



Mashruuca Dowlad-Wanaag

Dhahar District Authority

Capacity Assessment Report

February 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of the Capacity Assessment of Dhahar District Authority and District Council, carried out in February 2025 under the Dowlag Wanaag Project. The assessment was conducted by the Puntland Non-State Actors Association (PUNSAA) as part of a wider effort to evaluate and improve local governance structures across Puntland. The findings reflect the capacity of Dhahar District to perform its mandated governance, administrative, and service delivery roles effectively.

Dhahar is a Grade B district located in the Sanaag region and has an estimated population of 89,082 people. Its economy is predominantly based on nomadic pastoralism and limited trade. Although administratively well-recognized and with a functional district authority and council, Dhahar continues to experience significant challenges in delivering basic services, mobilizing resources, and engaging the community meaningfully in governance processes.

The district scored a total of 82 out of 336 points (24.4%) across the seven core assessment areas. This performance suggests that while some foundational governance structures exist, major gaps remain in institutional capacity, service delivery, financial management, and disaster preparedness.

Summary of Challenges:

Dhahar District faces significant governance and operational challenges, including weak institutional frameworks, inadequate human resource capacity, poor service delivery, and financial management deficiencies. Key issues include informal decision-making processes, lack of merit-based recruitment, limited infrastructure, absence of disaster risk management systems, and low community engagement. The district scored only 26 out of 336 (6.5%) in overall capacity, highlighting systemic gaps.

Summary of Opportunities:

Despite challenges, Dhahar has potential for improvement through decentralization, community consultation in budgeting, and informal engagement with marginalized groups. Strengthening governance structures, formalizing processes, and adopting best practices from higher-performing districts like Garowe could enhance service delivery and accountability.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Formalize governance and decision-making processes.
- Implement structured HR frameworks, including merit-based recruitment and training.
- Improve infrastructure and service delivery through strategic planning.
- Enhance financial transparency with external audits and revenue tracking.
- Strengthen community engagement with regular forums and awareness campaigns.
- Develop a comprehensive disaster risk management plan.

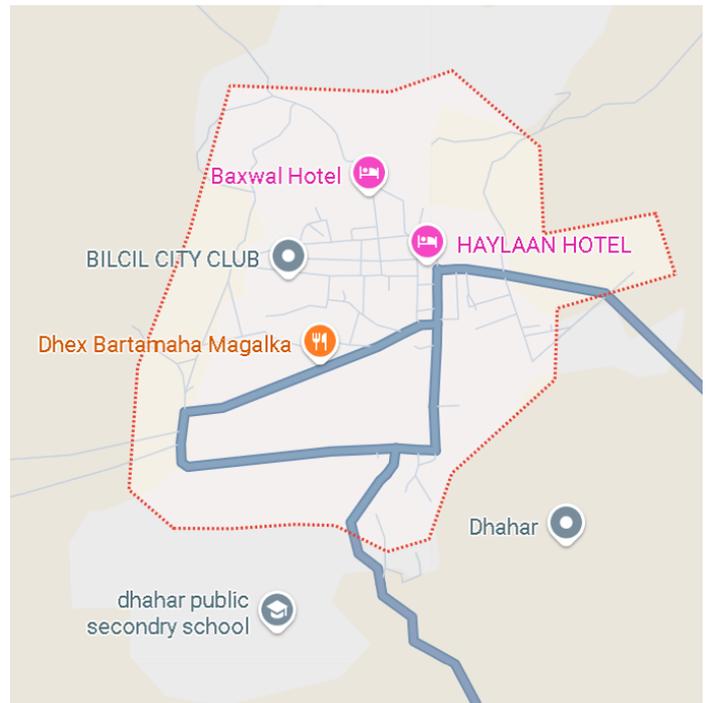
INTRODUCTION

Good governance is essential to effective local service delivery, responsive administration, and the creation of inclusive, transparent decision-making processes. Puntland's decentralization strategy seeks to bring governance closer to communities, with local district councils and authorities playing a central role in shaping priorities and delivering services

Dhahar District, located in the Sanaag region, is designated as a Grade B district under Puntland's decentralization framework. It holds strategic importance for the region and functions under a formal administrative structure supported by a council. The council provides an institutional framework for planning, decision-making, and engagement with citizens. However, the district still faces numerous challenges in realizing the potential of decentralized governance.

This assessment aimed to evaluate Dhahar's capacity across governance, administration, finance, service delivery, and community engagement. The findings provide a baseline for targeted interventions to strengthen local governance structures and promote inclusive development.

OVERVIEW OF DHAHAR DISTRICT:



Dhahar District is located in the semi-arid Sanaag region of northeastern Somalia, featuring rugged geography of mountains, plains, and valleys. The climate varies, with coastal areas experiencing higher humidity and inland regions facing hotter, drier conditions. Strategically positioned, Dhahar connects northern Somalia to the rest of the country, making it a key trade and mobility hub.

The population, estimated at 30,000 to 40,000, is predominantly Somali and mainly engaged in pastoralism. Many also practice small-scale agriculture in fertile riverbeds. The population is largely youthful, creating both growth potential and pressure on services like education, healthcare, and jobs.

As part of Puntland—an autonomous state since 1998—Dhahar operates under a decentralized and clan-influenced governance system. The 2023 local elections introduced formal council elections, strengthening democratic participation and reshaping local leadership dynamics.

Security in the district has improved due to Puntland’s efforts, although it has faced conflict in the past involving rival armed groups. Economically, the district depends on livestock and seasonal agriculture but faces challenges from erratic rainfall and limited infrastructure. Urban markets are small, and alternative livelihoods are scarce.

The district’s infrastructure is underdeveloped. Roads are often impassable during rains, health facilities are minimal, and education access—particularly for girls—is limited. Many residents rely on traditional medicine or must travel for care and higher education opportunities.

FINDINGS

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

Grade A

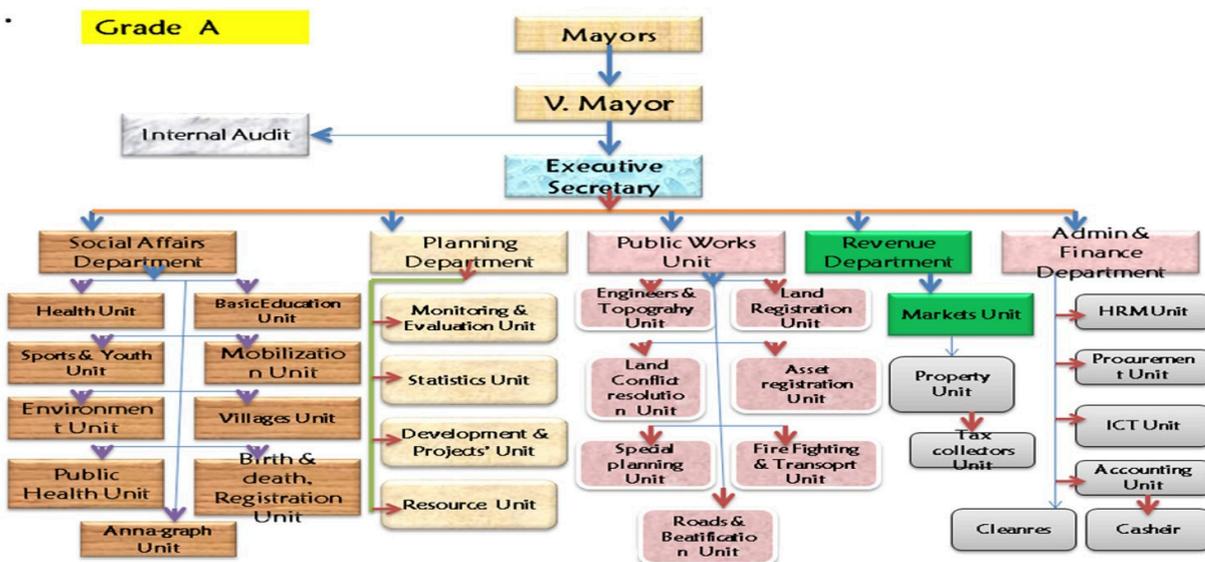


Diagram : MoIFAD District A Structure

The assessment reveals Dhahar's administrative structure operates with only four departments (Social Affairs, Planning, Public Works, and Administration & Finance) containing five total units - a significant deviation from the standard Grade A district framework which typically includes multiple units per department. This streamlined structure appears to result from severe resource constraints, with two departments completely lacking assigned units. The Executive Secretary position, appointed by the Minister of Interior, plays a pivotal role in daily operations, managing finances, staff welfare, and service implementation under the mayor's leadership. While this centralized coordination helps maintain basic functionality, the skeletal structure limits the district's ability to handle complex governance functions and specialized services.

- **Key Gaps:** Incomplete departmental units create functional gaps, over-reliance on informal processes undermines consistency, and resource limitations restrict operational capacity.
- **Recommendations:** Align structure with MoIFD standards through phased unit establishment, develop clear operational manuals for each department, and advocate for increased resource allocation from state authorities.

DISTRICT CAPACITY ANALYSIS

The district's performance across various governance and operational elements has been assessed, yielding an overall score of 26 out of 336 (6.5%). This score reflects a mixed record, with some areas showing basic foundations while others remain significantly underdeveloped. The key elements evaluated include Governance and Leadership, Human Resource Capacity, Service Delivery and Infrastructure, Financial Management, Community Engagement and Participation, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Accountability, and Disaster Risk Management.

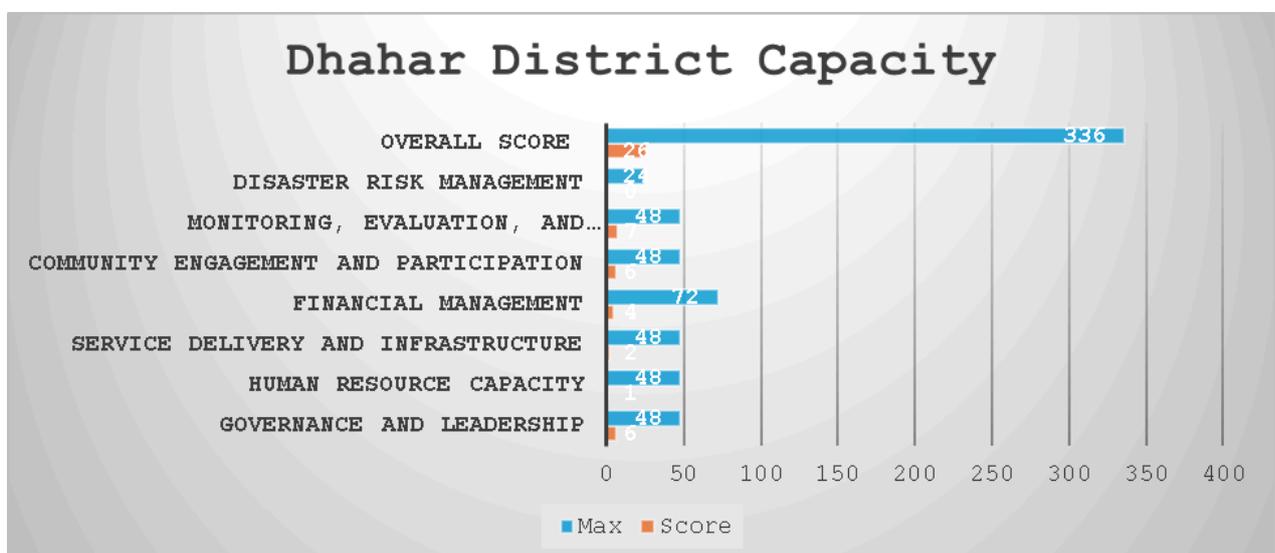


Chart 1: Dhahar District Capacity Performance Scores Across Key Areas

These scores provide a snapshot of the district's current standing and underscore the urgent need for improvements in several critical areas to enhance governance, service delivery, and resilience.

a) Governance and Leadership (Score: 6/48)

Dhahar demonstrates nascent governance capabilities through its development plan alignment with Puntland State policies and some community consultation practices. As one official noted: "We mostly engage in consultations before making decisions." However, these processes remain largely informal, with no structured mechanisms for regular plan reviews or systematic community input integration. Decision-making occurs reactively rather than through established procedures, and while some development plan actions have been implemented, there's no framework to assess their impact or adjust strategies accordingly. The 12.4% score reflects these fundamental weaknesses in institutionalizing governance processes.

- **Key Gaps:** Ad-hoc decision-making dominates, strategic plans lack formal review cycles, and community consultation occurs without standardized frameworks.
- **Recommendations:** Institute quarterly governance review meetings, develop formal public participation guidelines, and create a district governance manual documenting procedure.

b) Human Resource Capacity (Score: 1/48)

The district's HR systems are critically underdeveloped, evidenced by the near-failing 2% score. Recruitment lacks merit-based processes, job descriptions are nonexistent, and only informal internal workshops provide minimal capacity building. As councilors noted: "The main challenges include inadequate staff knowledge and experience." The workforce shows concerning gaps - 50% of staff lack high school education, no employees have postgraduate qualifications, and 75% of Planning/Public Works staff have less than two years' experience. No professional training has occurred in two years, leaving critical skill gaps in areas like ICT and financial management.

- **Key Gaps:** Absence of HR frameworks, severe educational/skill deficiencies, and no continuous professional development systems.
- **Recommendations:** Immediately develop competency-based job descriptions, institute annual training needs assessments, and create a mentorship program pairing junior staff with experienced officials from Garowe.

c) Service Delivery and Infrastructure (Score: 2/48)

Service provision operates on an entirely ad-hoc basis, with community members reporting: "The quality of services is poor and very low." While access shows no overt discrimination, essential services like healthcare and education remain inadequate. A concerning disconnect exists between community priorities (basic services) and district focus (infrastructure projects). Physical infrastructure is severely lacking – roads become impassable in rains, healthcare facilities are rudimentary, and drainage systems fail during rainfall, causing flooding. No systems exist to monitor service quality or conduct maintenance planning.

- **Key Gaps:** Complete absence of service standards, infrastructure maintenance systems, and misalignment between community needs and government priorities.
- **Recommendations:** Develop a 3-year service delivery improvement plan with community input, establish infrastructure maintenance schedules, and create a joint community-government priority-setting committee.

d) Financial Management (Score: 4/72)

This exposes the district While the district has developed its first annual budget through community consultations, systems remain embryonic. Councilors report: "The financial system is not currently operational," hindering basic functions. No mechanisms exist to track revenue collection versus expenditures, procurement lacks planning, and crucially, there are no external audits. Budget transparency is minimal, with limited public disclosure. Some revenue diversification through local taxes shows promise but lacks proper recording and oversight.

- **Key Gaps:** Non-functional financial systems, zero external oversight, and opaque fiscal processes.
- **Recommendations:** Prioritize financial system rehabilitation with technical support, mandate quarterly budget execution reports, and establish an independent audit committee including community representatives.

e) Community Engagement and Participation (Score: 6/48)

The district demonstrates relative strength in informal engagement, particularly with women and marginalized groups. However, forums occur irregularly in inaccessible venues, and as community members noted: "Meetings represent the primary, though limited, opportunity for consultations." Communication relies heavily on word-of-mouth and community leaders, with no systematic public awareness campaigns. While feedback mechanisms exist through public relations offices, there's no process to track how input influences decisions.

- **Key Gaps:** Unpredictable engagement opportunities, physical accessibility barriers, and no feedback loop on community input utilization.
- **Recommendations:** Establish monthly public forums in rotating locations, launch a community radio information program, and implement a tracked complaint resolution system.

f) **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Accountability (Score: 7/48)**

Current M&E practices rely entirely on informal reporting, with no performance indicators or structured evaluation processes. Though community complaints reach authorities through PR offices, as the report notes: "Feedback is often not integrated into policy decisions." Accountability remains reactive rather than preventative. While authorities express commitment to transparency - "We conduct regular monitoring" - no documentation or standardized processes exist to verify these claims or measure impact.

- **Key Gaps:** Absence of KPIs, undocumented monitoring claims, and no systems for evidence-based policy adjustment.
- **Recommendations:** Develop 10 core service delivery KPIs, institute bi-annual program evaluations, and publish quarterly performance scorecards for public review.

g) **Disaster Risk Management (Score: 0/24)**

Dhahar's complete lack of DRM systems represents a critical vulnerability. No plans, trained personnel, early warning systems, or budget allocations exist for emergencies. Community concerns about flooding - "Water drainage issues need addressing" - go unaddressed systematically. This institutional vacuum leaves the district wholly unprepared for increasingly frequent climate shocks, exacerbating existing infrastructure weaknesses.

- **Key Gaps:** Total absence of preparedness systems and no institutional capacity for crisis response.
- **Recommendations:** Immediately develop a DRM contingency plan focusing on flood mitigation, train 20 community first responders, and allocate 5% of the annual budget to emergency preparedness.

h) **Staff Capacity**

The 18-member workforce shows multiple systemic weaknesses: severe gender imbalance (5 female staff, all leadership roles held by men), educational deficits (9 staff below high school level), and experience gaps (75% in key departments have under 2 years work experience). No staff have received professional training in two years, creating competency gaps in critical areas like financial management and ICT. While no vacancies exist, this likely reflects non-competitive recruitment rather than adequate staffing.

- **Key Gaps:** Exclusionary gender dynamics, unqualified personnel in key roles, and chronic skill stagnation.
- **Recommendations:** Implement affirmative action recruitment policies, require minimum qualifications for technical roles, and mandate 40 hours annual training for all staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Short-Term :

1. Local Government

- Formalize decision-making processes and establish structured and institutionalized procedures for decision-making to improve transparency and consistency.
- Enhance community consultation by formalizing community consultation processes to integrate feedback systematically and address concerns in a structured manner.
- Implement Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) systems and Introduce formal M&E mechanisms for service delivery, ensuring that services meet quality standards and gaps are addressed efficiently.
- Expand public awareness campaigns by increasing the frequency of public awareness campaigns using diverse channels (e.g., radio, social media) to inform residents about governance processes and service delivery updates.

2. Puntland Government

- Strengthen revenue tracking systems and implement reliable and transparent revenue tracking and management systems to monitor financial flows and improve accountability.
- Introduce regular external audits by conducting annual external audits to evaluate financial performance, ensure transparency, and build public trust in budget management.
- Develop a comprehensive DRM plan by developing a detailed disaster risk management framework that includes prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery strategies.
- Allocate budget and resources for DRM. The central government should dedicate funds and resources for disaster preparedness, response, and recovery, including training for both district staff and the community.

3. Development Partners

- Create regular training programs and prioritize ongoing professional development in key areas like public administration, leadership, and service delivery to strengthen staff capacity. Offer courses in.
- strategic leadership, conflict resolution, negotiation, and ethical governance. In financial management and budgeting offer trainings on transparent budgeting, financial reporting, and managing public funds to ensure accountability.
- Promote inclusion by implementing outreach programs that focus on engaging women, youth, and marginalized groups in local governance and decision-making.

Mid-term :

1. Local Government

- Develop and implement annual review mechanisms by introducing formal review processes for strategic plans to ensure ongoing alignment with local needs and improve accountability.
- Formalize community feedback mechanisms and establish regular, accessible community forums to gather input and concerns, ensuring broader participation across all segments of society.
- Develop and Implement Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for each key service area (e.g., healthcare, education, infrastructure) to measure performance and guide decision-making.

2. Puntland Government

- Establish a merit-based recruitment system by implementing transparent recruitment policies with defined job descriptions and clear criteria for hiring.
- Introduce regular reporting mechanisms that ensure transparency and make data accessible to the public for monitoring purposes.
- Allocate budget and resources for DRM and dedicate funds and resources for disaster preparedness, response, and recovery, including training for both district staff and the community.

3. Development Partners

- Support in developing a comprehensive HR framework. This should include formal human resources practices, including succession planning and performance evaluations, to ensure workforce sustainability.
- Develop a strategic service delivery framework to transition from ad-hoc service delivery to a more structured, strategic approach that addresses long-term community needs.

Long-Term :

1. Local Government

- Develop and implement annual review mechanisms by introducing formal review processes for strategic plans to ensure ongoing alignment with local needs and improve accountability.
- Plan for to address critical infrastructure gaps and focus on priority infrastructure projects in healthcare, roads, and waste management, and allocate resources for both development and maintenance.

2. Puntland Government

- Create formal reporting mechanisms and establish regular reporting processes that ensure transparency and make data accessible to the public for monitoring purposes.
- Appoint and train DRM personnel, designate trained personnel to oversee DRM activities and ensure a rapid and effective response to potential disasters. Provide training

- advanced disaster risk management techniques, including mitigation strategies, advanced recovery planning, and disaster-related data analysis. Offer courses on how to effectively coordinate local, regional, and national emergency response systems.

3. Development Partners

- Support in enhancing budget transparency including processes to publicly disclose budget details and expenditures to improve transparency and accountability, fostering confidence in financial management. Training on how to ensure transparency in budget creation, allocation, and monitoring, including how to communicate financial data to the public in an accessible way as well as trainings on conducting audits, ensuring compliance, and managing government funds efficiently.
- Support in providing regular training programs the following trainings are recommended





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