One of the first pledges made by the first Governor of Nairobi upon assuming office was that of cleaning up the city. Years of neglecting solid waste management had seen the city cease from being a “green city in the sun.”

Increased urban growth, poor urban planning and years of mismanagement by the now defunct city council saw high levels of garbage accumulation. Unlike the past, where the council would provide residents with dustbins and collect garbage on designated days, the service was left to the free market and residents began paying private operators to collect their garbage. For those in the middle and upper classes, it worked and still does work well, but not so in the working-class areas and informal settlements. In some of the working-class neighborhoods, cartels are in control and at times have turned violent as they control their “territories.”

Those in informal settlements cannot afford private collectors and lack of wide access roads always challenged the council from providing the service.
Recent efforts by the county government have seen the purchase of several garbage trucks to boost garbage collection. They have also gone ahead to set clear regulations on the conditions for private firms that are collecting garbage from the central business district.

Nairobi generates over 3,000 tons of waste per day and only about half of it gets collected. Most of the collected waste is dumped at Dandora Landfill. The landfill is filled beyond capacity but still in use. There is also a temporary dumping site at Kayole.

In 2009, the City opened its first e-waste management site, to take care of electronic waste for recycling. In late 2013, the county government got into a contract with a German company to initiate a programme that will use waste to generate renewable energy.
In this system, over 4,000 homes can be powered with over seventy MW being generated per hour by a landfill gas to energy system.

The Integrated Solid Waste Management Plan for Nairobi was generated in 2010 and recognizes the importance of generating new landfills, investing in recycling (38% of the waste is recyclable), derivation of the value of organic waste fraction (51%) and involvement of both public and private partnerships.

The challenge of sustainable solid waste management remains one key area in modern urban centres – and Nairobi is no exception.