



Exploring Jowhar's Local Government: Service Provision, Gaps, and Opportunities

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Summary

- » Jowhar's local government primarily provides administrative services such as licensing, civic registration, and land certification, while core social services like education, health, and water remain largely outside its control.
- » The municipality's reliance on humanitarian and donor-funded programs leaves essential services vulnerable to disruption when external support is withdrawn.
- » Unclear division of roles between the municipality, Hirshabelle ministries, and NGOs undermines accountability, coordination, and local ownership of service delivery.
- » Sustainable progress requires improved local revenue generation, clarified mandates, stronger technical capacity, and institutionalized citizen participation and coordination with partners.

About Somali Public Agenda

Somali Public Agenda is a nonprofit public policy and administration research organization based in Mogadishu. Its aim is to advance understanding and improvement of public administration and public services in Somalia through evidence-based research and analysis.

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Introduction

Jowhar, the capital city of Hirshabelle State, serves as both the political heart of the state government and a key urban economic center for the state and surrounding rural districts. The Jowhar local government is mandated to provide essential municipal services, regulate economic activities, and act as the first point of contact between citizens and the state.

The establishment of Jowhar's current local government structure was part of broader decentralization efforts in Somalia aimed at bringing public services closer to citizens. This reform positioned local authorities not merely as administrative entities but as active service providers by improving access to basic needs, social services, civic registration, and infrastructure maintenance—delivering these services effectively to enhance public trust, reinforce government legitimacy, and encourage citizen participation in governance.

This governance brief examines the scope, accessibility, and quality of services provided by the local government of Jowhar, the actors involved in delivering key services, and the challenges undermining effective municipal performance. It also explores the extent of collaboration between the municipality and humanitarian partners, as well as the impact of donor withdrawal on service continuity. The brief draws on key informant interviews with representatives from the Jowhar local council, civil society members, youth, and a political activist. The interviews were conducted between July and August 2025 via telephone due to logistical and time constraints.

Participants were asked about the types of services the local government provides, who is responsible for essential public utilities, how the municipality collaborates with NGOs and state institutions, and the impact of funding disruptions on service delivery. The responses were transcribed, translated, and subjected to thematic analysis to identify patterns and common perspectives. All interviewees provided informed consent, and their anonymity has been preserved.

Scope of Services Provided by the Jowhar Local Government

The Jowhar local government provides direct services that highlight its administrative and regulatory functions. The municipality issues several services to residents, including business licenses, civic registration, and certification for local companies and

NGOs to participate in tenders, according to a local government councilor. “It also issues land ownership certificates and construction permits, ensuring that no permanent structures are built without municipal approval,” the councilor said.

In addition to these administrative roles, the local municipality engages in some public works. Seasonal services include the maintenance of irrigation canals and the removal of mud from streets during the rainy season. These efforts, though sporadic, are important for mitigating flooding and keeping transport routes accessible.

According to interviewees, conflict resolution is another service provided by the local government. It mediates resource-based disputes within the community. A member of the local council emphasized that “the local government helps to prevent and mediate disputes that risk escalating into broader clan or inter-community violence, although such mediation efforts depend heavily on the cooperation of elders and community leaders.”

While these functions are significant, respondents agreed that the Jowhar local municipality’s involvement in core social services such as education, healthcare, water, and sanitation remains limited. A civil servant stated: “These services are largely managed by private actors or humanitarian organizations, with the municipality playing only a marginal role.”

Frequency and Accessibility of Services

The provision of Jowhar’s municipal services to the local population varies in frequency, with some services delivered consistently throughout the year while others are seasonal or need-based. A local councilor noted that administrative services like business licensing and civic registration are available on a continuous basis.

Seasonal infrastructure works, such as canal maintenance and road clearance, occur during specific times of the year—typically in response to the rainy season rather than as part of continuous maintenance. Accessibility is constrained by the limited capacity of the local government. Several respondents noted that even basic repairs to street lighting often depend on external funding and are carried out only when urgent needs arise. In that regard, a youth representative claimed that “in some cases, delays in addressing maintenance issues have led to public dissatisfaction, as residents perceive the

municipality as reactive rather than proactive.”

Collaboration and Partnerships in Service Delivery

Collaboration between the municipality and external actors was reported to be inconsistent. However, several partnerships, particularly with NGOs and humanitarian organizations, have resulted in tangible improvements. For example, street lighting repairs have been carried out by the municipality with funding support from international partners. As one local councilor explained, “The NIS Foundation has trained groups of Jowhar youth to repair and maintain the solar lighting infrastructure and equipment for the benefit of the local government.”

Despite this, NGOs and humanitarian actors also coordinate directly with Hirshabelle State ministries, at times bypassing the Jowhar local government altogether. According to a local councilor, this minimizes the local government’s contribution to service delivery and limits its ability to shape service priorities in alignment with local needs,

Civil society representatives expressed concern that such arrangements weaken local governance by undermining municipal authority. They argued that humanitarian organizations should be accountable to the local government and channel more of their engagement through local government structures to improve coordination, avoid duplication, and strengthen institutional capacity.

Infrastructure and Public Utilities Management

Management of public utilities in Jowhar remains fragmented. For example, street lighting is nominally under municipal jurisdiction, but most repairs and upgrades are financed by donors such as the NIS Foundation. Garbage collection is outsourced to private companies through municipal tenders, but some respondents questioned the transparency and fairness of contractor selection.

The municipality has no direct role in managing water supply systems, which are operated by private providers. Similarly, public transport and road maintenance fall outside municipal capacity, with interventions occurring only in response to urgent needs.

Recent funding disruptions have affected NGOs providing services in Jowhar—such as INTERSOS—forcing the local government to step in despite limited capacity. Interviewed sources explained that INTERSOS withdrew from managing the local

hospital due to donor funding cuts, leaving the hospital unable to pay its electricity bills, which led to a service shutdown. In response, the municipality assumed responsibility for covering the electricity costs to restore operations.

While the municipality's intervention at Jowhar Regional Hospital demonstrated responsiveness and earned public appreciation, it was ultimately a stopgap measure that did not address the underlying funding gap. The case revealed how fragile essential services can be when reliant on a single donor, underscoring the need for sustainable financing and contingency plans to prevent future disruptions. As one youth representative observed, "It was a welcome effort, but without a long-term plan, the same problem will happen again."

Challenges in Service Delivery

The study revealed that Jowhar's municipal service delivery faces structural, financial, and operational constraints that significantly hinder effectiveness. Financial limitations stand out, with the municipality operating on a modest budget largely dependent on revenue from business licensing, civic registration fees, and construction permits. This leaves little room for investment in essential services or emergency response, as highlighted by a local councilor.

This challenge is compounded by overlapping mandates between the local government and state ministries—particularly in health and education—where Hirshabelle State ministries often assume direct responsibility, sidelining the municipality and creating confusion among the public regarding accountability. The municipality's heavy reliance on NGOs and donor-funded projects further exposes services to abrupt disruption whenever external funding is reduced or withdrawn, as demonstrated by the case of Jowhar Regional Hospital following the exit of INTERSOS.

A lack of technical capacity also undermines service quality, with shortages of skilled staff across critical areas of municipal management. Moreover, the absence of preventive maintenance planning means that most infrastructure repairs and public works—such as street lighting and canal maintenance—occur reactively after problems escalate, leading to higher costs, delays, and diminished public trust, as one civil society representative lamented.

Together, these constraints highlight not only resource gaps but also systemic governance challenges,

including weak intergovernmental coordination, overdependence on external actors, and the absence of strategic, long-term planning for service provision in Jowhar.

Opportunities and Good Practices

Despite limited resources, Jowhar's local government has earned public recognition for targeted, high-impact actions. A civil society representative noted that seasonal canal maintenance, conducted with humanitarian partners, was commended for "saving farmland from flooding" and "protecting houses from heavy rains." Elders also praised the municipality's proactive role in resolving land and resource disputes. As one elder stated, "This kind of work doesn't make headlines, but it keeps peace in our neighborhoods."

Through collaboration with Shaqodoon Organization and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) under the Jowhar Off-stream Storage Programme (JOSP), the municipality advanced land tenure regularization, providing a "clear roadmap for land disputes" and reducing conflicts.

These experiences illustrate that when the municipality leverages partnerships, engages local leadership, and prioritizes urgent community needs, it can achieve results that resonate widely with the public.

Conclusion

Jowhar's local government has shown that it can deliver tangible and valued services when the right mix of resources, technical capacity, and partnerships is in place. Targeted interventions—such as canal maintenance to reduce flooding, land tenure regularization to prevent disputes, and timely mediation in resource-based conflicts—demonstrate its potential to address urgent community needs effectively. However, these successes remain sporadic and heavily dependent on donor funding and external facilitation.

To move from limited achievements to sustained impact, the municipality needs a stronger mandate over core service sectors, reliable locally-generated funding (particularly through improved tax collection), and a structured framework for coordinating with state ministries, humanitarian agencies, and community representatives. Without these reforms, service delivery will remain reactive, inconsistent, and vulnerable to disruptions. Strengthening capacity, authority, and accountability

is therefore critical if Jowhar's municipality is to meet citizens' expectations and become a driver of equitable, reliable, and responsive local governance.

Policy Considerations

To address the service delivery challenges and ensure that the Jowhar local government earns public confidence by meeting citizens' needs and expectations for essential services, these steps should be prioritized.

Secure Sustainable Funding and Strengthen Local Revenue Generation: The Jowhar local government needs a stable source of income to reduce dependency on donors. Past discussions between the Hirshabelle Ministry of Finance and the Jowhar administration on how district revenues should be collected and managed locally should be formalized into an agreement allowing the municipality to access regular funding from its own revenue base.

The municipality should take responsibility for collecting local taxes, issuing business licenses fairly and transparently, and negotiating regular budget transfers from the state government. With a steady income, the local government would be able to provide essential services throughout the year, including education, healthcare, water supply, sanitation, street cleaning, and mud removal during the rainy season.

If the local government cannot manage tax collection directly, it should negotiate with Hirshabelle State to secure an agreed share of revenues generated in Jowhar and allocate funds for district development. This would give the municipality a predictable flow of resources. A portion of these funds should be reserved specifically for maintaining infrastructure and ensuring continuity of key services, reducing the risk of service breakdowns whenever donor funding is cut.

Clarify Municipal Mandates and Enhance Accountability: Hirshabelle State should formally

affirm the municipality's leadership role in service provision and ensure that ministries or external actors operate in coordination with local authorities. Clear legal and administrative frameworks should be enforced to avoid overlapping mandates, especially in health, education, and infrastructure. The municipality should also establish transparent procurement and reporting systems so citizens can track how resources are spent and how services are delivered.

Build Technical and Operational Capacity: To deliver services effectively, the municipality requires skilled staff, technical units for infrastructure, sanitation, and public health, and adequate logistical support. Investment should be made in staff training, provision of modern tools, and recruitment of qualified personnel. Enhancing technical capacity will enable proactive planning, preventive maintenance, and rapid response to community needs.

Strengthen Coordination with External Actors: NGOs, donors, and state ministries should be engaged through formal Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) defining roles, responsibilities, and accountability mechanisms. This will ensure that externally funded projects align with municipal priorities and that the local government remains central to service planning, implementation, and monitoring.

Foster Citizen Engagement and Participatory Planning: The municipality should establish regular public forums and feedback platforms to capture citizen priorities, concerns, and suggestions. Involving community representatives in planning and monitoring will not only improve service quality but also strengthen public trust in local governance.

This governance brief is the sixth in a series of District Council-driven research publications under our EU-funded project, Increased Opportunities for Somali Citizens' Scrutiny of Fiscal and Financial Governance, which examines critical issues related to fiscal governance and federalism at the district level. The topics explored in this series are identified through close collaboration with District Council members, and Civil Society Organizations' (CSOs) representatives during workshops held in Bosaso, Adado, and Jowhar on a quarterly basis, ensuring the research remains grounded in local governance realities.



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