

Strengthening City-Led Prevention of Hate, Extremism and Polarisation in East and Southern Africa

How Bringing Local Governments Together is Catalysing Action

Introduction

In November 2022, with support from the European Union (EU), the Strong Cities Network launched its [East and Southern Africa \(ESA\) Regional Hub](#), which is hosted by the [East African County and Local Government Association](#), to strengthen city-led prevention of hate, extremism and polarisation across the region. Since then, through in-person and virtual city-city, countrywide and regional convenings, the Regional Hub has inspired action and commitment, with mayors and other city officials wanting to protect the communities they serve against hate, intolerance and other threats to social cohesion and working with the Regional Hub to implement practices and policies to do so. The Hub has also raised awareness among national governments of the important contribution that cities can make to a whole-of-society prevention strategy and the role that national governments can play in facilitating these contributions.

As highlighted below, the benefits of investing in and advocating for local governments as vital actors in prevention and maintaining social cohesion in times of crisis are numerous, demonstrating the potential for change when cities are supported to learn from one another.

Catalysing Action Through City-to-City Learning

Cities across ESA have shown leadership in putting their learnings from Strong Cities convenings into practice. For example:

- **Border Municipalities Working Group:**

At a Strong Cities [regional workshop](#) in Johannesburg (South Africa) in June 2023, leaders of border towns from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda came together to form a Border Municipalities Working Group under the auspices of Strong Cities. At the workshop they recognised that they share a complicated threat landscape as a result of the region's porous borders and their remoteness from their capitals and that they could benefit from sustained peer learning on how to better address local threats.

Since then, the Hub has supported the Working Group by helping it develop a [strategy](#), grow its membership, which is now at **over 25 cities from 8 countries**, and provide in-person and virtual opportunities to discuss challenges, brainstorm solutions and learn from one another. This platform has also inspired action amongst its members: for example, **Nebbi Municipality** (Uganda) now regularly hosts officials from neighbouring **Mahagi** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) to explore joint peace-building initiatives.

“At our last meeting, we asked for cities from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Malawi to be included in the Working Group. We see them here now: we gave the Regional Hub our needs and they fulfilled it.”

Michael Mbano, Mayor, Songea Municipality (Tanzania) speaking at a meeting of the Border Municipalities Working Group in Arusha (Tanzania) in May 2024

- **Inspiring Leadership:**

The **City of Cape Town** (South Africa) developed and launched a framework for preventing hate and extremism following its participation in a Strong Cities regional [workshop](#) in Nairobi (Kenya) in May 2022. The framework not only names Strong Cities as the City's primary international partner on prevention but also notes that – like Strong Cities – the local government is committed to supporting peer learning on this topic. This commitment has come through in a number of inspiring Strong Cities initiatives the City has supported since then, including:

- In **May 2023**, the City co-hosted a Strong Cities [roundtable](#) for South African cities on prevention, inspiring Buffalo City, Durban/eThekweni and Stellenbosch, among others, to get involved in Strong Cities activities and join the Network.
- In **December 2023**, the City hosted Strong Cities' Border Municipalities Working Group for a [learning visit](#) on integrating prevention of hate and extremism into broader community safety efforts.
- In **July 2024**, city officials joined the Regional Hub in **Zanzibar** (Tanzania) for a [workshop](#) on engaging youth and communities in prevention, where they delivered a training on their prevention framework, as well as [Junior City Council](#) and Neighbourhood Watch initiatives.
- In **August 2024**, the City hosted a delegation from **Busia County** (Kenya) at the request of County Executive Committee Member Peter Odima, whose participation in the December 2023 learning visit inspired him to organise a follow-up exchange so other county officials could also benefit from peer learning. At this second exchange, the City of Cape Town provided training and site visits on its various youth and community engagement practices and broader community safety investments related to data and technology. The County Government will now transfer and implement – with support from the Regional Hub – Cape Town's Junior City Council and Neighbourhood Watch programmes in Busia.

Cape Town also serves on Strong Cities' International Steering Committee and co-hosted the Network's [Fifth Global Summit](#), which convened officials from over 90 cities from 40 countries across the world.



The leadership shown by cities in ESA once sensitised to their role in prevention extends far beyond Cape Town. For example:

- In Malawi, officials from **Zomba City** took their learnings from Strong Cities activities to sensitise local multi-actor structures in the city on prevention of hate and extremism, ultimately seeing prevention integrated into their existing functions and mandates.
- In Uganda, Mayor Florence Namayanja of **Masaka City's** participation in Strong Cities inspired her to create designated 'desks' within her office that are responsible for engaging marginalised communities, such as disabled individuals, with a view to strengthen participatory governance.
- In Kenya, Peter Odima, County Executive Committee Member for Lands, Housing, Physical Planning and Urban Development in **Busia County** has shared how his participation in Strong Cities Network has changed his approach to leadership, specifically that he now makes a more intentional commitment to promoting values of inclusivity and tolerance.

These are but a few examples of how mayors and other city leaders have embraced their role in prevention once made aware of the role they can play and how.

“Strong Cities Network has transformed me to an all-inclusive leader who embraces diversity in opinion and engagement. I believed in the winner takes it all syndrome but have since learnt that the winner shares with all.”

Peter Odima, County Executive Committee Member, Busia County (Kenya)



City-City Partnerships: Catalysing and Sustaining Implementation

Cities across ESA are also showing a commitment to supporting each other with implementing new or strengthening existing prevention practices.

- **Launching Neighbourhood Watch in Nansana (Uganda):**

In March 2024, Mayor Regina Bakitte of **Nansana Municipality** (Uganda) requested support from the Regional Hub to implement [Neighbourhood Watch](#) as a community-based model for early-warning against hate and extremism. Her request was motivated by two key factors: a) concern about the presence and continued crossing of [ADF militants](#) into Uganda from neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo and b) her participation in the Strong Cities learning visit to Cape Town in December 2023, where she learned about how Cape Town and Stellenbosch use Neighbourhood Watch as a community-oriented approach to public safety. Recognising the urgency of her request, the Regional Hub partnered with Stellenbosch Municipality to deliver a workshop on the model in May 2024, through which 200+ local government officials and community members from Nansana were trained.

Since then, **30+ Neighbourhood Watch groups have launched in Nansana**. A quality-assurance visit in August 2024 by the Regional Hub and technical officers from Stellenbosch revealed that the model has not only improved information-sharing between the local government and community members and raised community-wide awareness of hate and extremism but has also served as a platform to get youth and women – two often marginalised groups – engaged in community safety efforts.

Further, in December 2024, inspired by the proven potential for impact when local governments are given a platform to work together to prevent hate and extremism, the two Municipalities entered into a five-year [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MoU) to sustain their partnership on safety and security.

Mayor Bakitte has also committed to working with a national mayoral alliance in Uganda, AMICAALL and the Regional Hub to support other Ugandan cities with implementing the model.

“The impacts of Neighbourhood Watch in Nansana have been many: it gives community members the opportunity to collaborate with us on community safety and gives us, as a municipality, new perspectives on what communities need to feel safe and secure against hate, extremism and crime. We are excited to see women and youth playing such an active role [in Neighbourhood Watch] and look forward to our continued collaboration with the Regional Hub and Stellenbosch.”

Regina Bakitte, Mayor, Nansana Municipality (Uganda)

- **Strengthening Youth-Local Government Engagement in Masaka (Uganda):**

In November 2023, in response to concerns about vulnerability amongst young people, the Regional Hub organised a [learning visit](#) to Mombasa (Kenya) for mayors and technical officers from Tanzania and Uganda, giving them the opportunity to learn from Mombasa County Government's robust efforts to engage young people as beneficiaries of and partners in prevention. The visit inspired Mayor Florence Namayanja of Masaka City to strengthen her engagement with young people: in April 2024, she partnered with the Regional Hub and a youth leader from Mombasa to host a dialogue with youth from across the city.

The dialogue resulted in the establishment of a committee responsible for driving the City's youth engagement efforts and comprised of the Mayor's Youth Desk Officer and four youth leaders. The dialogue also catalysed a **long-term collaboration between Mombasa and Masaka on youth engagement**: youth leaders from both cities continue to convene (virtually) to discuss how to constructively engage local government on their concerns and needs while officials from Masaka City and Mombasa County Government regularly coordinate – with support from the Regional Hub – to support Masaka as it seeks to establish a youth innovation hub inspired by the one in [Mombasa](#) and a youth council inspired by Cape Town's [Junior City Council](#).

- **Supporting Whole-of-Society Prevention in Zanzibar (Tanzania):**

Representatives of Zanzibar Urban Municipality also took part in the Mombasa learning visit, which inspired them to host their first-ever dialogue with youth-led organisations on prevention of hate and extremism. In addition, in May 2024, representatives of Zanzibar Association of Local Government Authorities (ZALGA) took part in a Strong Cities [regional workshop](#) in Arusha. Together, these two engagements enabled ZALGA and Zanzibar Urban Municipality to identify four priorities for strengthening city-led prevention in Zanzibar: a) youth engagement, b) community-based early-warning, c) [national-local cooperation](#) (NLC) and d) cross-border city-city collaboration.

As part of a long-term technical assistance programme to address these priorities, the Regional Hub organised a [workshop](#) in July 2024 to build capacity of Zanzibari local governments on youth engagement and city-city collaboration. The workshop included experts from the City of Cape Town and Mombasa, who shared the variety of ways they engage young people. This has resulted in a tripartite partnership between Cape Town, Mombasa and Zanzibar Urban Municipality, which has been endorsed by the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar and is being supported by the Regional Hub, to continue peer-learning and support implementation of such practices in Zanzibar.

Serving as an Advocate for City-Led Action against Hate and Extremism

Since its launch, the ESA Regional Hub has been consulted by and has proactively provided local and national actors with guidance on how to scale city-led action, including by drawing on expertise and experiences from across Strong Cities' global membership.

- **Strengthening NLC in Malawi and Uganda:**

In October 2023, the **Malawi** national government launched its National Counter Terrorism and Prevention of Violent Extremism Strategy. In March 2024, the Regional Hub facilitated a dialogue among local governments, other local actors and the national government on the role of cities in the Strategy's implementation. The dialogue resulted in a commitment from the Ministry of Local Government, Unity and Culture to advocate for and support local governments with localising the Strategy and more broadly preventing hate and extremism. As a direct outcome of the dialogue, the Ministry has also worked with Malawi's four cities - Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mzuzu and Zomba - to implement multi-actor Peace and Unity Committees that can coordinate local prevention efforts. The Regional Hub also provided the Ministry with a contextualised strategy for strengthening NLC and will host a second dialogue in March 2025 to build on the above progress.

In **Uganda**, the Regional Hub's work on strengthening NLC has resulted in the establishment of a **city-led taskforce** that comprises local government officials, civil society, youth leaders and Resident District Commissioners (which are national government actors with a mandate for safety and security at the district level). In March 2025, the taskforce – itself a mechanism for NLC – will start working with the National Counter Terrorism Centre to review the country's National Strategy for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism to a) ensure it includes a role for local government and b) catalyse its implementation at the local level.

“Through the learning opportunities provided by Strong Cities, I have gained valuable insights to contribute to making our cities strong in Malawi: cities that are able to combat extremism and promote unity. We are now devising strategies and initiatives to work with our cities to fight hatred, polarisation and extremism.”

Joseph Dzuwa, Chief Peacebuilding and Conflict Management Officer, Ministry of Local Government, Unity and Culture (Malawi)

- **Ad Hoc Advisory Support:**

In Tanzania, **Dar Es Salaam City Council** requested support to improve its youth engagement efforts following the City’s participation in the November 2023 Strong Cities learning visit to Mombasa on youth-city cooperation on prevention. In consultation with the City, the Hub provided a menu of governance, economic, social and environmental initiatives to strengthen youth trust in government and public participation, as well as encourage youth to mobilise around constructive causes (thus mitigating their vulnerability to extremism). The City Council is now using this guidance to identify implementation priorities and finalise its youth engagement strategy.

The Hub also provided remote support to **Kyengera Town Council** (Uganda) as it launched its Talking Compounds initiative, inspired by a similar practice shared by West Pokot (Kenya) at the Hub’s regional workshop in Arusha in May 2024. The initiative, which launched in February 2025, sees the Town Council partner with local schools to disseminate positive messaging on campuses and host dialogues with students and their families on how to build a more inclusive and cohesive city.

“Strong Cities has truly empowered me. The knowledge I’ve gained, the networks I have built ... I can now confidently sit at any table and be a strong voice for my community’s well-being.”

Joseph Ssemugera Bitokote, Councillor, Kyengera Town (Uganda)

These are a selection of examples of how Strong Cities – through its Regional Hub – is inspiring and scaling city-led action against hate, extremism and polarisation across ESA. These examples highlight the practical benefits of investing in local governments as vital actors in prevention. Moreover, they demonstrate that **mayors and other city leaders want to get involved in addressing a set of threats where their role has far too often been overlooked**, as evidenced in the action and city-city partnerships that are resulting from Strong Cities activities.

About Strong Cities

Strong Cities is an independent global network of more than 270 cities and other local governments dedicated to addressing all forms of hate, extremism and polarisation, while promoting a human rights-based prevention framework. Through in-person and online convenings, exchanges and trainings, Strong Cities facilitates sharing and learning among mayors, other local leaders and municipal-level practitioners. By doing so, it helps local authorities leverage their full potential in prevention, while complementing national, regional and global efforts. Learn more:

www.strongcitiesnetwork.org.

For more information about the Strong Cities ESA Regional Hub, or to connect with the Hub team, email:

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