Event Report

East and Southern Africa Regional Hub
Uganda Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on Strengthening National-Local Cooperation in the Prevention of Polarisation, Hate and Extremism

Entebbe, Uganda
24 – 25 April 2023

Summary

On 24 - 25 April 2023, Strong Cities East and Southern Africa (ESA) Regional Hub hosted a Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on Strengthening National-Local Cooperation in the Prevention of Hate, Extremism and Polarisation in Entebbe, Uganda. The workshop brought together 32 representatives of local governments, national government, as well as civil society, multilateral institutions and embassies in Uganda. This dialogue, which featured Mayors and Town Clerks from ten municipalities, followed a one-day National-Local Cooperation (NLC) workshop by Strong Cities organized for Ugandan stakeholders in October 2022.

The two-day workshop was organised in collaboration with the Alliance of Mayors and Urban Leaders for Community Action at Local Level (AMICAALL), Urban Authorities Association of Uganda (UAAU) and Uganda Local Government Association (ULGA), with funding support from the EU STRIVE Cities initiative. Strong Cities used this occasion to announce two new members, both present at the dialogue: Masaka City (represented by Mayor Florence Namayanja) and Nansana Division Town Council (represented by Mayor Joseph Matovu).

Dialogue featured an overview of the Ugandan National P/CVE Strategy (which has yet to be publicly released), a presentation on findings and recommendations of the Strong Cities Uganda NLC Mapping Report, as well as perspectives of national government, cities, civil society and multilateral stakeholders on the state of P/CVE-related NLC in Uganda. Participants exchanged

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views on the mechanisms for and, more broadly, the state of coordination and cooperation among relevant national and local P/CVE actors, and levels of trust between security and non-security, government and non-governmental stakeholders. Participants also touched upon the opportunities the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) good practices offer for strengthening coordination, cooperation and building trust to allow for more effective and sustained P/CVE efforts in the country. The event also allowed the Regional Hub to introduce Strong Cities' mission, including the Hub's five pillars: Peer-to-Peer Learning; Cooperation; Capacity-Building; Elevating Local Voices; and Youth Engagement.

"Awareness of the strategy is a much bigger problem than anyone realises. So as we wait for the document to be launched, lets focus on things we can do. Thanks Strong Cities for organising this because it is an opportunity to sensitise actors as we await the strategy and the coordinating bodies. We need more forums to raise awareness and to target existing forums - send security people to go give a talk and introduce the strategy."

Mr. Onyi Mahmood Oonyu
Internal Security Directorate of Counter-Terrorism

In his presentation on the violent extremist threat landscape in Uganda and its national P/CVE, a representative from the Ministry of Internal Affairs shared that it was important to recognise that violent extremism, with all its manifestations — including hate speech — does not take place in a vacuum but within the communities. He said that this underscores the importance of an inclusive and a whole-of-society approach to prevention. With this objective in mind, he stressed the need to involve local leadership at grassroots' levels in this approach as it would enhance early detection efforts and catalyse the development of local solutions that are tailored to the local environment. He further highlighted the need to put in place mechanisms and measures to facilitate coordination around and ensure accountability for the implementation of the strategy. He also pointed to the need to raise the awareness of the national framework with local governments and other community-level stakeholders if one hopes to see its localised implementation.

"We see our country increasingly grappling with different forms of extremism and terrorism. There is no better time than now to gather like we are here to find a way forward and focus on prevention."

SCP David Wasswa Ssengendo
Deputy Director of Counter-Terrorism
Ministry of Internal Affairs, Uganda

Threats and Key Challenges

Participants identified several threats that impact peace, stability and economic development in Uganda. This includes mis- and dis-information, hate speech, ongoing political conflicts, high unemployment rates (particularly among youth), lack of service delivery, as well as concerns over violent extremist sleeper-cells, and the risk of backlash as a result of the misapplication of counter-terrorism measures against certain religious groups. This situation is further exacerbated by growing resentment within certain communities stemming from political intolerance, politicisation and securitisation of P/CVE.

Key challenges discussed include:
- A lack of clarity among mayors and local governments as to their role in P/CVE, which is further complicated by the overlapping mandates of national security actors. As underscored in the Strong Cities report on [Strengthening National-Local Cooperation in P/CVE in Uganda](#), more clarity around mandates and terminology can help minimize confusion, suspicion and resentment of P/CVE and may allow for more local government involvement in addressing violent extremism within their communities.
- Ongoing conflict and broader insecurity have meant that P/CVE is often deprioritised in favour of (overly securitised) counter-terrorism measures. Participants shared that the tendency to conflate P/CVE with counter-terrorism contributed to the perception that local governments do not have a role to play in P/CVE, which in turn hinders any semblance of P/CVE-related NLC.
- Lack of ownership of local actors over P/CVE. The national strategy was developed with limited input from civil society and no involvement from local government. Many participants mentioned the lack of awareness of the national P/CVE framework and capacity to implement at the local level.
- Lack of trust and information sharing between local and national level actors. While civil society and traditional, religious and community leaders enjoy high levels of trust within local communities, national government and security forces (including police) do not. Identity-based politics in Uganda also affects the relationships between local and national government, particularly in municipalities that are run by the opposition parties. There was consensus among participants that trust-building requires first setting aside political differences and focusing on serving communities.

Key themes

1) **Importance of raising awareness among national and local level actors about the role local governments can play in P/CVE**

Participants stressed the importance of educating community (traditional, religious and youth) leaders and the wider community about dangers of hate, extremism and polarisation, and the need for locally-owned P/CVE efforts. They underscored the importance of facilitating information sharing between national and local level actors, including civil society, religious institutions and private sector, to ensure local awareness of existing frameworks and programs, as well as effective coordination and collaboration among these stakeholders when it comes to P/CVE.

> For the mayors here, we are proud of what you [Strong Cities] are doing. We have a situation of radicalising young people. All these issues, the mayor is the first to have known. If you don't know, then you are not in charge of that city.
>
> Mayor Wilson Sanya
> Koboko Municipality

2) Awareness raising around the National P/CVE Strategy and clarifying P/CVE roles and responsibilities for different national security actors, as well as local governments and civil society

Participants recommended that mayors and local governments authorities should strengthen their working relationship with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and relevant government departments and agencies, leveraging local government association platforms, for more effective communication and cooperation on prevention. Mayors and local government authorities need to be aware of the strategy (which has never been published or otherwise shared with them) and, understand their roles. Further, participants emphasized the need to realise cooperation between parallel local structures: a localised, central government security structure and local government structures. In addition, participants stressed the need to depoliticize P/CVE at a local level in order to secure support from local communities for these efforts. To this end, it was suggested that mayors and other local leader should resist attempts or the temptation to politicise P/CVE the work. The Ministry of Internal Affairs should disseminate the strategy widely, understand and be responsive to the needs of local government actors in relation to the strategy objectives. Likewise, mayors and other local authorities should engage with their constituents in localising the objectives of the national PCVE strategy.

3) Capacity-building programs are needed at both the national and local level

National and local stakeholders in Uganda would benefit from training and other capacity-building support across a range of P/CVE issues. This includes assistance related to mapping city-level threats, needs and priorities; designing evidence-based interventions for prevention; improving digital literacy; engaging youth and other historically under-represented groups, like women and ethnic minorities; ensuring local support networks are in place before extremist- or hate-motivated violence manifests; and developing positive alternative narratives that counter disinformation.

4) Need to strengthen NLC in preventing and responding to hate, extremism and polarisation

Participants expressed keen interest in establishing structures that facilitate P/CVE-related information sharing and collaboration between national and local government stakeholders. More broadly, they underscored the need to overcome the barriers to NLC in the country that stand in the way of operationalising a whole-of-society approach to P/CVE and identified the Strong Cities ESA

Regional Hub – as a neutral actor - as being well-placed to convene national and local government representatives, along with civil society, around this often politically-charged agenda.

Enhanced NLC was further highlighted as essential to addressing the disconnect between highly centralised
and securitised approaches to address the manifestations of terrorism and violent extremism, and preventative efforts to address their underlying drivers. Participants noted that this lingering disconnect is due, in large part, to a lack of communication 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.

Mayoral Roundtable

As part of the event, Strong Cities organized a two-hour Mayoral Roundtable to generate input from local leaders in Uganda for a mayoral guide on prevention that Strong Cities is developing and planning to release in September 2023 at its Global Summit in New York City. The guide will provide accessible and actionable steps that mayors can take to address hate, polarisation and extremism. This session was attended by nine mayors and two deputy mayors.

Key Takeaways

- Local governments and mayors in Uganda have a very narrow mandate for prevention. They are also working with extremely limited budgets.
- To overcome the limited mandate, cooperation between mayors in different cities is essential, coupled with relationship-building with community and community leaders.
- Small towns and municipalities get to know their citizens more intimately, thus providing deeper insights and high potential for localising the prevention mechanisms.
- Peer to peer learning is essential. A number of mayors highlighted holding town meetings (barazas) and organising community leaders' forums as useful and effective interventions.
- Mayors are often excluded from security committees, with some choosing to organise alternative security meetings through the existing structures of lower local councils (i.e. LC 1, 2 and 3) to obtain information and to find ways of addressing local security threats.

Mr. Gilbert Cathal of the European Union (EU) Delegation in Kampala offered closing remarks in which he stated that Uganda is a priority country for the EU, pointing out that the Strong Cities programme work supported by the STRIVE Cities initiative, was linked to the work the EU has been doing in the country and region. He added that the take-aways from the workshop were practical and action-oriented, and hoped they would be actioned.

The more local governments we can bring into the process, the better it will be.

Gilbert Cathal
Programme Officer
Democratic Governance and Human Rights

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Conclusion

The two-day meeting provided a platform not only to elevate the voices and highlight the roles that mayors and cities in Uganda can play in addressing these challenges, but also to share practical ways to enhance cooperation between national and local government actors across the country in tackling them.

Participants underscored the importance of local governments in Uganda having a role in the development of and supporting implementation of Uganda's national strategy given their proximity to the communities they serve. The discussions also highlighted the need to explore opportunities for developing multi-stakeholder approaches to P/CVE that, rather than being dictated by the national government, respond to the needs and concerns of those local communities.

The multi-stakeholder dialogue also offered a unique and much needed platform, where mayors and local government leaders got an opportunity to constructively discuss the challenges of hate, extremism and polarisation with security personnel and senior officials from government ministries, departments and agencies. The Representative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which is the lead agency for the national P/CVE strategy, committed to engaging with mayors and local government associations with a view of securing their representation on the strategy implementation Steering Committee.

Strong Cities ESA Regional Hub committed to supporting Ugandan cities in their advocacy for greater engagement and involvement in national policy/decision-making processes; building a

shared understanding of extremism, hate and polarisation; and drawing on lessons-learned and good practices from across the 175+ member Strong Cities' Network to enhance effective city-led prevention policies and programmes.

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](#)

Contact Information:

For more information on this event and the Strong Cities East and Southern Africa Regional Hub please contact esaregionalhub@strongcitiesnetwork.org.

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