Event Report

East and Southern Africa Regional Hub Preventing and Responding to Hate- and Extremist-Motivated Violence in South Africa: Tapping into the Potential of Cities

Cape Town, South Africa
30 May 2023

Summary

On 30 May 2023, the Strong Cities Network East and Southern Africa (ESA) Regional Hub convened cities and other stakeholders from across South Africa to explore the role of cities in preventing and responding to hate- and extremist-motived violence in the country as part of wider city-led efforts to promote public safety, build resilience and enhance social cohesion. Co-hosted with the City of Cape Town and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), and financed under the EU's STRIVE Cities initiative, the workshop included more than 50 representatives from local governments (including mayors), national government, civil society and academia across South Africa, as well as from UN-Habitat and the US Consulate in Cape Town. In addition to the host city, the workshop included representatives from the following South African cities: Buffalo City, Cape Town, Ekurhuleni, eThekwini (Durban), Johannesburg, Mbombela, Overstrand, Swartland, Stellenbosch and Tshwane.

Some of the key needs identified in order to enhance city-led hate, extremism and polarisation prevention and response efforts include:

- Awareness raising on the role local governments in South Africa can play in addressing these challenges;
- Improved and sustained cooperation between national and local governments on preventing and responding to them which should involve, for example:
  - The national government consulting local governments when formulating national policies and strategies; and
  - Information sharing and cooperation across different national governmental departments and among police and other security forces and local governments.
- Dedicated budget allocation for local governments for public safety and security, including within smaller municipalities; and
- Training and other capacity-building support to local governments across a range of hate and extremism prevention and response issues to ensure there are no local safe havens where these threats can take root.

Threats & Key Challenges

The city leaders identified several threats and other challenges that hinder stability and economic growth in South Africa, including rising levels of xenophobia and mobilisation to target migrants, (e.g., 2021 saw the raise of *Operation Dudula,* an anti-foreigner' movement targeting new arrivals), high crime rates (e.g, Illegal trade in narcotics and proliferation of illegal firearms), corruption and poor governance, as well as high unemployment rates (particularly among the youth).

In addition, participants mentioned the central government's struggles to confront and deal decisively with wounds and traumas South Africans have suffered as a result of the country's apartheid and colonial history. These injustices and the failure to address them adequately have left segments of the population resentful and particularly susceptible to hate and extremist propaganda. Participants shared how, although cities are on the front-lines of the manifestation of

rising levels of discontent linked to these issues, they often lack the necessary mandate and support to address these challenges holistically and sustainably.

Other challenges facing local governments cited include limited national-local cooperation (NLC), cities' lack of preparedness to proactively deal with the rising hate and extremist landscape and limited opportunities for cities in South Africa to share and learn from each other. The preparedness challenge is particularly acute outside of the larger metros, where capacities are often limited.

Key Themes

1. Existing crime prevention and violence reduction efforts that feature partnerships with community-based organisations, the private sector and other cities can serve as a foundation for city-led hate and extremism prevention approaches.

Throughout the workshop, participants emphasized the importance of partnerships and community engagement in prevention, and how existing initiatives can be leveraged for addressing hate and extremism. For example, **Cape Town** pointed to its Safer and Healthier Places of Worship programme through which the city works to improve relationships among faith communities, and between them and the local government. The city initially brought these groups together – focusing on all such groups in the city to avoid one feeling singled-out - and gave them a forum to share their concerns and what they perceive as the gaps in their ability to address them, as well as to establish a regular channel of communication between the city and the faith groups. After the initial meeting, the city organized a three-day workshop that included security actors and focused on training on emergency scenario planning, including for first responders.   Overall, the programme helped to build trust and improve the relationships between the local government and different faith groups, as well as equip the latter with the knowledge and information needed to proactively participate in prevention and response.

Another existing city practice that could be leveraged for hate and extremism prevention objectives came from **Stellenbosch** municipality.   There, its Community Police Forums (CPFs) convene ward councillors, police and other relevant stakeholders along with members of local communities to discuss the latter's concerns and needs, which are then registered and followed up on.

Throughout the discussions, participants emphasized the need for city-level data to inform local government policies and programmes. In this context, they recommended for cities to look at partnerships with civil society and academia that conduct work on urban safety and make use of the available data (including demographic, economic and social) in order to better understand the vulnerabilities that can lead to radicalisation to violence within their local communities. Participants further emphasized the need to explore opportunities for developing multi-stakeholder approaches to prevention that, rather than being dictated by the national government, respond to the needs and concerns of local communities, and build upon existing efforts of civil society, private sector, academia and others.

Participants also shared how young people in South African cities are particularly susceptible to recruitment to violence due to lack of economic opportunities and marginalization and emphasized

the importance of seeing them as part of the solution, e.g., becoming agents of change, rather than as part of the problem. They pointed to enhanced collaboration between local governments and community-based organizations that run educational and youth engagement programs as one way to realise this shift.

Participants further discussed the importance of pursuing public-private partnerships to support crime, as extremism prevention efforts. **Buffalo City**, for example, pointed to the partnership it established with private security companies across the city, which allowed the city to connect them with local business owners, who were increasingly feeling pressured to pay money to criminal groups for protection.

2. Enhanced peer-to-peer learning and, more broadly, city-to-city collaboration in prevention is critical to activating the role of local governments in prevention and response to hate and extremism.

City to city collaboration and peer-to-peer learning were highlighted as particularly relevant in the South African context where big cities have a lot of experience and learning from crime prevention efforts that can be shared and applied to smaller and rural municipalities.

The City of Cape Town's impetus to want to host this workshop and facilitate sharing with other cities in the country resulted from its first engagement with the Strong Cities Network in May 2022. After participating in a regional event in Nairobi, Cape Town officials realised there was a role for it and other South Africa cities in hate and extremism prevention, even without an explicit mandate to engage and that it was particularly important for local governments to be proactive in this area rather than to wait to act after hate- or extremist-motived violence hits their communities. Cape Town officials returned home committed both to take action within the city and partner with the Strong Cities Network to encourage other local jurisdictions across the country to do the same.

''In May 2022, I attended the Strong Cities conference in Nairobi. This was an extremely informative experience for me that left me with the impression that there is much more South African municipalities can do in terms of prevention, protection and response.'' Alderman JP Smith, Mayoral Committee Member for Safety and Security, City of Cape Town

Underscoring the importance of a whole-of-country approach, participants mentioned that violence reduction efforts in a big city often lead to violent groups seeking safe haven in or extremist recruiters targeting neighbouring smaller towns and villages (an example was given of how **Cape Town's** successful crime prevention efforts led to the criminal groups moving their base of operations to the neighbouring municipality of **Overstrand**). Given this trend, participants emphasised the need for smaller municipalities to benefit from capacity building and awareness raising so that criminal and extremist actors do not take advantage of the situation and their lack of preparedness.

Participants from other cities appreciated hearing from **Cape Town** on the evolution of their approach to prevention and urged **Cape Town** officials to share their experience with others, especially the small and rural municipalities that often lack capacity and exposure and would greatly benefit from cross-municipal prevention programmes and peer-to-peer learning.

Highlighted City-led Approaches

Cape Town Prevention Framework

After participating in Strong Cities' workshop in Kenya in 2022, **Cape Town** developed and adopted a prevention framework that has five elements:
- Communication
- Youth interventions
- Community partnerships
- Joint policing efforts - Safer City Nerve Centre, and
- Research.

Within the communications element City of **Cape Town** focuses on countering hate and extremist narratives, and addressing conspiracy theories and hateful stereotypes (e.g., recently launched campaign to target the rise in xenophobia).

Youth interventions include a range of educational and training programmes (e.g., Metro Police youth cadet programme; awareness sessions on violent extremism within schools) that aim both to educate young people on these threats, and to engage young people in programmes that support their development and provide employment opportunities.

Community partnerships focus on capacity building of the community on threats of hate and extremism (e.g., The city developed guidance and training for community partners on violent extremism), as well as building trust between the city and different communities (e.g., of Safer and Healthier places of worship project).

Cape Town has also partnered with the South African Police Service (SAPS) to conduct joint policing efforts, as well as pledged the establishment of a Safer City Nerve Centre, a project that integrates technology in realising the city's safety agenda. The idea behind the project is to be pro-active rather than reactive when dealing with the city's safety issues, and the idea is modelled on an integrated approach, data reliance and cooperation with the city residents, especially through the neighbourhood watches. The project highlighted how data and technology, processes and people interface to produce a city safety strategy for **Cape Town**.

Stellenbosch City Practice
Stellenbosch municipality established Community Police Forums (CPFs) where ward councillors, police and other relevant stakeholders meet communities to discuss their issues and challenges, which are then registered and followed up on. The primary objective is to promote a partnership between the community and the local police and to create an environment that will promote effective local policing that is user-friendly. These CPFs have three work streams: crime, physical infrastructure and social issues. Participants stressed how   genuine investment and commitment from all stakeholders is needed for these forums to have impact.

3.   Proactive and effective national-local collaboration is critical to having local governments in South Africa tap into their prevention potential.

The workshop underscored the importance of the national government recognising the role that local governments in South Africa can play in hate and extremism prevention and, in particular, facilitating the local application of relevant national prevention frameworks given that such governments are closest to the local communities and best understand local needs and dynamics. In this context, following a presentation on the new National Action Plan against Racism, participants acknowledged the limited involvement of local governments in the elaboration of the plan. This, it was argued, has contributed to the limited awareness among cities of the plan, let alone their role in its implementation.   Participants exchanged views on the importance of ensuring that local governments have the required awareness and understanding of the plans, and capacity and resources to turn these plans into action at the local level. Discussions highlighted how regular communication between the national and local levels is needed to ensure local governments and the community-based actors can feed the information needed to design effective prevention interventions.

More broadly, city representatives highlighted the lack of communication and cooperation between national security agencies and the local actors implementing social, cultural, economic, and other non-security-focused programmes to address inequality, marginalisation and feelings of injustice. Participants also pointed to the particular challenges to improving national-local cooperation in a country where identity-based political discourse features so prominently. This makes such cooperation, especially when involving municipalities that are run by the opposition parties so fraught.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The conversation highlighted that South African cities need and want to be involved in the prevention of hate, extremism and polarisation, and there are ways for them to become more involved without necessarily creating new policies or programmes or requiring new resources. During workshop, officials from different cities pointed to a number of existing initiatives which could be leveraged for hate and extremism prevention objectives as well.

However, where political will, resources and capacities exist, there is also room for municipalities (most likely the larger ones) to develop dedicated hate and extremism-prevention frameworks and programmes, without necessarily requiring an explicit mandate to do so. Cape Town represents a good example of the latter approach.

City-to-city collaboration and peer-to-peer learning were highlighted as particularly relevant in a South African context where big cities have a lot of experience and learning from crime prevention efforts that can be shared and applied to smaller and rural municipalities which typically lack the

resources and expertise of their larger, urban counterparts. The meeting also highlighted the many opportunities to build synergies across existing city-focused initiatives like the Safer Cities by UN Habitat, South Africa Cities Network, SALGA, as well as Strong Cities Network. If fully realised, these synergies can help more cities across the country to develop the type of holistic, integrated approaches required to promote public safety, reduce crime and also prevent hate and extremism

The Strong Cities ESA Regional Hub committed to supporting South African cities in their advocacy for greater engagement and involvement in national policy/decision-making processes; building a shared understanding of hate, extremism and polarisation; and facilitating additional cross learning peer-to-peer events, drawing on lessons-learned and good practices from across the 175+ member Strong Cities' Network to enhance effective city-led prevention policies and programmes.

The Regional Hub agreed to pursue development of specific and targeted training and capacity building interventions facilitated by Strong Cities' Technical Support Fund and shared that Strong Cities is in the process of developing two prevention guides – one for mayors and one for local governments –   that will be released in September 2023 at its Global Summit in New York City. The guides will provide accessible and actionable steps that mayors and local governments as whole can take to address hate, extremism and polarisation and extremism.

Additional Resources

- Report: Implementing the GCTF Good Practices on Strengthening National-Local Cooperation in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism: Mapping Strengths and Challenges in East and Southern Africa
- Report: Addressing-the-Overlooked-Role-of-African-Cities-in-Preventing-and-Countering-Violent-Extremism
- Urban Safety in South Africa – Understand – SaferSpaces
- Urban Resilience In South African Cities - SA Cities

Donors and Partners

Contact Information

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