



Waste Collection in Jowhar: Service Delivery Gaps, Affordability, and Environmental Risks

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Summary

- » Jowhar's formal waste collection system has limited capacity and uneven coverage, leaving some residential neighbourhoods underserved, particularly during the rainy season.
- » Collection fees and irregular services push some low-income households towards informal collection, waste burning and burial, while poor disposal practices pose public health and environmental risks.
- » Weak enforcement, unclear service arrangements and limited oversight undermine effective waste management, including the safe handling of medical waste and the protection of the Shabelle River.
- » This governance brief recommends introducing competition among waste collection providers, making services more affordable, expanding neighbourhood coverage, strengthening enforcement and public awareness, improving waste worker safety and medical waste management, and protecting the river and drainage areas through regular collection and coordinated clean-up campaigns.

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

Waste collection is an important local government service because it affects neighbourhood cleanliness, public health, the environment, and residents' daily lives. Jowhar Municipality continues to face challenges in managing waste and maintaining a clean urban environment.

Waste is visible in several parts of the city, including Guulwade, Suuqa Xoolaha, Kulmis, and Faanoole Drainage in Horseed Village. Community members reported that plastic bags are among the most common forms of visible waste. The Cali-garoob tree, known in English as the neem tree and also called Garan-waa and Geed-yahuud, often traps plastic and other lightweight materials, making waste accumulation more noticeable. Residents identified Faanoole Drainage as one of the areas most visibly affected by waste, linking the problem to gaps in regular and effective collection.

Jowhar's formal waste collection service is provided by Shabelle Waste Collection Company, the city's only formally licensed provider. The district administration licensed the company to collect and transport waste, and it currently operates four motorized tricycles.

This brief examines waste collection and disposal in Jowhar, focusing on service delivery, institutional capacity, environmental management, accountability, the monthly US\$2 fee, household disposal practices, medical waste, dumping along the Shabelle River, and the disposal site.

The brief draws on eight key informant interviews covering community experiences, the company's operational challenges, local government responsibilities, and the roles of the District Council, businesses, and communities in waste management and accountability.

The Current Waste Collection System and Its Capacity

Shabelle Waste Collection Company was licensed by the local administration to provide waste collection services without a competitive tender. According to a company official, residents can use a toll-free telephone number to request collection or submit complaints. However, study participants said they did not know the number. The local government provides guidance and supervises the company's activities.

Community respondents said collection is more visible along main roads and around business areas, while some households inside residential neighbourhoods receive less regular service. One community member explained:

"The company mainly collects waste from the main roads and business areas. Many households inside the neighbourhoods do not receive the same level of service."

The company's four motorized tricycles were considered insufficient for the size of the city and the volume of waste produced. Limited vehicles make it difficult to provide consistent service across main roads, business areas, and residential neighbourhoods.

Road conditions create additional challenges. During the rainy season, some neighbourhood roads become muddy and difficult for collection vehicles to access. Vehicles are then more likely to remain on main roads and in other accessible areas, leaving households in less accessible locations to store waste for longer or find alternative disposal methods.

The company also reported transportation problems, including waste falling from collection vehicles. Community members raised concerns about waste workers' training and access to protective equipment. Effective collection therefore requires more than additional vehicles: suitable equipment, worker training, protective gear, and safe transportation practices are also essential.

Limited resources and difficult operating conditions constrain coverage. When collection is delayed, some households use donkey carts or dump or burn waste near their homes.

Household Access, Affordability, and Informal Disposal

Households reportedly pay approximately US\$2 per month for waste collection. For families dependent on daily labour or irregular income, this fee can be difficult to afford, particularly when services are unreliable. As one community member explained:

"Many householders in Jowhar are daily labourers. They cannot always afford to pay the two dollars every month, especially when the waste collection service does not reach their neighbourhoods. Some people choose to bury the waste near their homes instead of paying for collection."

The issue is not only the fee but whether households receive a regular service in return. When collection fails, some households burn waste outside their homes, particularly on Thursdays and Fridays, while others bury it nearby, creating risks for neighbourhoods and the environment.

Informal donkey-cart collectors offer another alternative for households unable to access formal collection. These operators work independently and are not part of Shabelle Waste Collection Company's formal system. Community respondents reported that some take waste to locations not officially designated for disposal, transferring the problem from households to public or unauthorised sites.

Businesses also generate waste that requires appropriate handling. Butcher shops produce bones and animal

remains, barbers generate hair and used stainless-steel razor blades, and pharmacies produce medical waste, including used injections, gloves, and other materials requiring safer disposal.

Community respondents reported that some pharmacies hand medical waste to donkey-cart collectors and that, in some cases, young children may be involved in carrying it. One respondent stated:

"Some pharmacies give used injections, gloves, and other medical waste to donkey carts, and sometimes small children are involved in carrying this waste."

These reports highlight the need for clear arrangements for different waste types. Household, commercial, and medical waste have different handling requirements, which businesses and service providers need to understand and follow.

Environmental and Public Health Implications

The interviews raised concerns about open burning, burial near homes, medical waste, dumping along the Shabelle River, and conditions at the city's disposal site. These problems become more difficult during the rainy season. Rain can expose buried waste and carry materials from drainage areas to other locations. Conditions at Faanoole Drainage in Horseed Village illustrate the importance of keeping drainage channels clear of accumulated waste.

Community members reported that some households burn waste outside their homes when regular collection is unavailable. This practice produces smoke and exposes nearby residents to pollutants. The World Health Organization's 2014 guidance on waste management identifies open burning as a source of harmful air pollution.

Medical waste requires particular attention because used injections, gloves, and other materials can expose people handling them without adequate protection to health risks. The company reported collecting medical waste separately, while community members said some medical waste was being passed to informal collectors. This discrepancy needs to be addressed through monitoring and clear communication with pharmacies and other health facilities.

Dumping along the Shabelle River is another environmental concern. One respondent stated:

"People are dumping waste along the Shabelle River. This affects the environment, and there needs to be action against people who dispose of waste along the riverbank."

The river is important to Jowhar's environment and surrounding livelihoods. Waste dumped along its banks can spread into the surrounding environment. The city's disposal site also raises concerns. Respondents said

waste was previously taken to an area near the former Jowhar sugar factory (Isnaay biyaaso) before being moved outside the city following residents' complaints. The current disposal site is reportedly close to internally displaced persons (IDP) communities.

Respondents said some displaced people search through the waste for reusable or recoverable materials. They also reported that smoke from burning waste can reach nearby communities. These accounts raise concerns about the disposal site's location and management and the conditions faced by nearby residents.

Governance, Accountability and Enforcement

Waste management in Jowhar involves several actors. The local government is responsible for planning, regulation, monitoring, and enforcement. Shabelle Waste Collection Company provides the formal collection service, while households and businesses generate waste and are expected to follow disposal rules. The District Council and communities also have roles in local oversight and participation.

The interviews reveal a gap between these responsibilities and practice. Waste continues to accumulate in some areas, households burn waste, informal collectors operate outside the formal system, and dumping is reported along the riverbank and at unauthorised locations. The local government has reportedly announced fines for people who burn waste outside their homes, but community respondents said enforcement has been inconsistent.

Enforcement is more likely to be effective when residents have practical alternatives. If collection services do not reach a neighbourhood or households cannot afford the fee, residents may continue using other disposal methods. Enforcement should therefore be accompanied by improved access to collection. Clear performance arrangements between the District Administration and the company are also needed.

The process through which Shabelle Waste Collection Company was selected and awarded its contract could not be verified during the study, despite efforts to clarify it with local government representatives and the company.

A clear service agreement should specify service areas, collection schedules, responsibilities for transportation and disposal, complaint procedures, and reporting requirements. It should also establish how performance will be measured and what action will follow when agreed standards are not met.

Towards a More Sustainable Waste Management System

Strengthening collection capacity should be a priority. Four motorized tricycles are insufficient to provide consistent coverage across the city, particularly when

rain makes some neighbourhoods difficult to access. Additional vehicles and equipment could help the company reach more households and reduce the time waste remains at collection points.

The local government and company should establish clear service areas and schedules so residents know when to expect collection and authorities can monitor delivery. The US\$2 fee should be reviewed alongside service quality and the circumstances of residents who depend on daily labour.

Although informal donkey-cart collectors provide an alternative for some households, they are not part of the formal system, and there are no authorised or licensed donkey-cart operators. The local government should determine how informal collection can be regulated and how unauthorised dumping can be prevented.

Medical and commercial waste require specific arrangements. Pharmacies and health facilities should follow clear procedures for medical waste, while butcher shops, barbers, and other businesses should understand how their waste must be stored, collected, and disposed of. Waste workers also need appropriate training and protective equipment. The municipality should enforce rules against dumping along the Shabelle River and review the disposal site to reduce risks to nearby communities.

Residents also need accessible ways to report missed collections, illegal dumping, and other problems. The district could work with the company to publicise its toll-free complaint number and track how complaints are handled and resolved.

Community clean-up campaigns have helped address accumulated waste. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other humanitarian agencies have supported campaigns involving residents. A Council Member noted that these initiatives have helped communities clean public areas but need to continue regularly. Such campaigns can encourage participation, but they cannot replace a permanent collection service capable of removing and safely disposing of waste after each clean-up.

The local government, company, businesses, and communities should coordinate their distinct responsibilities. Waste management requires sustained planning, resources, monitoring, and public participation.

Conclusion

Jowhar has a formal waste collection system, but services do not reach all parts of the city regularly or equally. Shabelle Waste Collection Company, the only formally licensed provider, operates four motorized tricycles, while some neighbourhoods remain difficult to access,

particularly during the rainy season. The monthly fee also challenges households with limited or irregular incomes. Consequently, some residents burn or bury waste, while others rely on informal donkey-cart collectors who may dispose of it at unauthorised locations. Waste accumulation at Faanoole Drainage, along the Shabelle River, and elsewhere highlights gaps in collection, disposal, and enforcement.

Jowhar needs more than increased collection activities: it needs regular and affordable services, safe transportation and disposal, and effective enforcement. IOM-supported clean-up campaigns have helped, but cannot replace a permanent service. Progress depends on stronger oversight, greater capacity, clear responsibilities, safer medical waste management, and community participation.

Policy Considerations

To improve waste collection, environmental management, and the accessibility of local services in Jowhar, this governance brief proposes the following recommendations:

1. **Introduce competition in waste collection services.** The District Administration should consider licensing two or more waste collection companies to operate in Jowhar. Multiple providers could give residents alternatives when services fail to meet their needs and encourage reliable, responsive service.
2. **Make collection affordable for low-income households.** The local government should consider reducing fees in neighbourhoods with concentrated low-income households or subsidising costs for those unable to pay the full fee. This could encourage greater use of formal collection instead of burning, burying, or unauthorised disposal.
3. **Improve collection planning and neighbourhood coverage.** The District Administration and providers should establish clear collection days and schedules for each neighbourhood. Additional vehicles and equipment should be considered, particularly for areas that become difficult to reach during the rainy season. Clear schedules would also help residents and authorities monitor service delivery.

4. **Increase public awareness and strengthen enforcement.** The District Administration, community leaders, and service providers should conduct regular awareness campaigns on proper waste disposal. Clear regulations and consistent fines should address open burning and illegal dumping, particularly along the Shabelle River, drainage channels, and other public areas. Enforcement must be supported by accessible collection services.
5. **Strengthen waste worker safety and medical waste management.** Waste workers should receive appropriate training and protective equipment. The municipality should establish clear arrangements for separating and handling different types of waste, ensuring that medical waste from pharmacies and health facilities is collected and disposed of separately from ordinary household waste.
6. **Protect the Shabelle River, drainage areas, and urban environment.** The District Administration should take stronger measures to prevent dumping along the river and in drainage areas. Faanoole Drainage in Horseed Village and other waste accumulation hotspots should receive regular attention. The role of Cali-garoob trees (neem trees), which trap plastic and other waste, should also be assessed. Community clean-up campaigns supported by IOM and other organisations should continue and be linked to regular collection to prevent waste from accumulating again.

References

- World Health Organization (WHO). (2014). *Safe Management of Wastes from Health-Care Activities* (2nd ed.). Geneva: World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/publications/item/9789241548564>



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This governance brief is the fourteenth 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.