

## Event Report

### Mayoral and City Officials' Learning Visit on Enhancing City-Youth Engagement in Preventing and Responding to Hate, Extremism and Polarisation

Mombasa, Kenya  
21 – 22 November 2023



## Summary

On 21 — 22 November 2023 in Mombasa (Kenya), the [Strong Cities Network](#) East and Southern Africa (ESA) Regional Hub convened mayors and technical officers from **Koboko Municipality**, **Masaka City**, **Nansana Municipality** and **Nebbi Municipality** in Uganda; and the **City of Dar es Salaam** and **Zanzibar Municipality** in Tanzania to learn from the [County Government of Mombasa's](#) efforts to engage youth in its hate and extremism prevention policies, including to empower young people to deliver social cohesion and community resilience projects. In addition to roundtable discussions with County Government officials about the County's youth engagement initiatives, visiting officials had the opportunity to connect with young people leading initiatives to



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address youth grievances and/or promote social cohesion, hearing from them about why investment and meaningful engagement from mayors and local governments is so important. The learning visit highlighted several key themes, including:

- 1. Investing in Youth as Changemakers:** whether by providing funding support to youth-led initiatives or rolling out a youth internship programme with the local government, there are many avenues through which mayors and city administrations can empower young people and mitigate challenges of idleness and unemployment. Above all, these efforts should be **proactive** and **inclusive**, ensuring youth of different ethnic, socioeconomic or other backgrounds are engaged, and **consultative**, where young people are seen as core to the development and implementation of effective prevention policies and programmes.
- 2. Investing in Youth to Understand Community Needs:** by engaging young people proactively and consultatively, local governments not only build trust between them and their young residents but can also empower youth to serve as representatives of their communities, enabling them to inform a city's policies and programmes to ensure they meet the actual needs of its residents.
- 3. National-Local Cooperation (NLC) to Enhance Youth Engagement and Empowerment:** whether through national-local partnerships to train community-based actors on prevention, or a nationally-given mandate at the local government for youth engagement, NLC can serve as a powerful tool through which cities can enhance and sustain efforts to engage and otherwise empower young people.

The learning visit highlighted that effectively preventing hate and extremism requires local governments to implement programmes that resonate with the needs and perspectives of young people. By fostering an environment where the energy, creativity and aspirations of young individuals are not only recognised but actively integrated into decision-making, local governments can pave the way for a more inclusive, resilient and forward-thinking response to these complex issues. The learning visit further inspired visiting city officials to identify a series of priorities to enhance their engagement with youth, which they will implement over the coming six months with support from Strong Cities' ESA Regional Hub:

- **Koboko Municipality** will prioritise the creation of a physical space where youth can convene to safely nurture their skills, come up with joint business ideas and more. The Municipality will also seek to more proactively consult with young people as it develops prevention-related initiatives.
- **Masaka City**, which is made up of three divisions that are sub-divided into 25 wards, will bring together two youth leaders per level of governance (50 total at the ward level, six total at the division level, and two total at the city level) for a first-of-its-kind citywide convening focused on gathering youth perspectives on community needs and how the City should



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respond. This will inform a concept note on enhanced youth engagement that the City will share with Strong Cities and peers in other cities for input before implementation.

- **Nansana Municipality** will draft a by-law on prevention informed by young people, who will be consulted throughout its development. The Municipality will also create a department specifically for prevention to embed this responsibility in the local government. Finally, inspired by the Fursa application, the Municipality will seek to digitalise core functions, including around employability to make it easier for young people – amongst whom internet penetration is highest – to navigate these services.
- **Nebbi Municipality** will convene youth representatives across each of its wards to share what it has learned from Mombasa County Government and gain insights on how the Municipality can achieve a similar level of youth engagement. The Mayor also committed to providing a designated, physical space wherein young people can innovate and build their skills.
- **City of Dar es Salaam** will develop a comprehensive plan aimed at digitalising and simplifying employment processes. By borrowing insights from the Mombasa Youth Assembly, the city also plans to re-invest in its youth councils, extending the initiative from the ward to the city level, enabling a more representative and diverse platform through which the local government can learn from youth perspectives on everything ranging from governance to development and deployment of prevention policies and programmes.
- **Zanzibar Municipality** plans to mobilise a local network of community-based organisations and youth groups to better coordinate the work they are doing. As part of this effort, the city plans to convene youth leaders to create a collaborative and sustainable approach to youth-city engagement. This strategic move will aim at harnessing the collective efforts of youth with support from community-based organisations, ensuring a more coordinated and impactful approach to addressing the diverse needs of youth and the broader community.

## Threats & Key Challenges

Among the main concerns shared amongst visiting city officials are **high unemployment rates** and a lack of economic opportunities specifically for young people, particularly that these leave youth idle and thus vulnerable to exploitation by extremist and other mal-intended actors. **Geoffrey Ngiriker, Mayor, Nebbi Municipality (Uganda)**, shared, for example, that criminal gangs are mobilising young people in his city to partake in illicit activities both within Nebbi but also across the nearby border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). He added that militant groups in DRC recruit youth from Uganda, smuggle them across the border to train them, and then send them back to Uganda to “cause havoc”. He further shared that obstacles to overcoming these challenges include widespread disregard for and difficulty with implementing the rule of law, adding that, as a



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new municipality, the city lacks the resources and structures to effectively provide for its residents, let alone address these challenges. Cross-border challenges were also pointed to by **Emmanuel Baiga, Speaker, Koboko Municipality (Uganda)**, where he noted that youth are often exploited by gangs to serve as cross-border drug mules.

**Regina Bakitte, Mayor, Nansana Municipality (Uganda)** also expressed significant concern about high unemployment rates. She noted that in her city, threats of hate and extremism are exacerbated by a rapidly growing population, which strains existing resources and public service delivery. She pointed to growing intolerance of those holding “divergent” views and, more broadly, increased inter-communal tensions. In **Tanzania**, city officials from **Dar Es Salaam** and **Zanzibar** added that gender-based violence (GBV) poses a significant challenge and that high unemployment rates leave young girls particularly vulnerable, as some are exploited by older men that offer funds and other resources in exchange for sex.

## Key Themes

### 1. Investing in Youth as Changemakers:

**Abdulswamad Sharrif Nassir, Governor, Mombasa County (Kenya)** urged city leaders to perceive young people “as part of the solution” to local threats and challenges, instead of just viewing them as a vulnerable demographic. The governor noted the critical role of youth in fostering community resilience and the need for cities to harness the potential and creativity inherent in them. For example, the County Government has **invested financially and with other resources**, such as project management training, in youth-led initiatives that address the root causes of hate and extremism. One such example is that of [LONAMAC](#), a youth-led community-based organisation that provides digital resilience training and business and life skills trainings, which young people can register for simply by completing an online form accessible through their [Facebook](#). LONAMAC also trains youth on conflict mediation and inter-communal dialogue techniques. These youth are then deployed to serve as ‘peace ambassadors’ particularly around election periods, during which Kenya has experienced [significant violence](#) in the recent past.

The County also **embedded youth-led initiatives within its public service delivery** and approach to meeting local needs. For example, the County is working with a group of youth tech. developers to roll out a job-seeking application created by young people called [Fursa](#) (Kiswahili for ‘opportunity’), which is geo-fenced to Mombasa County (where only those in Mombasa can see and apply to Mombasa-based job opportunities on the app.). The application is designed by youth for youth with user-friendliness in mind, providing a ‘go-to’ place through which young people can find local job and/or upskilling opportunities. Another way the County has invested in youth innovation is through providing a **physical space** where young people can safely convene and engage in productive hobbies, thus mitigating risks of idle youth being drawn into harmful or illicit activities. For example, Mombasa County Government pays for the grounds that are used by [Swahilipot Hub](#), a youth-focused skills-incubation non-government organisation.



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Beyond investing in youth organisations, the County itself has deployed programmes to directly engage young people as changemakers, helping them contribute to the overall safety and governance of Mombasa. The [Mombasa Ni Yangu Initiative](#), for example, ‘absorbed’ over 1500 young people into various departments of the County Government, training them up to serve as beach safety marshals, traffic officers, tour guides, information centre agents, neighbourhood cleaning agents, to support disaster management, and more. Importantly, the programme runs year-round, ensuring such opportunities are provided in overlap with school holidays, when youth are more likely to become idle and/or engage in anti-social or harmful behaviours. The programme ultimately carries multiple benefits: it provides a space through which young people can support the County’s public service delivery, it trains them up on relevant skills and thus supports their employability, and it increases the County’s resources and capacity for its public service delivery. The Governor attributes the County’s improved ability to manage natural disasters, such as flooding, to the increased disaster risk management capacity that has [resulted](#) from involving youth in this mandate as part of the Mombasa Ni Yangu Initiative.

## Mombasa Ni Yangu Initiative

### Mombasa County, Kenya

- **Challenge:** High rates of youth unemployment, leaving youth idle and leading some young people to engage in disruptive and unhealthy behaviours.
- **Approach:** The County Government of Mombasa developed a youth economic empowerment initiative offering opportunities to work with the County Government in core service areas such as county cleanliness, tourism, safety and security, disaster management, and more.
- **Impact:** Over 2000 young people have been employed with the County through this initiative.



Link: <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/realtime/2023-04-22-nassir-how-mombasa-ni-yangu-plan-averted-drainage-crisis/>

Some visiting city officials shared that they have embarked on similar efforts to empower young people and mitigate the risks of them being left idle and thus vulnerable to exploitation: **Florence Namanyanja, Mayor, Masaka City (Uganda)** noted that she employs youth in core local government functions such as waste management, and **Happiness Joachim, Youth Development**



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**Officer, City of Dar Es Salaam (Tanzania)** said that her city provides stipends to marginalised youth to cover two months' intensive training at a nearby college, giving them certification to increase their chances of employment. However, local officials agreed there is potential to do more and identified a number of priorities (see above) to enhance their youth empowerment efforts based on learnings from Mombasa County Government.

## 2. Investing in Youth to Understand Local Needs:

Participants agreed that consistent and sustained engagement between a local government and young people is vital to implementing a community-driven and community-centric approach to preventing hate, extremism and polarisation, where the *actual* – rather than perceived – needs of communities inform relevant policy and programming. Discussions throughout the visit emphasised, for example, the important role that young people can play as representatives of local communities, and that they can serve as entry points into historically neglected or otherwise marginalised communities, in particular.

One model for achieving such engagement is the [Mombasa Youth Assembly](#), a platform through which young people get to inform local policymaking in the County. Members of the youth assembly host public meetings (or 'barazas' in Kiswahili) to collate community needs, which they then relay to local and national government (see Theme 3), providing a youth-informed perspective on how to respond to emerging threats and concerns. When reflecting on this model, participants agreed that **mayors and other city leaders have a vital role to play in facilitating and safeguarding the establishment of such fora**, noting that they should actively encourage the participatory governance that this model facilitates, and welcome feedback provided to the local government through such assemblies.

“You cannot ignore the participation of the community in prevention and responding to violent extremism - they are privy with the realities on the ground”.

**Joshua Mathoka**, Representative of the Office of the County Commissioner of Mombasa, Mombasa County (Kenya)



In Nansana, **Mayor Regina Bakitte** established a **Youth Office** that sits within her office, which is responsible for coordinating with youth councils across the city, to invest in youth engagement more broadly, as well as to compile and analyse municipal-wide youth-related data. Through organising community meetings and administering a citywide survey about youth needs, the Youth Office has identified a series of priorities it will take forward over the coming months. This includes investing in



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sports and other extra-curricular programmes to keep youth occupied while they are out of school and, similarly to Mombasa County's partnership with Swahilipot Hub, creating an incubation lab that can serve as a safe space for youth to invest in their talents.

Further, **Happiness Joachim** shared how the **City of Dar es Salaam** has facilitated youth-focused dialogues on peace and security. One was organised in September 2023 with Ugandan, Rwandan and Kenyan youth to discuss prevention of hate, extremism, terrorism and peacebuilding from the perspective of youth in countries that have recently endured hate- and/or extremist-motivated violence. Cross-border engagement as such was highlighted as a need by other participants such as **Emmanuel Baiga**, noting that youth unemployment in **Koboko Municipality** has led to young people engaging in cross-border smuggling (e.g., of drugs and arms), and that this threat could be mitigated through better coordination between cities that share borders. He also underscored the importance of local governments explicitly engaging with youth from marginalised communities, such as refugees. This engagement is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it provides a symbolic display of inclusivity, where the Mayor and/or other city officials show residents that the local government is there to meet the needs of *all* its residents, new and old. In addition, it is important because youth from such backgrounds are often disproportionately vulnerable to exploitation, given the traumas they carry from being displaced. Mr. Baiga shared the municipality has sought to ensure that its youth empowerment programmes always include *both* 'local' youth and those of refugee background. This requires making the programmes accessible to both audiences and dedicated outreach to youth from both demographics to facilitate their participation.

Visiting city officials agreed that, while their existing initiatives provide a good foundation for meaningful and sustainable youth-city engagement, they will endeavour to be more proactive and consultative in engaging young residents to inform policy and programming going forward. As **Mayor Geoffrey Ngriker** observed, "this learning visit has shown us we are not engaging youth enough. We have imposed ideas and information in the past, but realised from this learning visit that we need to be much more consultative. We will take this forward, creating additional forums through which youth can propose ideas and tell us what they need."

### 3. NLC to Enhance Youth Engagement and Empowerment

Finally, the roundtable highlighted important lessons regarding NLC as a means to enhance youth engagement and further mitigate vulnerabilities amongst young people. For example, in Mombasa, the Youth Assembly actively engages the national government on policies related to security, which is often facilitated through the County Government. National governments can also facilitate youth-city engagement and city-led empowerment of young people by creating a mandate for local governments to do so. In Tanzania, for example, the national government requires all counties to allocate 30% of all tenders to youth, as noted by **Happiness Joachim**.




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In this context, **Raymond Tsuma, Officer, Department of Youth, Gender, Sports and Social Services, Mombasa County** shared that the County benefits from a national context in which the mandate for hate and extremism is devolved, as per Kenya's [National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism](#), which outlines an extensive role for county governments. Importantly, the Strategy states that youth representatives must be included in “county-level deradicalisation and counter-radicalisation bodies”, thus mandating city-youth engagement in its implementation at the county level. He further shared that Mombasa County has been able to leverage the strong relationships it has built with the national government – in part as a result of the country’s decentralised approach to prevention – to build trust between youth and national security actors. Here, the County Government has facilitated dialogues between young people and security officials and partnered with the security sector on multi-stakeholder trainings (at a sub-county level) to sensitise diverse actors, including young people, on hate and extremism, as well as its prevention.

## Conclusions and Next Steps

The workshop concluded with mayors and their technical officers collaborating to design and propose strategies for implementing their learnings from this visit in their own cities, as outlined above (see ‘Summary’). Strong Cities’ ESA Regional Hub will support each city with translating these priorities into action, providing further opportunities for city-city learning, expert support and by leveraging Strong Cities’ new [Guide for Mayors](#) and [Guide for Cities](#).



“I’m so excited about taking forward the learnings from this visit. I have learned so much. There are a lot of youth groups and community-based organisations in Zanzibar, but I see now there is much more we can do to coordinate them.”

**Mwajuma Ali Abadi**, Head of Social Services Division, Zanzibar Urban Municipal Council (Tanzania)



## Additional Resources

- Youth organisations that featured in the learning visit:
  - [Acha Gun Shika Mic](#) – an initiative that uses music as a means to break down inter-communal balances, express youth concerns and promote peace



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- [Mombasa Youth Assembly](#) – a forum through which youth can inform county- and national-level policymaking
- [LONAMAC](#) – runs a number of prevention-related initiatives, including on digital resilience, training on democracy and peace-building, and much more.
- [Swahilipot Hub](#) – a NGO dedicated to incubating and nurturing youth entrepreneurship
- [Mombasa County Action Plan](#)
- [Strong Cities – A Guide for Mayors: Preventing and Responding to Hate, Extremism and Polarisation](#)
- [Strong Cities – A Guide for Cities: Preventing Hate, Extremism and Polarisation](#)

## Donors & Partners

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## Contact Information

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