As a growing metropolitan city, Nairobi is faced with the problem of accumulating solid waste and its environmental, social, economic and political implications. The inability of the city to manage its solid waste is largely driven by the overwhelming amounts of solid waste generated daily as a result of the increasing population and other institutional constraints. As an emerging player in urban solid waste management, the private sector was the focus of this study, particularly its experience in solid waste management as an entrepreneurial venture. Data was collected from 44 private companies actively involved in this business in the city and analysed using descriptive statistics. Results indicate that the Nairobi City Council and private companies are the principal providers of solid waste management services in Nairobi. However, private company involvement is rather low contrary to expectation, with the main areas being collection, transport and disposal. Their services are concentrated in the high-income areas due to the capacity of their residents to afford. In the middle-income areas waste is poorly managed with open dumping and burning being a common sight on open spaces and along roads. Key players in low-income areas are the community-based organisations and NGOs singly and or in partnership.

Customer unwillingness or inability to pay for solid waste management in Nairobi is a major hindrance to private sector involvement. Affordability is higher from customers within the central business district and residents within the high and medium income areas. Poverty in the low-income areas makes it unaffordable for its residents. Other critical hindrances to private sector participation in solid waste management in Nairobi are: the inefficiency of the Nairobi City Council as a regulatory agency, lack of appropriate technology in solid waste management, lack of clear policy on solid waste management, high initial investment costs and absence of economic and fiscal incentives. Despite all these problems, the future of solid waste management in urban centres lies in partnerships among all stakeholders with the private sector playing a leading role.