



East & Southern Africa Regional Impact

**Strong Cities
Network**

10 Years
Stronger Together

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

How Bringing Local Governments Together is Catalysing Action

Introduction

In October 2022, with support from the European Union (EU), as part of its three-year STRIVE Cities action, 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. Through in-person and virtual city-to-city, countrywide and regional awareness-raising and capacity-building activities, the Regional Hub inspired action and commitment amongst both local and national governments across the region: not only did mayors and other city officials invest in policies and practices to address intolerance and other threats to the cohesion and safety of the communities they serve, a number of national institutions collaborated with the Regional Hub to align local and national prevention efforts and otherwise support local action against hate and extremism.

As highlighted below, the benefits of investing in and advocating for local governments and municipal and county leaders as vital actors not only in prevention but also in maintaining social cohesion in times of crisis are numerous. This demonstrates the potential for change when these local actors are supported to learn from one another.



“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)

Sensitisation: Inspiring Action through Awareness Raising

One of the Regional Hub’s core functions is to raise awareness amongst local governments of the role they can play in addressing hate and extremism, complementing relevant national strategies to implement a truly whole-of-society approach to prevention that must – by definition – include local government. Once sensitised to their role (i.e., through regional convenings and other awareness-raising activities), cities across ESA showed leadership in putting their learnings into practice.

- **Strengthening Cross-Border City-to-City Cooperation:**

During 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. This was inspired by recognition that a) they share a complicated threat landscape as a result of the region's porous borders and their remoteness from their capitals and b) that they could benefit from sustained peer learning on how to better address local threats.

Since then, Strong Cities has supported the Working Group by helping it develop a strategy, grow its membership, which is now at over 30 members from 9 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 peacebuilding initiatives, while Kyengerera Town (Uganda) launched a Talking Compounds initiative inspired by West Pokot (Kenya)'s Peace Border Schools.

“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 Mbanjo, 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 numerous inspiring Strong Cities initiatives the city has supported since then, including:

- In **May 2023**, Cape Town co-hosted a Strong Cities [roundtable](#) for South African cities on prevention, inspiring Buffalo City, Durban/eThekweni and Stellenbosch, among others, to join the Strong Cities Network.
- In **December 2023**, Cape Town 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**, Cape Town hosted a delegation from **Busia County** (Kenya) at the request of their 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 has added implementation of Cape Town's Junior City Council and Neighbourhood Watch programmes in Busia to its forward strategy. Further, Mr. Odima credits his participation in such activities for changing his approach to leadership, specifically that he now makes a more intentional commitment to promoting values of inclusivity and tolerance.

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.

Other examples of cities putting their learnings from Strong Cities' convenings into practice include:

- In Malawi, officials from **Zomba City** sensitised already operating community-based committees in the city on prevention of hate and extremism, integrating this work into their functions and mandates.
- In Uganda, Mayor Florence Namayanja of **Masaka City** created designated 'desks' within her office that are responsible for engaging marginalised communities, such as disabled individuals, with a view to strengthen participatory governance.

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.

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** 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+ community members and local government officials were trained from a selection of pilot wards. These wards were then asked to launch Neighbourhood Watch groups, with explicit instruction to ensure such groups included representatives from historically marginalised groups, such as youth, people with disabilities, women and others. The 30+ groups that were established were then trained on a strict code of conduct to guide their activities, and – to monitor implementation – practitioners from Stellenbosch have conducted several site visits and delivered additional trainings on an as-needed basis.

Through regular patrols, awareness-raising activities (e.g., of hate and extremism as well as reporting mechanisms) and creating fora for dialogue, Neighbourhood Watch has had a range of impacts in Nansana.

- **Greater social participation and integration of women**, with unemployed women – who are traditionally confined to their homes - forming a disproportionate amount of Neighbourhood Watch group members.
- **Economic benefits**, with local business owners reporting they feel safer to stay open longer due to the visible patrolling of Neighbourhood Watch (and the resulting deterrence of petty crime).
- **More dialogue about and proactive reporting of community concerns**: Neighbourhood Watch groups are mandated not just to patrol streets but also to host fora for community members to share concerns. Through monthly committee meetings with the Mayor's Office and dedicated WhatsApp channels, the groups can then identify – with the Municipality – how best to address such concerns. This has, in turn, led to a more informed deployment of local government resources that responds to the actual needs of communities as they arise.
- **Improved trust in local government** as a result of the Municipality being better able to address concerns as they arise, and due to the trust-building function of Neighbourhood Watch, who serve as interlocutors between the community and local government.
- **An overall greater sense of 'camaraderie'** and togetherness, with Mayor Bakitte sharing a story of one Neighbourhood Watch group stepping in to find employment and offer interim housing to a man in their jurisdiction who lost his job and then his house.

“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)

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 and to sustain their partnership, Nansana and Stellenbosch signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MoU), whereby they committed to continue to collaborate over the next five years. Mayor Bakitte has also committed to working with a national mayoral alliance in Uganda, Alliance of Mayors Initiative for Community Action at the Local Level, [AMICAALL](#), to support other Ugandan cities with implementing the model.



- **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 deepen and broaden 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, 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 have convened (virtually) regularly since April 2024 to continue sharing ideas for how to constructively engage and work with local government to address their concerns and needs. Further, officials from Masaka City and Mombasa County Government regularly coordinate 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](#).

“Since Strong Cities’ intervention [in April 2024], we have established forums, climate change programmes with young people... If the youth see themselves closer to the city’s programme and agenda, we prevent youth who once felt disempowered from becoming adults who are disempowered.”

Florence Namayanja, Mayor, Masaka City (Uganda)

- **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-to-city collaboration.

To help meet 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. There, experts from the City of Cape Town and Mombasa shared the variety of ways they engage young people. This has resulted in a tripartite partnership among Cape Town, Mombasa and Zanzibar Urban Municipality, which seeks to sustain peer-learning on safety and security-related issues.

- **Supporting Migrant/Refugee Integration in Musina (South Africa):**

Koboko Municipality in Uganda has an inclusive and comprehensive approach to managing migration that includes an emphasis on understanding the numbers, background and needs of refugees and migrants in Koboko; co-designing and co-delivering trauma-informed integration efforts with new arrivals; and consulting long-term residents to see how they can not only support but also benefit from integration efforts.

In May 2024, Koboko's Mayor, Sanya Wilson, presented on this approach at a Strong Cities [regional workshop](#) in Arusha, where representatives of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) identified Koboko's practices as transferable to and much needed in Musina, a town in South Africa that borders Zimbabwe and is host to one of the continent's busiest border crossing points, Musina is often used as a transit point for migrants and refugees seeking to settle in Johannesburg. SALGA therefore partnered with Strong Cities' ESA Regional Hub to facilitate a partnership between Musina and Koboko to improve the former's capacity for effective migration management. This included in-person and virtual trainings and exchanges, as well as site visits between the two border towns.

As SALGA shared with the Regional Hub, bringing Musina together with Koboko has already resulted in positive change. This includes the implementation in Musina of a one-stop hotline for refugees/migrants that come into the town, where they can find information about their rights and – should they wish to settle in South Africa – the proper procedure for doing so. The partnership has also inspired SALGA to revisit how it can support local governments beyond Musina with migration management, particularly as South Africa continues to grapple with [rising levels](#) of xenophobia.

“The value of SALGA, as a local government association, in engaging with Strong Cities both within ESA and at Global Summits has been significant. With a core mandate to support municipalities, these engagements have provided valuable opportunities to establish partnerships with municipalities both within the region and globally, strengthening our ability to provide relevant and appropriate support to South African municipalities.”

Nondumiso Twalo, Senior Manager, Community Development and Social Cohesion, SALGA

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

Throughout STRIVE Cities, the ESA Regional Hub was 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:**

In October 2023, the **Malawi** national government launched its National Counter Terrorism and Prevention of Violent Extremism Strategy. Through March 2024 and March 2025 Strong Cities' national-local dialogues, and with remote guidance provided by the Regional Hub in the interim, the Ministry of Local Government, Unity and Culture achieved the following:

- **Complementing district-level multi-actor collaboration with a more localised city-level approach:**

One of the recommendations of the first national-local dialogue Strong Cities hosted in Malawi was to complement District Peace and Unity Committees, which are multi-actor structures launched at the district/provincial level by the Malawi Peace and Unity Committees, with structures that operate at a more local level, i.e., within cities.

To implement this recommendation, the Ministry of Local Government, Unity and Culture and Malawi Peace and Unity Commission visited each of Malawi's four primary cities (Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mzuzu and Zomba) to train local officials on the Peace and Unity Committee model. Since then, each city has started establishing such committees, starting with identifying relevant actors to join.

- **Institutionalising local action in national policy and frameworks:**

The Ministry of Local Government has also taken steps to revisit existing policy frameworks, such as the National Peace Policy (2017), to ensure it better captures the needs and concerns of local actors and how local councils can support its implementation.

The Government's new [National Action Plan on Youth Participation in Peacebuilding](#) will also be operationalised in collaboration between local governments and the Ministry of Youth.

- **More regular communication between national institutions and local governments, and between local governments themselves, on disaster risk management.**

Officials from Lilongwe have reported to the Hub that they are now in more regular communication with the national government and with other cities in Malawi on climate resilience and other forms of disaster risk mitigation and management, catalysed by the national-local dialogues hosted by Strong Cities, which "opened the doors" for better cooperation and information-sharing between national ministries and local councils, as well as between local councils themselves.

"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

- **Strengthening NLC in Uganda:**

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 – started 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.

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 290 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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