



Barriers to Business Community Participation in Local Government Accountability in Adado

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Summary

- » The Adado business community plays a limited role in local government accountability due to low trust, unmet expectations regarding service delivery, and skepticism about how tax revenues are utilized.
- » Businesspeople's participation in local government meetings is hindered by perceptions that such forums are unproductive, lack meaningful inclusion, and fail to generate tangible outcomes.
- » Short-notice invitations, unclear meeting purposes, and limited familiarity with formal governance processes significantly reduce businesspeople's attendance and effective engagement.
- » Weak and inconsistent engagement strategies by the local government, including the absence of a strong intermediary role for the business committee, further constrain collaboration and accountability between businesspeople and local authorities.

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

In August 2023, the Adado local government developed tax regulations that comprise twelve categories. Businesspeople have expressed concerns that the Adado local government has not yet delivered services in return for the revenues it collected from the district. In response, the local government has stated that its budget is insufficient to address the municipal needs of Adado, as it faces financial pressures from ongoing clan conflicts in Adado villages, droughts, and the costs of expenses and salaries for municipal employees in the Adado district.

This response was not enough to convince the concerned businesspeople, who have low trust in the local government. Thus, the Adado Administration has attempted to address these concerns through a town hall meeting facilitated by the Somali Public Agenda on 23 September 2025, to publicly disclose the revenue it collected, the sources of expenditure, and the challenges it faced in collecting revenue from the district.

Nevertheless, the target businesspeople, the primary audience of the event and the largest group paying taxes to the local government, attended the town hall meeting in very small numbers. The event served as a platform where both parties, alongside local people, addressed serious questions about key issues in the district, including, though not limited to, accountability for revenue collected in the district.

This brief examines the main reasons why Adado businesspeople did not actively participate in the town hall meeting. It also explores how the business community's limited understanding of its role in local government accountability fails to adequately address questions and track the revenue figures and expenditures of the Adado local government. It recommends approaches to enhance local businesspeople's active participation in fiscal and

financial governance in the Adado district. The data were collected through key informant interviews conducted with six businesspeople, three civil society members, and one local government executive in the Adado district.

Explaining the business community's ambivalence toward accountability

Interviews with businesspeople revealed that several factors prevented Adado businesspeople from attending the town hall meeting and confronting local government officials with questions concerning accountability for the revenue collected by the local government, while also listening to the concerns of local government officials regarding revenue collection. The following discussion outlines the factors that contributed to businesspeople's absence from the town hall meeting.

1. Businesspeople's ambivalence toward local government meetings

Respondents expressed that local government meetings in Adado have largely lost their sense of purpose. They further described these meetings as unproductive and overly time-consuming, with promises that go unfulfilled. They noted that earlier meetings seem to reflect only what the Adado administration wants to convey, rather than interactive engagement that addresses real needs and outcomes.

Respondents also complained about the limited inclusion of business representatives in the initial phases of important meetings, such as tax and expenditure presentations, causing a disconnection between the two sides, which are supposed to have close collaborative relations to advance the interests of local people.

Overall, limited stakeholder participation, unmet promises, and previous insufficient transparency in governance have led

businesspeople to view these meetings as largely time-consuming. This perception diminishes their willingness to participate actively in local government activities and also erodes confidence in the process, making it harder to foster meaningful collaboration between the Adado local government and the business community.

2. Short-notice invitations to local government meetings

Adado businesspeople raised concerns about receiving meeting notices only a few hours in advance. This short notice, they argued, leaves little time to prepare, assess agendas, and plan meaningful participation. When meetings are announced on such short notice, many businesspeople find it challenging to organize themselves, leading to a decline in attendance and limited engagement with local government issues.

This underscores the need for earlier notice to ensure effective involvement in important discussions, allowing businesspeople enough time to prepare, collect questions, understand objectives, and build necessary connections with stakeholders. Without sufficient lead time, participation rates drop, highlighting how timing directly influences willingness to engage with local government initiatives.

Clarity and transparency regarding the meeting agenda and purpose are also critical, as one of the businesspeople interviewed for this brief mentioned. The distinction between information-sharing and accountability-oriented meetings is often unclear, reducing the perceived value of businesspeople's participation. Additionally, scheduling constraints—such as preferences for evening sessions—and the potential for lengthy discussions that run late further discourage participation.

3. Limited local government engagement with businesspeople

The current administration shows interest in engaging with stakeholders of the Adado local government by hosting forums and demonstrating a willingness to collaborate with local businesspeople, as a member of the local government executive claimed. However, engagement with this group remains inconsistent. Many businesspeople in Adado are not familiar with formal meetings, government briefings, and policy discussions. This contributes to uneven participation and limited responsiveness to engagement opportunities, undermining the intended collaborative character.

A key challenge is fatigue over the last six months within the business committee due to disengagement from interactions with the local government, alongside rising tensions and a lack of apparent value from these engagements. This fatigue has led to reduced attendance and unwillingness to participate in forums and briefings. The absence of a proactive engagement approach—such as timely outreach, clear agendas, and tangible pathways for mutual benefit—exacerbates uncertainty and diminishes the perceived importance of accountability measures for the Adado local government.

Another issue is the absence of a clear role for the Adado Business Committee in helping bridge gaps between government and businesspeople. Its absence places a burden on businesspeople to initiate contact, share information, and obtain feedback from the local government. This undermines accountability and inclusive participation.

4. Low expectations of businesspeople toward the local government

Low expectations among Adado's businesspeople toward the local government are fueling a growing reluctance to attend

meetings. This hesitation arises from concerns about transparency and the perceived lack of genuine collaboration between local government officials and the business community. As a result, interaction and dialogue have diminished, and participation in scheduled engagements has declined.

In addition, there is growing frustration among businesspeople that local government meetings produce outputs that do not align with the community's needs. Participants argue that taxes collected from Adado residents are not returned to the district in a meaningful way, offering no tangible contributions to local development. This disconnect reinforces skepticism about the value of engagement and underscores the need for a clearer link between fiscal policy, meeting agendas, and actual, measurable benefits for residents and the business community alike.

Several factors contribute to these low expectations. Businesspeople note a stagnation of new government initiatives and question whether meetings will yield tangible benefits for the district. There is also concern that discussions focus more on promoting the government's image than delivering concrete, measurable outcomes. Additionally, perceptions of "shadow connections" or non-transparent dealings between some actors undermine trust and dampen enthusiasm for continued dialogue.

Conclusion

This brief underscores that the Adado business community plays a limited role in local government accountability, a situation driven by several interrelated factors tied directly to businesspeople's limited, or lack of, attendance at town hall meetings. Foremost, many businesspeople view local government gatherings as unproductive and unresponsive to real needs, with insufficient inclusion of business representatives in core discussions.

This perception is reinforced by the practice of issuing invitations on short notice, which places pressure on businesspeople in terms of preparation, understanding of agendas, and meaningful participation.

Compounding these dynamics are persistently low expectations among businesspeople regarding the value of attendance. At the same time, businesspeople question the benefits derived from tax payments, fueling skepticism about accountability efforts. Taken together, these factors create a self-reinforcing cycle, as disengagement by business actors limits oversight and dialogue.

Policy considerations

This brief presents the following policy considerations to establish a collaborative relationship between the local government and businesspeople that serves the interests of local people:

- 1. Foster a sense of ownership:** The Adado local government should foster a sense of ownership among all stakeholders, including businesspeople in Adado, by strengthening relationships with the business community.
- 2. Enhance trust and inclusivity:** The Adado local government should enhance trust and inclusivity by making its plans public and disclosing returns from collected taxes.

- 3. Set meeting schedules carefully:** The Adado local government must exercise additional caution regarding the timing of meetings, ensuring adequate notice is provided and specifying the duration of meetings to improve acceptance among businesspeople.
- 4. Specify meetings:** The Adado local government should categorize meetings as either participatory or informational for businesspeople to increase their level of acceptance.
- 5. Put a communication strategy in place:** The Adado local government should establish a communication strategy grounded in maturity and accurate information, focused on a peer group of businesspeople, to foster mutual understanding between the business community and the business committee.
- 6. Establish effective communication mechanisms:** The Adado local government should establish reliable pathways and platforms that facilitate communication with businesspeople in Adado.



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This governance brief is the tenth 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.