (Abdelhamid, 2001).

2.2 Importance of Local Development

The importance of local development can be summarized in the following points (Yakout, 2016):

- **Allowing local administration to meet the needs of its members** and find appropriate solutions for part of its urgent problems, according to the specific characteristics of each area.
- **Increasing cooperation and participation** between residents and their local councils, which helps transform the local community from a state of indifference to active engagement.
- **Developing the capacities of local leadership** while simultaneously enhancing their sense of responsibility.
- **Improving services, activities, and economic and social projects** through creativity and self-reliance, without total dependence on the state or waiting for its projects.

At the macro level, the importance of local development is manifested as follows:

- **Completing the mission of comprehensive national development** at the local level.
- **Achieving regional balance** across the country.
- **Reducing internal migration between regions** by providing employment opportunities and essential living conditions in isolated areas.
- **Strengthening the spirit of collective work** and linking the efforts of the people with those of the government to advance the country's economy, society, culture, and politics.

2.3 Motivations for Interest in Local Development and Controlling Factors

2.3.1 Motivations for Interest in Local Development

The main reasons and motivations behind the growing interest in local development can be summarized as follows (Abdelhafiz, 2013):

- **Intellectual, political, and cultural reasons**, which are interconnected and reflect the increased public awareness in contemporary societies. Various educational efforts, mass media, widespread communication, openness, and cultural and intellectual interaction have contributed to citizens' awareness of their rights and demands within the framework of justice, equality, and balance.
- **Practical reasons**, which include economic, administrative, social, and environmental aspects. The most important of these are:
    - **Internal migration** from local communities to major urban centers, accompanied by negative effects such as city congestion, unemployment, rural depopulation, abandonment of productive land, false consumerism, and increasing demand for public services in cities, among other problems.
    - **Utilization of local resources and wealth** in various sectors such as agriculture, tourism, and water resources, directing them to serve comprehensive national development.

- **Enhancing popular participation in development** and activating the role of citizens in all areas to contribute to developmental efforts, both in planning and implementation.

- **Moving towards administrative decentralization**, so that all local and central regions develop in a relatively balanced manner, allowing public services to be delivered quickly, adequately, effectively, and efficiently.
- **Strengthening stability, unity, power, cooperation, and general cohesion at the national level**, which contributes to internal security and enhances the capacities for external defense.

2.3.2 Factors Controlling Local Development

Several factors influence local development, mainly: the environment, the actors, and the organizational structure of local development management. These are detailed as follows:

2.3.2.1The Environment

Analyzing the environment in which local development takes place requires considering the overall economic, social, cultural, demographic, technological, and even religious conditions, given their interconnected nature and mutual influence on local development. These factors include (Zidan, 2014):

- Geographic Location:

The space occupied by members of the local community, such as villages, towns, and municipalities, which have legally defined boundaries. These areas encompass all necessary facilities for the life of the local individual, including educational institutes, schools, hospitals, transportation, and training centers, among others.

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- Population:

Population is a fundamental element for the existence of a local community, as it forms its core. It is inconceivable to have a local community with a defined geographical scope that lacks people. Therefore, the existence of a local community is inherently linked to the presence of a group of individuals connected through social relationships, which are usually complementary.

- Religion, Customs, and Traditions:

Human communities differ in their religious practices and their cultural and social heritage, including customs and traditions. These factors have a tangible effect on individual behavior and attitudes towards local development. They can result in either a **receptive attitude**, facilitating the success of any developmental initiative, or an **oppositional stance**, which may hinder or even obstruct local development efforts.

These cultural elements may either **support local development** or act as a **destructive force**, depending on whether they foster acceptance or opposition to development initiatives. This dynamic, based on the variables of **acceptance and rejection**, applies to both rural and urban communities. Every local group, regardless of size, respects its social values, including religion, customs, and traditions, which can either facilitate or hinder the success of local development.

2.3.2.2 Organizational Structure of Local Development Management

This factor is a key component for comprehensive local development, as the **structural organization forms the cornerstone for executing development projects**. It contributes to the distribution of powers and responsibilities and enhances effective communication. The organizational structure must include several essential criteria to support local development (eljawadi, 2010-2011):

- Capacity to develop the internal community.
- Utilization of modern technological skills.
- Flexibility and readiness to adopt and implement new ideas.
- Familiarity with modern management methods and the ability to apply them.
- Ability to adapt to both internal and external environments.

Local development is closely linked to **national development**, and the two are considered **two sides of the same coin**, as one cannot exist meaningfully without the other.

2.3.2.3**Actors**

The main actors in local development are **local leaders**, who are responsible for leading and organizing the implementation of development initiatives within the framework of the designated plan. Here, a distinction must be made between:

-Elected local leaders: These are locally elected officials who bear significant responsibility for developing the region chosen by their constituents. In this context, it is important to consider **how councils are formed, the size of the local unit, and the level of urban development**. Notably, some of these leaders rely on **informal social relationships**, such as kinship or traditional

authority, which may influence formal governance structures. This form of leadership, sometimes referred to as **traditional leadership**, is tied to the person rather than the official administrative position.

-Appointed leaders by the central authority: These are officials designated to manage local development in alignment with the national framework. Their effectiveness depends on the ability to coordinate with local communities and integrate government policies with local needs.

There is also a **third category of leadership**, which combines elements of both formal and traditional authority, balancing **institutional responsibilities with social influence** to effectively implement development projects.

Local leadership relies on **specific types of services** provided by the leader, which allow them to **gain the trust of the community** and enhance their leadership position, due to their distinguished ability to carry out activities across various sectors of local development (zidan, 2014).

3. Shadow Areas

The term "**shadow areas**" is relatively new in the Algerian economic context. It was officially introduced in early **2020 during the government council meeting held in February of the same year**.

3.1 Origin and Definition of Shadow Areas and the Impact of Local Development

This section addresses the **emergence of shadow areas**, their definition, and the **effects of local development on these areas**.

3.1.1 Origin of Shadow Areas:

The term "shadow areas" was not widely used in the past. It prominently appeared during the government council meeting held on February 16, 2020, where a report titled *"The Suffering of Shadow Areas"* was presented by Algerian Television at the request of President Abdelmadjid Tebboune. The report highlighted the hardships experienced by residents of isolated areas, which were described using the term "shadow areas (Hadouch Warda S. B., 2021)."

Following the President's speech at the government–governors meeting, the term became politically, socially, and economically widespread. It came to represent the pockets of underdevelopment across the country, referring to isolated, remote, marginalized, and underprivileged areas deprived of development (Hadouch Warda S. B., 2021).

After this meeting, a census of shadow areas was initiated to create an accurate map of these regions, along with the necessity of precisely evaluating their priority needs.

3.1.2 Definition of Shadow Areas:

There are several definitions of shadow areas (2. Hadouch Warda, 2021):

- Shadow areas are remote, isolated, mountainous regions and areas surrounding cities.
- They are distant and isolated areas experiencing vulnerability, where residents face harsh and miserable living conditions due to the lack of basic infrastructure and essential services such as water, electricity, gas, schools, and employment opportunities.
- They encompass all forms of misery experienced by remote areas far from life centers, lacking the minimum living conditions, and difficult to access due to the absence of roads and pathways, alongside the lack of electricity, gas, potable water, and healthcare coverage.

In addition to the above, the following definitions can be provided (Saber, 2021):

Shadow areas are defined as isolated, remote, marginalized, and underdeveloped regions. These areas are characterized by their geographic location, whether mountainous, steppe, desert, border areas with neighboring countries, or regions on the boundaries between provinces. These areas tend to repel populations due to the absence of infrastructure such as municipal road networks and rural paths, connection to rural electricity and natural gas networks, and the shortage or absence of potable water. Moreover, schools and healthcare facilities may be entirely absent or, if present, closed, poorly equipped, and provide insufficient services. All these factors lead to a lack of regional justice and a clear imbalance in regional development.

Shadow areas can also be defined as municipalities, villages, and rural areas that are fundamentally excluded from classification, where problems of lacking basic services intersect, with clear deficiencies in electricity coverage, gas supply, and network connections.

Safe drinking water is lacking, healthcare services are absent, educational centers are far away, and recreational facilities are almost entirely missing.

Based on the above, shadow areas can be defined as "black spots" scattered across the national territory, largely concentrated in villages, rural areas, and remote and isolated municipalities. The outskirts of cities are also considered shadow areas. These regions are characterized by a lack or absence of the most basic living necessities, such as water, electricity, gas, and roads, as well as the absence of educational centers, healthcare facilities, and playgrounds or entertainment areas.

3.1.3 Effects of Implementing Sustainable Local Development in Shadow Areas in Algeria:

Implementing sustainable local development in shadow areas would have several positive effects, including:

- Making these shadow areas more attractive to residents, thereby reducing rural-to-urban migration.
- Promoting development in shadow areas could lead to reverse migration from urban centers to rural villages, contributing to regional equity.
- Establishing rural clusters and centers in shadow areas would reduce population pressure on cities, especially large ones experiencing severe congestion.
- Developing shadow areas would make them more dynamic and active in the overall economic process, particularly in rural and domestic investment.
- Creating new social and economic hubs within shadow areas and activating their contribution to the economic and social life of Algeria.

Eliminating social and economic disparities, including in political participation.

3.2.Criteria for Classifying Shadow Areas:

To census deprived areas and classify them as shadow areas, the following standards and guidelines were considered (2. Hadouch Warda, 2021):

- Verifying and correcting the proposed operations, whether in terms of number or subject, and ensuring objectivity by only proposing operations with actual impact.
- Limiting the proposal of operations to the framework of urban improvement.

- Focusing on operations that have a direct and rapid impact on citizens' lives, especially in remote areas, and accelerating their implementation while considering factors such as cost, short completion time, and direct positive impact on these areas. These operations include:
    - Capturing water sources, preparing them, and making them available to citizens (as public fountains) or constructing small reservoirs with a distribution network supplied by water tankers.
    - Sanitation: installing a sewage network with a treatment station that is regularly maintained.
    - Using solar energy: for household use or public lighting.
    - Supplying these areas with propane gas tanks.
    - Opening pathways and other operations that benefit these areas, which can be implemented in the same

way as mentioned above, with the necessary involvement of the technical services of the district.

By applying these guidelines and criteria, deficiencies and needs of deprived areas were identified, allowing them to be classified as shadow areas:

- **Primarily:** Areas lacking safe drinking water, not connected to the electricity network, without natural gas supply, without a sewage system, lacking public transport and health centers, with no roads or only dilapidated roads, and lacking security.
- **Secondarily:** Areas without school meals, school heating, overcrowded classrooms, local playgrounds, or exposed to natural hazards (such as wadi flooding, landslides, etc.).

The following factors were taken into account to prioritize areas in classification:

- Distance from the municipal center (municipal headquarters).
- Approximate area of the region.
- Population size.
- Distance from the nearest primary school and nearest middle school.
- Distance from the nearest health center.
- Distance from the nearest market.

3.3 Census of Shadow Areas within the Economic Recovery Program 2020–2024:

Around 20% of Algerians live in persistent poverty, particularly in the outskirts of cities. The goal is to implement an urgent rehabilitation plan for these areas to improve living conditions and provide essential services. The following data relate to shadow areas, the planned

development projects, and the expected implementation rate by the end of 2021 (Saber, 2021):

- Total number of identified shadow areas: 13,587 areas.
- Total number of projects planned for development: 327,000 projects.
- Population concerned: 8.5 million, approximately 20% of the total population.
- Required financial envelope: 480.42 billion.
- Projects with funding: 12,841 projects, totaling 188.42 billion.
- Projects without funding: 19,859 projects, totaling 292 billion.
- Distribution by region: 5,745 shadow areas in the northern regions, 6,854 in the highlands, and 988 in the south of the country (Daoudi, 2021):

The targets were set by year:

- Target for 2020: implementation of 8,143 development projects.
- Target for 2021: implementation of 4,698 development projects.

3.3.1 Number of Development Projects in Shadow Areas by Sector within the Economic Recovery Program (2020–2024):

The number of projects aimed at sustainable local development in shadow areas, organized by sector and financed within the framework of the Economic Recovery Program (2020–2024), is presented in the following table (Saber, 2021):

Table 01: Funded Development Projects in Shadow Areas by Sector within the Economic Recovery Program 2020–2024

"funded development projects		sub-sectors
"Amounts (billion DZD)	number"	
30.66	2465	drinking water supply
24.69	1737	"sanitation
16.77	1352	"electricity connection
23.96	998	"gas supply
11.49	1436	improving schooling conditions
0.39	41	"public transportation
67.73	3216	breaking isolation
4.75	693	"public lighting"
2.76	364	community health"
3.27	356	playgrounds"
0.058	3	"desertification control
0.63	66	"security coverage
1.26	114	"natural hazards
188.42	12841	Total

Source:*(People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, February 2021, p. 53)*

From the table, we can observe the Algerian state's focus on vulnerable, deprived, and isolated areas across the national territory within the framework of the Shadow Areas Program, which is part of the Economic Recovery Plan (2020–2024). The plan includes the implementation of 12,841 funded development projects valued at 188.42 billion DZD, alongside 19,859 development projects totaling 292 billion DZD that currently lack funding.

It is also noticeable that the sub-sector dedicated to breaking the isolation of shadow areas received the largest share of the funded development projects, ranking first with 3,216 projects, representing 25.04% of the total planned projects, with a total implementation cost of 67.73 billion DZD.

The second-largest share goes to the sub-sector for drinking water supply, with 2,465 projects, accounting for 19.19% of the total planned projects and a total implementation cost of 30.66 billion DZD.

The sub-sector for sanitation ranks third with 1,737 projects, representing 13.52% of the total.

13.52% of the total planned projects, with a total implementation cost of 24.69 billion DZD.

The sub-sector for improving schooling conditions in shadow areas ranks fourth, with 1,436 funded development projects, representing 11.18% of the total planned projects, with a total implementation cost of 11.49 billion DZD.

The fifth position goes to the electricity connection sub-sector, with 1,352 projects, accounting for 10.52% of the total planned projects, with a total implementation cost of 16.77 billion DZD.

The penultimate position is occupied by public transport, with 41 funded development projects, representing 0.31% of the total planned projects, with a total cost of 0.39 billion DZD.

The last position is held by the sub-sector for combating sand encroachment, with only 3 projects, totaling 0.058 billion DZD, which

represents 0.02% of the total funded development projects planned under the Economic Recovery Program (2020–2024).

3.3.2.Results of the Shadow Areas Program within the Economic Recovery Plan (2020–2024) for the Year 2020:

The achievements of the Shadow Areas Program within the framework of the Economic Recovery Plan (2020–2024) for 2020 can be summarized as follows (Maâtouq, 2021):

- Completed projects: 7,276 projects, representing 89.35% of the targets set for 2020.
- Ongoing projects: 2,914 projects, of which 1,268 projects have a completion rate of more than 50%.
- Projects not yet started: 2,651 projects, pending administrative procedures.

The completed projects achieved the following:

- Connected 173,489 families to the drinking water network.
- Connected 79,548 families to the sewage network.
- Built 375 classrooms and rehabilitated 298 schools.
- Constructed 1,323 km of roads and rented 515 school buses.

3.4. **: Local Development Challenges Facing Shadow Areas in Algeria:**

Shadow areas along the Algerian borders face a range of problems that have prevented the achievement of the desired local economic and social development goals. This has contributed to local citizens' dissatisfaction with the work of official bodies (local communities, central authorities) regarding …

Challenges to Achieving Local Development in Shadow Areas:

The main obstacles to achieving local development in these areas can be summarized as follows (Abdeldin, 2021):

- **Weak Local Resources:**
  Most border shadow areas in Algeria suffer from weak local revenue generation. More than 50% of municipalities in border regions cannot cover the needs of their local populations, which limits their ability to implement development programs and monitor their execution. Consequently, these municipalities naturally rely on the state budget to meet the basic needs of their citizens. The new Municipal Law No. 11/10 aligns with the state's support of local municipalities by providing sufficient funds to implement projects within their jurisdictions. The weakness of local financial resources in border shadow areas is primarily due to underdeveloped industrial, agricultural, and tourism infrastructure.
- **Weak Development Policies Regarding Balanced Development:**
  This issue stems from the lack of optimal utilization of the competitive advantages of the development environment in border shadow areas. Not all border provinces have leveraged their material, economic, and human resources to serve development across all areas equally; instead, they focused on some municipalities over others. This has resulted in numerous poor municipalities far from even basic signs of local development, creating an imbalance between urban centers and rural areas within each border province.
- **Organizational and Technical Problems:**
  These problems are reflected in the ineffective implementation of administrative decentralization and democracy in border

areas. The administrative aspect of preparing, implementing, and monitoring development plans—both general and local—is essential for their success. In these areas, planning decentralization is not properly applied and does not fulfill its role due to a lack of cohesion and coordination among administrative bodies, as well as insufficient supervision and guidance regarding task management.

- **Problems Related to Human Resources:**
  The situation of human resources in border shadow areas and regional communities in Algeria is generally poor, due to several reasons, including …

Operational and Administrative Challenges in Shadow Areas:

- **Human Resources Challenges:**
  Human resources in local communities face problems related both to operational policies at the local level and to the lack of training, tools for reform, and capacity-building of local human resources, particularly elected officials. The main characteristics of human resources at the level of regional communities can be summarized in two points: quantitative inflation and qualitative deficiency.
- **Numerous Administrative Obstacles:**
  The main administrative constraints include:
    - **Bureaucratic Management:** There are significant delays in administrative procedures and an excessive number of documents required to obtain a permit or implement a specific development project.
    - **Avoidance of Responsibility:** Economic actors often do not find the responsible authority to receive, guide, or facilitate procedures for them.
    - **Lack of Planning, Programming, and Preliminary Studies:** Municipalities prepare technical sheets for all proposed projects in a rushed and unstudied manner,

often at the end of each year immediately after receiving correspondence from the supervisory authority in charge of the file. This leads to delays in project implementation and several issues, including:

- Failure to consider the availability of land for the programmed project.
- Lack of control over determining the project cost.
- Failure to define the project title, location, and scope precisely, often resulting in changes to project titles, cancellation, or additional works that increase project costs.

- **Deficiencies in Project Implementation:**
  Several shortcomings were observed in executing various programs due to poor control over public procurement laws and procedures, especially regarding:
  - Advertising and opening wide competition.
  - Incomplete or missing descriptions in the tender documents.
  - Non-compliance with new procedures in the Public Procurement Law, particularly regarding the dates and times for submitting bids.
  - Failure to respect deadlines for project execution stages.
  - Delays in paying dues within the deadlines set by the Public Procurement Law.
  - Disputes and conflicts with implementing institutions, which often are resolved in favor of the contractors.
- **Delays in Closing Fully Completed Projects:**
  Projects that have been fully completed often experience bureaucratic delays in finalizing and closing them.

- **Inefficient Distribution of Staff:**
  In Boumerdes Province, one administrative challenge is the irrational distribution of employees across various municipal offices. Some offices and sectors have a sufficient number of administrative staff, while others suffer from a shortage. Additionally, the tax authorities face difficulties in addressing fraud and tax evasion by local citizens, which weakens local revenue for various municipalities due to the limited resources available to the tax departments.
- **Widespread Corruption:**
  Corruption in all its forms has become increasingly prevalent in Algeria, reaching the level of a national phenomenon. Many Algerian border municipalities are affected by corruption, especially due to weak oversight of the spending of development project funds in border provinces. Favoritism and nepotism are also widespread in various interactions between the administration and citizens.
- **Weak Participation of the Private Sector and Civil Society in Local Development:**
  The management of local development in many municipalities in border provinces faces significant weaknesses in involving the private sector and civil society. These institutions have the capacity to contribute to local development at the municipal level, helping meet citizens' needs and supporting official bodies in performing their various roles, especially in development.

Achievements in Basic Infrastructure: 33,124 homes have been connected to electricity, and 48,252 families have been connected to natural gas.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, activating local development mechanisms in Algeria's shadow areas cannot be seen as a temporary measure or a limited government program. It is a long-term strategic path that requires a comprehensive reform of the development system. The real challenge is not only providing projects or financial resources but building a local development model based on efficiency, sustainability, and spatial equity.

Deepening this process requires a shift from an "administrative management" logic to a "local empowerment" approach, granting regional communities broader decision-making powers and providing participatory planning tools that

This makes the citizen an active participant rather than just a beneficiary. Valuing the local characteristics of each area—whether agricultural, touristic, or artisanal—is also a fundamental pillar for directing investments intelligently, creating real added value, and ensuring the continuity of projects.

On the other hand, it is crucial to link local development to the national economy by developing production chains, improving the business climate in these areas, and facilitating access for small and medium enterprises to financing and markets. Investing in human capital, through education and vocational training tailored to the needs of each area, forms the cornerstone of any effective developmental transformation.

The role of digitalization should not be overlooked as a modern lever to reduce disparities. It contributes to better access to services (health, education, administration) and enhances transparency and field

monitoring of projects. Moreover, adopting periodic evaluation mechanisms based on precise indicators—economic, social, and environmental—allows for correcting imbalances and ensuring the effectiveness of adopted policies.

Ultimately, the success of activating development in shadow areas depends on the integration of economic, social, and institutional dimensions, as well as the ability of all stakeholders to work within a unified vision based on equity and efficiency. Once these conditions are met, shadow areas can transform from spaces of vulnerability into genuine engines of growth and sustainable development in Algeria.

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