



# Voices from Dhusamareb: Citizens Engage the Mayor on Local Governance Challenges

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## Summary

- » Since the establishment of the Dhusamareb's current Local Government in mid-2022, engagement between the municipality and citizens on local governance issues has been limited, leaving many residents unaware of decisions made on their behalf.
- » The municipality operates with a very limited revenue base, with only 11 of the 33 identified revenue streams currently active, generating approximately USD 20,000–25,000 per month.
- » This limited revenue significantly constrains the local government's ability to provide basic public services and fulfill citizens' expectations.
- » Residents raised concerns about rising insecurity, weak municipal services, sanitation problems, and limited transparency, highlighting the need for stronger collaboration between local authorities and the community.

## 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.

## About the Author

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## Introduction

Dhusamareb district is the administrative capital of the Galgaduud region and the capital of Galmudug State. It acquired the latter status during the early phase of Galmudug's state formation process when clan delegates convened in the district and selected it as the state capital (Wasuge & Yusuf, 2021).

However, the regional administration temporarily operated from Adaado district after Ahlu Sunna Waljama militias displaced the newly established administration from Dhusamareb and assumed control of the town. This situation persisted until early 2018, when the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) brokered an agreement between President Ahmed Duale Gelle "Haaf"—who had succeeded Abdikarim Gulled following Gulled's resignation due to health reasons—and the Ahlu Sunna Waljama leadership in Dhusamareb (Wasuge & Yusuf, 2021).

Despite the agreement, stability and effective governance did not immediately follow. Instead, Dhusamareb became a site of political disagreement between the Mogadishu-based Federal Government of Somalia and the Dhusamareb-based Galmudug State authorities, particularly regarding the organization of state elections. Nevertheless, the city experienced relatively improved stability following the February 2020 Galmudug state elections, although tensions continued between the new administration backed by the Federal Government and Ahlu Sunna Waljama, which lost control of the city.

Under successive administrations, Dhusamareb was governed through appointed district administrations headed by district commissioners and supported by a small number of appointed officials. During this period, the administration operated with minimal institutional capacity and lacked proper offices, as many government buildings had been destroyed or left derelict due to the prolonged civil conflict. Consequently, district administrations provided almost no public services.

The situation began to improve gradually after the February 2020 elections, when the Galmudug State government was able to operate from Dhusamareb, the designated state capital. During this period, government buildings were rehabilitated and the district administration continued operating under an appointed structure until 2022, when the state established a 33-member local council for Dhusamareb as part of a broader local council formation initiative that began in mid-2020.

The establishment of the local council transformed the district administration into a formal local government, with councilors electing a mayor and deputy mayor. However, the new arrangement did not grant the municipality full authority over revenue generation and service delivery. Much of this authority remained centralized at the state government level, limiting the operational autonomy of the local government (Yusuf, 2024).

Despite these limitations, the local government began collecting modest revenues, though these were insufficient even to cover basic administrative costs (Yusuf, 2024). As a result, the municipality has struggled to provide essential services to residents. This situation is not unique to Dhusamareb but is common among local governments across Somalia's federal member states, where fiscal and service delivery powers remain highly centralized at the state level.

Local governments are widely recognized as the level of government closest to citizens and best positioned to respond to local needs. Strengthening them was a key objective of Somalia's federal system, which aimed to bring governance and services closer to communities.

Against this backdrop, Somali Public Agenda (SPA) convened an on-the-record forum in Dhusamareb on 20 December 2025, bringing together the local government and citizens to discuss key governance issues affecting the district. This event was the first of four planned dialogues across Galmudug and Puntland (Dhusamareb, South Galkacyo, North Galkacyo, and Qardho). The objective of these dialogues is to strengthen citizen participation in local governance, particularly given the limited opportunities for citizens to directly engage with their local authorities. Such platforms also help raise public awareness about the roles and responsibilities of local governments while promoting accountability.

The Dhusamareb dialogue, which is the focus of this governance brief, was attended by 48 participants (17 women and 31 men) representing women's groups, youth, elders, persons with disabilities, marginalized communities, religious scholars, and businesspeople. The mayor of Dhusamareb, Abdirahman Ali Mohamed (Geeda-Qorow), also participated.

The dialogue lasted approximately one and a half hours and was video-recorded. It is now available on [SPA's social media platforms](#). During the session, participants raised a range of issues, including revenue collection, service delivery, security concerns, drug abuse, transparency, accountability, and relations between the local government and citizens.

Both the participants and the mayor acknowledged that this was the first public dialogue of its kind in Dhusamareb, where the local government engaged directly with citizens on municipal governance issues. This governance brief summarizes the key issues raised during the dialogue and the responses provided by the mayor.

### Local Government Revenue Collection

Revenue generation was the first issue raised during the dialogue, reflecting participants' interest in understanding the scale of municipal revenue and its implications for service delivery. According to the mayor, the local government identified 33 potential revenue streams following the establishment of the municipality in mid-2022. However, only 11 of these sources are currently operational, representing roughly one-third of the identified revenue streams.

The active sources include:

- land title fees
- notary public fees
- transport-related taxes
- business license fees
- fees for issuing birth certificates

The mayor indicated that the municipality generates approximately USD 20,000–25,000 per month from these sources. This relatively small revenue base significantly limits the municipality's ability to provide meaningful public services.

One important revenue source that has not yet been implemented is property tax, which could potentially become a major source of municipal revenue. When asked about this, the mayor explained that preparations for introducing property tax are in their final stage and that the municipality has already contracted a local company to collect the tax.

Participants also highlighted other potential revenue sources that remain underutilized, including:

- advertising billboards
- fees charged to utility companies digging roads to install electricity and water lines
- taxes on electricity poles and infrastructure

The mayor acknowledged these suggestions and noted that such taxes are being considered as part of the 2026 municipal revenue plan.

Nevertheless, he emphasized that the local government faces several challenges in revenue collection, including:

- limited public awareness of municipal taxes
- practical difficulties in activating certain revenue streams under current conditions

These challenges are not unique to Dhusamareb. Similar issues affect many local governments across Somalia's federal member states. Our previous research on [fiscal and service decentralization in Puntland, Galmudug, and Benadir region](#) shows that local governments generally collect limited revenue and often lack authority over certain taxes that legally fall under their mandate.

In practice, state ministries of finance control a large share of revenue collection, including taxes that are supposed to be administered by municipalities. Although federal member states have pledged to decentralize local government revenues, these commitments remain largely unfulfilled, significantly constraining municipalities' ability to provide services.

The mayor confirmed that Dhusamareb local government has an annual budget approved by the local council, but he acknowledged that the budget process currently lacks meaningful public participation.

### Service Delivery and Decentralization

When participants learned about the municipality's limited monthly revenue, many acknowledged the financial constraints under which the local government operates. Such revenue is insufficient to fund basic services such as primary education and health care.

Participants questioned why the municipality had not yet assumed responsibility for delivering these services, which are currently administered by state ministries and funded largely by donors. The mayor explained that discussions are ongoing regarding the gradual transfer of these services to the local government, although the process has not yet been completed.

Despite financial limitations, the mayor highlighted several initiatives undertaken by the municipality, including:

- purchasing land for a new public cemetery, as the existing one is full
- acquiring land for a municipal dumpsite
- allocating land for a livestock market

He also noted that the municipality previously donated land in the city center for the construction of a market complex for small businesses. The market was built with donor funding and provides affordable rental space for

traders who cannot afford commercial rents in privately owned buildings.

### Sanitation and Waste Management

Sanitation and waste management were major concerns raised by participants. The mayor explained that the municipality had purchased garbage collection vehicles and acquired land approximately one kilometer outside the city for waste dumping and incineration. However, participants complained that private companies contracted to collect garbage often dispose of waste improperly within neighborhoods instead of the designated dumping site, posing serious health risks to both humans and animals.

Participants also raised concerns about rainwater accumulation on city streets during the rainy season. They noted that some households and restaurants dispose of waste into flowing water along the streets, which then stagnates in potholes along the main road, creating sanitation and public health problems.

The mayor acknowledged these concerns and pledged to hold waste collection companies accountable for improper dumping practices. He also stated that the ongoing main road construction project, which includes drainage and sewage systems, would help resolve the problem of stagnant water once completed.

### Security Concerns

Security was one of the most frequently raised issues during the dialogue. Participants reported rising insecurity, particularly in peripheral neighborhoods, and criticized both the local government and the police for failing to adequately address the problem. Residents reported incidents in which individuals wearing government security uniforms allegedly robbed mobile phones from civilians.

Participants attributed rising insecurity to several factors, including:

- poor or insufficient street lighting
- lack of police patrols in peripheral neighborhoods
- weak cooperation between neighborhood commissioners and police
- slow police response to calls from citizens
- absence of a centralized emergency phone number

Participants also raised concerns about drug abuse, suggesting that some individuals involved in criminal activities may be motivated by the need to finance drug consumption.

The mayor acknowledged the existence of security challenges and emphasized the importance of strengthening collaboration between community members, neighborhood officials, and police in order to improve safety in the district.

### Challenges Facing the Local Government

Though local governments face enormous difficulties, the mayor summarized the main challenges facing the municipality as follows:

1. High public expectations relative to the limited financial capacity of the local government.
2. Limited public awareness of government structures and responsibilities, largely due to decades of governance disruption in Somalia.

### Women's Representation in Local Government

Women participants raised questions about the level of women's representation in the local government. Currently, six women serve in the 33-member local council, which is below the 30% gender quota recommended for representative bodies in Somalia.

The mayor noted that Dhusamareb has seven neighborhoods, three of which are led by women, while women also serve as deputy commissioners in three others. However, he was unable to provide exact figures regarding women's representation among departmental directors within the municipality.

### Policy Considerations

Based on the dialogue, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen citizen participation and improve local governance in Dhusamareb.

1. **Organize regular citizen engagement forums:** The local government should convene regular public dialogues with diverse community groups to discuss decisions that affect residents. Such engagements help build trust, enhance legitimacy, and strengthen cooperation between authorities and citizens.

2. **Develop public security awareness campaigns:** The municipality should collaborate with local media to design and broadcast security awareness messages aimed at preventing crime and encouraging community cooperation with law enforcement authorities.
3. **Establish a municipal emergency hotline:** The local government should introduce a 24-hour emergency phone number that allows citizens to quickly report security incidents and other urgent issues to municipal authorities and the police.
4. **Strengthen cooperation between neighborhood authorities and communities:** The local government should enhance collaboration between neighborhood commissioners, police, and community members to address insecurity. Commissioners should be selected based on their ability to effectively engage with and represent their communities.
5. **Establish a district development committee:** Local authorities should advocate for the creation of a district development committee composed of local stakeholders. Such a body could help mobilize community resources to address urgent development needs given the municipality's limited revenue base.

### References:

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