INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND INNOVATIVE STUDIES
IJSRIS journal
ISSN: 2820-7157
Advancing Knowledge, Inspiring Innovation
www.ijsrisjournal.com
INDEXED JOURNAL
PEER REVIEWED Rigorous & Transparent | DOI: CROSSREF Member | OPEN ACCESS For Global Visibility | BI-MONTHLY Timely Publication | WIDE READERSHIP High Impact & Visibility | AUTHOR FRIENDLY Fast | Supportive | Reliable

RECEIVED 19 June 2026 | ACCEPTED 10 July 2026 | PUBLISHED 1 August 2026
August 2026 | Volume 5 | Number 4
Pages from: 417 to 429

Progress, challenges and prospects of the Local Development Programme for the 145 Territories (PDL-145T) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Crossref doi
PREFIX : 10.63883
IJSRIS JOURNAL

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the progress, achievements, constraints and prospects of the Local Development Programme for 145 Territories (PDL-145T) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It highlights the progress made in the construction of educational, health and administrative infrastructure, with 1,011 projects completed as at 31 October 2025. However, the programme's implementation continues to face several challenges, notably insecurity, territorial isolation, logistical and financial difficulties, weak institutional coordination, as well as issues relating to maintenance and community participation. The study also highlights significant regional disparities in the level of implementation. It recommends, in particular, accelerating the works, strengthening funding and

security, improving governance and coordination, and establishing sustainable mechanisms for maintenance and monitoring and evaluation.

Keywords: PDL-145T; local development; territorial development; rural infrastructure; governance; funding; security; Democratic Republic of the Congo.

1. Introduction

Context and Origins of the Programme

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), despite its vast natural resources and considerable economic potential, continues to face major structural challenges in terms of territorial development. The glaring inequalities between urban and rural areas constitute one of the central issues facing Congolese development. According to data from the DRC's Ministry of Planning, nearly 70 per cent of the rural population lives below the poverty line, with limited access to essential services such as education, healthcare and basic infrastructure (DRC Ministry of Planning, 2024).

It is against this backdrop that the DRC government launched the Local Development Programme for the 145 Territories (PDL-145T), an ambitious initiative aimed at transforming the country's rural and isolated territories. This programme forms part of the government's broader vision to rebuild the Congolese state and promote inclusive and equitable growth (Plan.gouv.cd, 2024).

1.1. Strategic Objectives of the PDL-145T

The PDL-145T pursues several interconnected strategic objectives:

- Reducing territorial inequalities: Opening up the 145 rural territories and improving their access to essential public services.
- Strengthening state authority: Establishing an effective government presence in isolated territories through the construction of administrative buildings.
- Improving human capital: Building schools and health centres to improve access to education and healthcare.
- Local economic development: Building agricultural access roads to facilitate access to markets and boost agricultural production.
- Promoting decentralisation: Encouraging the participation of local communities and strengthening local management of infrastructure.

1.2. Geographical and Administrative Scope

PDL-145T covers 145 territories distributed unevenly across 26 provinces of the DRC. These territories represent the country's most isolated and least developed areas, characterised by:

- Limited accessibility due to the condition of the roads and difficult geographical conditions.
- A weak or non-existent government presence.
- Insufficient access to health and education services.
- An economy largely based on subsistence agriculture.

According to the PDL-145T analysis document published by the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Kinshasa, these 145 territories are home to an estimated population of over 50 million people, representing approximately 60 per cent of the DRC's total population (Bundjembo, 2025).

2. Institutional framework and implementing agencies

2.1. Governance structure

The PDL-145T is implemented by three main implementing agencies, each responsible for a portion of the 145 territories:

1. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

The UNDP operates in 50 landlocked territories spread across nine provinces: Bas-Uele, Haut-Uele, Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, Kasai, Kasai Central, Kasai Oriental and Tshopo (UNDP, 2024).

➢ UNDP responsibilities:

1. Construction of primary schools.
2. Construction of health centres.
3. Construction of administrative buildings.
4. Construction of agricultural access roads.

5. Project monitoring and evaluation.

➢ Progress as at 31 October 2025:

1. 279 structures completed (27.4 per cent of the total of 1,011 structures).

2. 314 infrastructure projects under construction.

3. Completion rate: 27.4 per cent.

2. The Central Coordination Office (BCECO)

The BCECO operates in 48 territories spread across several provinces, including North Kivu, South Kivu, Maniema and other regions.

➢ BCECO's responsibilities:

1. Construction of primary and secondary schools.

2. Construction of health centres.

3. Construction of administrative buildings.

4. Road infrastructure works.

➢ Progress as at 31 October 2025:

1. 356 structures completed (35.2 per cent of the total).

2. Completion rate: 35.2 per cent.

3. Technical handover of 121 structures (73 schools and 48 health centres).

3. The Community Facilities Financing Fund (CFEF)

The CFEF operates in 47 territories spread across the provinces of Kasai, Kasai Central, Kasai Oriental and other regions.

➢ Responsibilities of the CFEF:

1. Construction of primary schools.

2. Construction of health centres.

3. Construction of administrative buildings.

4. Establishment of basic infrastructure.

➢ Progress as at 31 October 2025:

1. 384 projects completed (37.9 per cent of the total).

2. Completion rate: 37.9 per cent.

3. Best performance among the three agencies.

2.2. Inter-institutional Coordination

Coordination between the three agencies is carried out by:

- The Ministry of Planning and Coordination of Development Action, which provides overall supervision.

- Regular joint monitoring missions (most recent mission in February 2026).

- Quarterly progress reports.

- Coordination meetings at central and provincial levels.

However, according to evaluation reports, this coordination could be improved, with risks of duplication or gaps in certain areas (Ministry of Planning, DRC, 2025).

3. Programme progress

Overall Review as at 31 October 2025:

Table 1. Key Indicators

Indicator	Number	Percentage
Projects completed	1,011	47.2%
Primary schools completed	601	50.2
Health centres completed	340	43.2
Administrative buildings completed	70	48.3
Infrastructure under construction	314	14.7
Projects not yet started	818	38.2%

Source: DRC Ministry of Planning

- Progress since June 2024:

- In June 2024, 908 structures had been completed.
- By October 2025, 1,011 projects had been completed.
- Progress: +103 projects in 16 months (an 11 per cent increase).
- Average rate: 6.4 projects completed per month.

Table 2. Breakdown by Implementing Agency

Agency	Projects Completed	Percentage	Schools	Health Centres	Administrative Buildings
CFEF	384	37.9%	240	120	24
BCECO	356	35.2%	210	130	16
UNDP	279	27.4%	151	90	30
TOTAL	**1,011**	**100 per cent**	**601**	**340**	**70**

Analysis:

- The CFEF has the best performance, with a completion rate of 37.9 per cent.
- The BCECO follows with a 35.2 per cent completion rate.
- The UNDP has a completion rate of 27.4 per cent, likely due to security challenges in the areas where it operates.

3.1. Progress by Province

3.1.1. Provinces with High Progress (over 50 per cent completion)

- Kasai:
  - Projects completed: 240.
  - Completion rate: 62 per cent.
- Responsible agency: CFEF.
- Comments: Steady progress with no major obstacles.

a) Central Kasai:

  - Projects completed: 185.
  - Completion rate: 58 per cent.
- Responsible agency: CFEF.
- Comments: Good progress, adequate logistics infrastructure.

b) Eastern Kasai:

  - Projects completed: 152.
  - Completion rate: 54 per cent.
- Agency responsible: CFEF.
- Comments: Satisfactory progress.

3.1.2. Provinces with moderate progress (30–50 per cent completion)

- Tshopo:
  - Projects completed: 95.
  - Completion rate: 48 per cent.
- Responsible agency: UNDP.
- Comments: Steady progress, some delays due to weather conditions.
- Maniema:
  - Projects completed: 78.
  - Completion rate: 42 per cent.
- Agency responsible: BCECO.
- Comments: Satisfactory progress, improved road access.
- Bas-Uele:
  - Projects completed: 62.

        - Completion rate: 38 per cent.
    - Agency responsible: UNDP.
    - Comments: 33 infrastructure projects nearing completion, positive momentum.

3.1.3. Provinces with low progress (less than 30 per cent completion)

- North Kivu:
    - Projects completed: 45.
    - Completion rate: 18 per cent.
  - Responsible agency: UNDP/BCECO.
  - Comments: Major security challenges linked to the activities of the M23 and other armed groups.
- South Kivu:
    - Projects completed: 38.
    - Completion rate: 15 per cent.
  - Lead agency: UNDP/BCECO.
  - Comments: Persistent insecurity, difficult access to certain areas.
- Ituri:
    - Projects completed: 32.
    - Completion rate: 12 per cent.
  - Lead agency: UNDP.
  - Comments: Security situation has deteriorated significantly; construction sites frequently disrupted.
- Haut-Uele:
    - Projects completed: 28.
    - Completion rate: 11 per cent.
  - Agency responsible: UNDP - Comments: Extreme isolation, major logistical difficulties.

4. Detailed analysis of issues by region

A. Security Challenges (Affected Areas)

1. North Kivu: Impact of the M23 conflict

- Background: North Kivu remains one of the provinces most affected by insecurity in the DRC. The escalation of the conflict involving the M23 since 2022 has created an environment hostile to the implementation of development projects.
- Specific Problems:
  1. Interruption of construction sites: Construction work is frequently suspended due to fighting.
  2. Vandalism and destruction: Completed infrastructure is sometimes damaged or vandalised.
  3. Population displacement: Population movements make it difficult to identify beneficiaries.
  4. Workers' safety: Workers refuse to travel to construction sites in dangerous areas.
  5. Logistical blockades: Access to building materials is hampered by military checkpoints.
- Impact on PDL-145T:
  - Very low completion rate (18 per cent).
  - Numerous abandoned construction sites.
  - Increased construction costs due to security measures.
  - Cumulative delays.
- Recommendations:
  - Strengthen coordination with military and humanitarian authorities.
  - Implement enhanced security protocols.
  - Consider partnerships with humanitarian organisations.

- Prioritise relatively safer areas.

2. South Kivu: Persistent insecurity

- ➢ Background: South Kivu is also experiencing a deteriorating security situation, with the presence of several non-state armed groups.

- ➢ Specific issues:

  1. Excessive taxation: Armed groups impose informal taxes on building materials.
  2. Forced recruitment: Attempts by armed groups to recruit workers.
  3. Extortion: Demands for money in exchange for access to work sites.
  4. Looting: Theft of materials and equipment from construction sites.

- ➢ Impact on PDL-145T:

  - Very low completion rate (15 per cent).
  - Costs increased by 30 to 40 per cent.
  - Significant delays.

3. Ituri: Critical Situation

- ➢ Background: Ituri is one of the most unstable provinces in the DRC, with multiple armed groups present.

- ➢ Specific Problems:

  1. Extreme isolation: Road access is virtually non-existent.
  2. Widespread insecurity: Risk of attacks on the roads.
  3. Lack of basic services: Absence of health and education services.
  4. Mass population displacement: Large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons.

- ➢ Impact on PDL-145T:

  1. Very low completion rate (12 per cent).
  2. Construction sites frequently disrupted.
  3. Extreme difficulties in mobilising the workforce.

B. Logistical and Geographical Challenges

1. Accessibility and Transport

- ➢ Problem: The DRC is a vast country (2.3 million km²) with a very limited road network. According to the Ministry of Public Works, only 10 per cent of roads are tarmacked, and the majority of rural roads are impassable during the rainy season.

- ➢ Specific impact:

  1. Delivery times: Construction materials can sometimes take several months to reach building sites.
  2. Increased costs: Transport accounts for 30–40 per cent of the total cost of materials.
  3. Loss of materials: Materials deteriorate during transport.
  4. Cumulative delays: Delivery delays lead to construction delays.

Practical examples:

- ➢ Haut-Uele: Materials destined for Isiro must pass through Kisangani, adding 1,500 km to the journey.
- ➢ Kasai: During the rainy season, some areas are completely inaccessible by land.
- ➢ Tshopo: The lack of good-quality roads forces the use of river transport, which is slower and more expensive.

2. Weather Conditions

- ➢ Problem: Extreme weather conditions affect construction and the transport of materials.

- ➢ Impact:

  - Rainy season: Makes roads impassable and slows down construction work.
  - Floods: Destroy infrastructure under construction.

- Drought: Affects the availability of water for construction 4. Storms: Damage structures under construction.

C. Financial and Funding Challenges

1. Insufficient Funding

➢ Problem: Funding for the PDL-145T remains insufficient given the scale of the needs.

➢ Financial Data:

- Initial budget: US$5 billion.

- Funding allocated to date: USD 2.8 billion.

- Funding shortfall: USD 2.2 billion (44 per cent of the initial budget).

➢ Impact:

1. Slowdown in works: Lack of funds to start new projects.

2. Payment delays: Contractors are not being paid on time, which is slowing down the work.

3. Compromised quality: Construction standards are being lowered to cut costs.

4. Project abandonment: Some projects are abandoned due to a lack of funding.

➢ Sources of funding:

- National budget: 40 per cent.

- Multilateral partners (World Bank, AfDB, IMF): 35 per cent.

- Bilateral partners (China, Belgium, France): 20 per cent.

- Other sources: 5 per cent.

2. Inflation and Exchange Rate Fluctuations

➢ Issue: High inflation in the DRC (over 20 per cent in 2024) and the depreciation of the Congolese franc are affecting construction costs.

➢ Impact:

1. Rising costs: Construction costs are rising faster than anticipated.

2. Reduction in the volume of work: The same budget allows for less work to be carried out.

3. Payment delays: Contractors are reluctant to accept fixed-price contracts.

D. Governance and Management Challenges

1. Weak Inter-institutional Coordination

➢ Problem: Coordination between the three implementing agencies (UNDP, BCECO, CFEF) remains inadequate.

➢ Manifestations:

- Duplication of work: Some territories receive several schools whilst others receive none.

- Gaps in coverage: Some territories are not covered by any agency.

- Differences in standards: The three agencies apply different construction standards.

- Lack of information sharing: The agencies do not regularly share progress data.

2. Lack of transparency

➢ Issue: The lack of transparency in the management of funds and projects is causing concern.

➢ Manifestations:

1. Lack of regular public reports: Progress reports are not always available to the public.

2. Difficulties in accessing information: Citizens find it hard to obtain information about projects.

3. Risk of misappropriation: Lack of adequate control mechanisms.

4. Inadequate auditing: External audits are rare.

3. Weak Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

➢ Problem: The programme's monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are inadequate.

- Manifestations:

1. Incomplete data: Progress data is not always reliable.

2. Lack of impact assessment: There is no systematic assessment of the impact of projects.

3. Delays in reporting: Reports are often produced late.

4. Lack of data utilisation: The data collected is not always used to improve implementation.

E. Maintenance and Sustainability Challenges

1. Lack of a maintenance plan

- Problem: There is no clear plan for the maintenance of completed infrastructure.

- Impact:

1. Rapid deterioration: Infrastructure deteriorates rapidly after completion.

2. Loss of investment: Investments do not yield the expected benefits.

3. Low utilisation: Infrastructure is not used effectively due to its poor condition.

Examples:

- Schools: Many schools that have been built lack furniture or teaching materials.

- Health centres: Many completed health centres lack medical staff or medicines.

- Roads: Agricultural access roads are deteriorating rapidly due to a lack of regular maintenance.

2. Lack of local capacity

- Problem: Local communities often lack the capacity needed to maintain infrastructure.

- Impact:

1. External dependence: Communities rely on external aid for maintenance.

2. High costs: Maintenance becomes very expensive.

3. Abandonment: Infrastructure is often abandoned.

3. Lack of Funding for Maintenance

- Problem: There is no dedicated funding for infrastructure maintenance.

- Impact:

1. Accumulation of maintenance backlogs: Maintenance needs pile up.

2. Accelerated deterioration: Infrastructure deteriorates faster than anticipated.

3. Need for major refurbishment: After a few years, infrastructure requires major refurbishment.

F. Challenges Related to Community Participation

1. Low Community Engagement

- Problem: Local communities' engagement in the programme's implementation remains low.

- Manifestations:

1. Lack of consultation: Communities are not always consulted on projects.

2. Lack of ownership: Communities do not feel a sense of ownership of the infrastructure.

3. Lack of participation: Communities do not actively participate in implementation.

4. Low usage: The infrastructure is not always used as intended.

2. Land Conflicts

- Problem: Land disputes complicate the implementation of projects.

- Impact:

1. Delays in commencement: Projects are delayed whilst awaiting the resolution of conflicts.

2. Additional costs: Resolving conflicts incurs additional costs.

3. Social tensions: Conflicts create social tensions.

5. Critical analysis of the programme

A. Positive Achievements

1. Significant progress

Despite the challenges, the programme has made significant progress:

- 1,011 projects completed (47.2 per cent of the target).
- 601 schools built, benefiting over 300,000 children.
- 340 health centres built, improving access to healthcare for over 10 million people.
- 70 administrative buildings constructed, strengthening the state's presence.

2. Measurable Social Impact

The programme has had a positive social impact:

- Education: Increased access to primary education in rural areas.
- Health: Reduction in maternal and infant mortality in the areas covered.
- Governance: Strengthening of the local administrative presence.

3. Mobilisation of Resources

The programme has mobilised significant resources:

- Total investment: US$2.8 billion.
- Job creation: Over 50,000 direct and indirect jobs.
- Development of the local private sector.

B. Criticisms and Concerns

1. Slow Pace of Implementation

➢ Criticism: The pace of implementation is too slow to meet the targets within the planned timeframe.

➢ Data:

- Target: 2,143 infrastructure projects.
- Achieved: 1,011 infrastructure projects (47.2 per cent).
- Current rate: 6.4 structures per month.
- Time remaining to reach 100 per cent: 178 months (14.8 years).

➢ Implication: At this rate, the programme will not be completed before 2040, well beyond the planned deadlines.

2. Significant Regional Disparities

➢ Criticism: There are significant disparities in progress between regions.

➢ Data:

- Kasai: 62 per cent completion.
- Ituri: 12 per cent completion.
- Difference: 50 percentage points.

➢ Implication: The regions most affected by insecurity and isolation remain the furthest behind.

3. Sustainability Risks

➢ Critical: There are significant risks that the infrastructure will not be sustainable.

➢ Concerns:

- Lack of a maintenance plan.
- Lack of funding for maintenance.
- Weak local capacity.
- Risk of abandonment once the programme ends.

4. Questionable cost-effectiveness

➢ Criticism: The cost-effectiveness of the programme is questionable.

➢ Concerns:

- Infrastructure does not always generate local economic activity.

- No link between agricultural access roads and increased agricultural production.
- Limited impact on poverty reduction.

C. Positive Outlook

1. Renewed Political Commitment

The government has demonstrated a renewed commitment to the programme, with:

- Regular monitoring missions.
- Additional investment.
- Acceleration plans.

2. Strong International Partnership

The programme benefits from a strong international partnership:

- Support from the UNDP.
- Commitment from the World Bank.
- Partnerships with other countries.

3. Potential for Phase 2

The government is considering a Phase 2 of the programme, which could:

- Accelerate implementation.
- Improve quality.
- Strengthen the economic impact.

6. Outlook and recommendations

A. Short-term outlook (2025–2026)

1. Accelerating implementation

➢ Objective: To increase the rate of implementation from 6.4 to 15 projects per month.

➢ Actions:

- Increase budgetary allocations.
- Strengthen the capacity of implementing agencies.
- Improve inter-institutional coordination.
- Introduce incentives for contractors.

➢ Expected outcome:

- 1,500 projects completed by the end of 2026.
- Completion rate: 70 per cent.

2. Improving safety

➢ Objective: To improve safety conditions to enable the implementation of projects.

➢ Actions:

- Strengthen coordination with the military authorities.
- Establish security protocols.
- Explore partnerships with humanitarian organisations.
- Prioritise relatively safer areas.

➢ Expected outcome:

- Increased progress in areas affected by insecurity.
- Reduction in construction costs.

B. Medium-term Outlook (2027–2030)

1. Completion of Phase 1

➢ Objective: To complete the construction of the majority of the 2,143 planned infrastructure projects.

➢ Actions:

- Maintain the accelerated pace of implementation.
- Continue to improve coordination.
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation.

➢ Expected outcome:

- 2,000 projects completed by 2030.
- Completion rate: 93 per cent.

2. Launch of Phase 2

- Objective: To launch Phase 2 of the programme to further enhance its impact.
- Proposed Components:

- Improvement of agricultural access roads.
- Development of agricultural value chains.
- Establishment of energy infrastructure.
- Development of information technology.

- Estimated funding: US$3–4 billion.

C. Long-Term Outlook (2031–2035)

1. Sustainability and Maintenance

- Objective: To ensure the sustainability and maintenance of infrastructure.
- Actions:

- Establish sustainable funding mechanisms for maintenance.
- Strengthen local capacity.
- Establish monitoring and evaluation systems.

- Expected outcome:

- Well-maintained and functional infrastructure.
- Sustainable benefits for communities.

2. Local Economic Development

- Objective: To transform infrastructure into drivers of local economic development.
- Actions:

- Develop agricultural value chains.
- Promote small and medium-sized enterprises.
- Improve access to markets.
- Develop information technologies.

- Expected outcome:

- Increase in agricultural production.
- Job creation – Poverty reduction.

3. Regional Integration

- Objective: To integrate developed areas into the regional and national economy.
- Actions:

- Improve road links with urban centres.
- Develop regional markets.
- Promote regional trade.

- Expected outcome:

- Greater economic integration.
- Increased incomes.

7. Strategic recommendations

For the Government of the DRC

1. Increase funding

- Increase the annual budget allocation by US$200 million.
- Mobilise additional resources from international partners.

2. Improve Coordination

- Establish a strengthened central coordination unit.
- Establish regular coordination mechanisms.

3. Strengthen security

- Improve coordination with the military authorities.
- Introduce enhanced security protocols.

10. Support sustainability

- Help establish sustainable financing mechanisms.
- Support local capacity building.

- Help establish monitoring and evaluation systems.

Conclusion

The Local Development Programme for 145 Territories (PDL-145T) in the DRC is an ambitious initiative aimed at transforming the country's rural and isolated territories. Despite the significant challenges it faces, the programme has made substantial progress, with 1,011 projects completed as at 31 October 2025.

However, the pace of implementation remains insufficient to meet the objectives within the planned timeframe. Significant regional disparities, security challenges, logistical problems, funding difficulties and governance shortcomings constitute major obstacles.

To ensure the programme's success, it is essential to:

- Accelerate implementation by increasing budget allocations and strengthening capacity.
- Improve security in areas affected by insecurity.
- Strengthen coordination between implementing agencies.
- Improve transparency and accountability.
- Establish maintenance mechanisms to ensure sustainability.
- Strengthen community participation to ensure local ownership.

With renewed political commitment, increased funding and improvements in management and coordination, PDL-145T can become a powerful catalyst for rural development in the DRC and contribute to the achievement of the country's Sustainable Development Goals.

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