

Event Report

How Local and Regional Governments Are Building Trust and Preventing Corruption

Atlanta, USA
December 12, 2023



Summary

On 12 December 2023, the Strong Cities Network co-hosted a panel with the Carter Center's [Inform Women Transform Lives Campaign](#) on the margins of the [Tenth Session of the Conference of State Parties to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption in Atlanta](#). The event focused on the important role that mayors and cities play in preventing corruption and building trust, a role that is too often overlooked in national and multilateral conversations about how to strengthen anti-corruption efforts.

The event opened with framing remarks from the co-hosts and [Norman Eisen](#), former Special Counsel to President Obama for Ethics and Government Reform and Senior Fellow at the [Brookings Institution](#) and [Melissa Brown](#), Executive Director of USAID's Anti-Corruption Center. Eric Rosand and Laura Neuman, Senior Advisor at the Carter Center facilitated a conversation among mayors and other local leaders from **Chicago, Illinois** (US) **Nairobi** (Kenya) **Palmira**, (Colombia) and **Skopje** (North Macedonia) on city-led efforts to prevent corruption and build trust.

Key takeaways from the event included:

- **Cities are at the vanguard of corruption prevention – they should be at the global anti-corruption table:** they are often better positioned than national governments to identify corruption in their institutions and make necessary changes to restore integrity; city-led action and leadership should be at the forefront of informing national and global policies.
- **Cities are reducing corruption risk through a range of initiatives:** City-led trust-building and transparency initiatives, including ones focused on modernising government systems and involving historically marginalised and/or underrepresented communities in decision-making, are reducing the risk of corruption at a local level and contributing to the localisation of global anti-corruption measures;
- **Anti-corruption efforts contribute to hate and extremism prevention:** Corruption has detrimental effects on trust between residents and their local government. City-led anti-corruption measures facilitate higher levels of trust in local governments from residents which can serve as a protective factor against hate and/or extremist narratives. Addressing corruption is therefore one of the many ways local governments can help stem the rising tide of hate and extremism.

Cities as the Vanguard of Corruption Prevention

Acknowledging corruption undermines citizens' trust in governments, local governments are well-positioned to build trust and strengthen democracy through locally led initiatives. Speakers spotlighted the success they have had working with city leaders and to tackle corruption and build trust between communities and governments. For example, the **Carter Center's Informed Women Transform Lives** initiative increased mayors' capacity to reach women with critical information on healthcare and domestic violence resources across five continents promoting greater trust from residents in their local governments to service their needs and concerns. This in turn promoted greater participation in public reporting of corruption activities. **Norman Eisen**

emphasised how transparency, accountability and participation (TAP) are the pillars of good governance that stem corruption activity. He shared that integrity of government institutions and actors is a contextual factor that must be considered alongside these pillars to create an effective anti-corruption governance framework. He shared how, through its newly-launched [Anti-Corruption, Democracy, and Security Project](#), the Brookings Institution will be working to incubate this "TAP Plus" model in cities because they are often better positioned than national governments to identify corruption in their institutions and make necessary changes to restore integrity.



Melissa Brown offered how her work at **USAID's Anti-Corruption Center** focuses on deepening partnerships between local governments and global anti-corruption programs that are designed to take multi-faceted approaches to empowering citizens, civil society organisations and journalists to participate in corruption prevention. She highlighted the impact that local government action has had on accelerating participation in global anti-corruption initiatives.

Speakers agreed that meaningful change happens faster at the local level, which city-led innovations can serve as blueprints for regional and national anti-corruption measures. **Eric Rosand** welcomed the recognition that city-led action and leadership should be at the forefront of informing national and global policies, a founding principle of Strong Cities' mission. He shared examples of initiatives Strong Cities Network members and other cities are delivering to prevent corruption including through participatory budgeting to engage communities in city planning, transparency initiatives around policy making and spending and establishing specialised units to investigate concerns around corruption. He also shared that addressing corruption is one of the many ways local governments can stem the rising tides of hate and extremism: anti-corruption measures facilitate higher levels of trust in local governments from residents that, in turn, can serve as a protective factor against hate and/or extremist narratives.

Local Actions, Global Impact

Local leaders shared how they are tackling corruption in their cities to enable greater trust between constituents and local government. Whether creating e-procurement (Nairobi) or open contracting platforms to increase diversity of government funded contractors (Palmira), establishing online platforms for easier accessibility to government resources and programming (Chicago) or establishing [phone applications](#) that encourages community participation in oversight of government services (Tirana) local leaders pointed to systems modernisation as a way to set standards for ethical governing and accountability.

“Digital systems that are traceable decrease corruption.”

Mayor Oscar Escobar
Palmira, Colombia

Local leaders also pointed to their efforts to encourage an inclusive approach to governance, with a particular emphasis on involving historically underrepresented communities in decision-making, as important anti-corruption measures which are influencing the direction of national level anti-corruption efforts. For example, **Tirana's Mayor, Erion Veliaj**, instituted a 50/50 gender quota for their city council. Following public praise of the initiative in the capitol city, the quota became a standard at the national level. **Skopje Mayor, Danela Arsovska**, said that her city council created special councils for women, youth, and marginalised groups to advise the city on public services and other key issues. She said that these bodies have been effective for trust building by encouraging greater public participation in government services and oversight.

Oscar Escobar, Mayor of Palmira, spoke about his efforts to work with young people in his city to increase their civic engagement and train future leaders in ethical governance. For example, the city established a [Peace and Opportunity for Palmira](#) initiative which provides information about how to access government services to students in communities with historically limited interaction with the local and national government. The initiative encourages students to share this information with their families and neighbours. This has resulted in higher engagement from these communities in public services and increased trust in the local government.

Similarly, **Anna Valencia, Chicago's City Clerk** said the local government created youth councils in schools to empower students to talk about good governance and train the next generation of city council leaders. **Esther Passaris** shared how the **Nairobi City Council** is stamping out corruption and nepotism practices by setting up public hotlines to report these issues. She highlighted how education campaigns informing women and minority groups on Nairobi's laws against nepotism and corruption proliferated the use of reporting hotlines and, in turn, significantly helped the city council thwart corruption practices.



The panel showcased examples of how local leaders are transforming their governments to be more equitable and accountable to citizens which helps reduce the risk of corruption. Local leaders consistently highlighted that they are

implementing national anti-corruption policies on a daily basis and have developed tools and systems that meet citizens needs and facilitate greater trust building. They see a growing appetite from citizens for national governments to implement the same mechanisms for accountability and transparency and seek to inform national and international bodies on how to scale their promising practices. As the **Mayor of Tirana** stated, "By 2023, 65% of people will be living in cities. Mayors need a seat at the table to inform the international rules that they will implement. The 20th century was the century of states, the 21st century will be the century of cities."

Next Steps

Participants agreed that mayors and local leaders must stay engaged with the international and national communities on the topic of anti-corruption to facilitate greater trust building in national institutions and inform international policy. Strong Cities will continue to elevate local leaders' voices on their promising practices to prevent corruption and its nexus to preventing hate, extremism and polarisation, including its [Transatlantic Dialogue](#) and future events with the Carter Center.

Additional Resources

- A Guide for Cities: Preventing Hate, Extremism & Polarisation, Strong Cities Network, September 2023, <https://strongcitiesnetwork.org/resource/a-guide-for-cities>.
- A Guide for Mayors: Preventing and Responding to Hate, Extremism and Polarisation, Strong Cities Network, September 2023, <https://strongcitiesnetwork.org/resource/a-guide-for-mayors>.

Partners

For more information on this event or the Strong Cities Network please contact the Strong Cities North America Regional Hub at na.hub@strongcitiesnetwork.org.

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