



Global Crises, Local Impact: City-Led Prevention and Response in South Asia

22 – 23 January 2025
Colombo, Sri Lanka

Agenda

Wednesday, 22 January 2025

- 08:30 – 09:00 Registration and Networking**
- 09:00 – 09:25 Introductory Remarks**
- 09:25 – 10:20 Local Leaders Conversation: Maintaining Social Cohesion in Times of Crisis – The Role of Cities**
City leaders from South Asia will share their experiences in safeguarding social cohesion and community well-being amid crises such as climate shocks, migration pressures, political instability and rising violent extremism. Participants will discuss how they address tensions, foster community trust and navigate the challenges of limited resources while prioritising the well-being of all residents. The session will highlight innovative city-led approaches to inclusive governance, public communication, fostering resilience and ensuring public safety in multicultural urban settings. The conversation will provide practical insights into the unique role cities play on the frontlines of global challenges.
- 10:20 – 10:30 Keynote I: Urban Growth and Migration – Challenges and Opportunities for City Leadership**
- 10:30 – 10:50 Coffee & Tea Break**
- 10:50 – 11:35 Plenary Session I: City-Led Responses to Displacement and other Demographic Changes**
This session will focus on how South Asian cities can maintain social cohesion in the face of challenges posed by large-scale migration and refugee flows, balancing immediate and long-term needs of new arrivals with maintaining social cohesion. Panellists will explore city-level strategies for resource allocation, equitable service delivery and fostering community trust.
- 11:35 – 12:30 Breakout Session I: Social Cohesion in Multicultural Cities**
Participants will discuss strategies for fostering unity and maintaining public safety in cities with diverse populations. The session will focus on





building and enhancing trust between communities as well as between communities and local authorities and police during crises which can fuel hate and polarisation that can lead to violence.

12:30 – 12:50 Brief-backs and Discussion: Breakout Session I

12:50 – 13:50 Networking Lunch

13:50 – 14:00 Keynote II: Responding to Community Tensions – The Path to Stability and Harmony

14:00 – 14:45 Plenary Session II: City Strategies for Addressing Hate Speech and Building Resilient Communities

This session will explore how cities in South Asia are addressing hate speech that can escalate into community tensions and violence. Drawing on insights from Strong Cities' [hate speech policy brief](#), mayors and other city representatives will share practical steps and initiatives they have implemented to counter hate speech, including through community engagement, public awareness campaigns and partnership with relevant local stakeholders such as civil society and law enforcement. The discussion will also focus on how cities are operationalising these approaches while upholding human rights and fostering inclusive dialogue. Participants will also assess the relevance of the policy brief's recommendations for the region, as well as their needs to be able to implement them.

14:45 – 15:30 Plenary Session III: Addressing Climate-induced Disruptions and Violence

This session will explore how cities can mitigate and adapt to climate-driven challenges such as flooding, heatwaves and displacement that create a ripe environment for tensions and violence. Drawing on Strong Cities' [policy brief on urban planning](#) and development, the discussion will also examine how innovative, community-centred approaches can address the detrimental impact of climate change while strengthening resilience and promoting harmony. Participants will share examples of city-led climate adaptation plans and their intersection with social resilience.

15:30 – 15:45 Coffee & Tea Break

15:45 – 16:35 Breakout Session II: Urban Planning for Inclusive and Cohesive Cities

Building on the previous session, this interactive discussion will focus on how cities in South Asia can apply urban planning strategies to reduce inter-communal tensions, enhance resilience and promote social cohesion in the face of natural disasters, migration, population growth and violence. Participants will examine the relevance of recommendations from the Strong Cities Network's policy brief on urban





planning and development to the region's unique challenges and, if appropriate, identify additional steps cities in the region can take to use urban design to enhance social cohesion. More broadly, they will discuss how they can best strengthen and leverage capacities to address inequities across neighbourhoods and foster inclusivity in urban spaces.

16:35 – 16:55 Brief-back and Discussion: Breakout Group Session II

16:55 – 17:00 Wrap Up

End of Day

18:30 Reception

Thursday, 23 January 2025

08:30 – 09:00 Registration

09:00 – 09:10 Recap of Day I

09:10 – 09:20 Keynote III: Women Local Leaders and Resilient Cities

09:20 – 10:20 Plenary Session IV: Empowering Women Local Leaders to Promote Peace and Tolerance at the City Level

As part of Strong Cities' new Women's Caucus, this session will provide an opportunity to discuss the critical role women leaders play in addressing urban challenges, resolving community tensions and empowering vulnerable and marginalised groups. It is an opportunity to share challenges and approaches for tackling the gender-based threats and structural barriers women are often subject to, and to highlight the unique contributions of women to preventing and responding to hate, violent extremism and polarisation at the local level.

10:20 – 10:40 Coffee & Tea Break

10:40 – 11:30 Plenary Session V: Addressing Offline Impacts of Online Hate and Violent Extremist Propaganda – Strengthening Digital Resilience of and in Cities

This session will examine how online hate and violent extremist propaganda translate into real-world tensions and, in some cases, violence in urban communities. Participants will discuss how South Asian cities are tackling digital challenges such as conspiracy narratives, threats to information integrity and hateful content by building awareness, fostering partnerships and implementing local strategies to protect vulnerable communities. The discussion will focus on innovative approaches to mitigating the offline consequences of digital threats while





promoting inclusive and safe online spaces. This session aims to highlight the interconnectedness of online and offline hate and violent extremism and the urgent need for city-level interventions.

11:30 – 12:30 Breakout Session III: Building Digital Resilience – Practical Approaches for Cities

In this interactive session, participants will explore specific strategies for strengthening digital resilience at the city level. Discussions will include developing early-warning systems for online threats, equipping local governments with tools to counter threats to information integrity and promoting digital literacy among residents, including those from minority or marginalised communities, to reduce vulnerability to harmful content.

12:30 – 12:50 Brief-back and Discussion: Breakout Group Session III

12:50 – 13:50 Networking Lunch

13:50 – 14:00 Keynote IV: Harnessing the Power of Youth in Strengthening Community Cohesion

14:00 – 14:45 Plenary Session VI: City-Led Initiatives to Empower Youth in Hate Prevention and Response

This session will feature city leaders and practitioners from South Asia sharing examples of successful programmes that amplify youth voices and equip them to contribute meaningfully to their communities. Drawing on Strong Cities' recently published policy briefs on city-led [youth engagement](#) and [youth councils](#), participants will discuss how cities can create opportunities for youth leadership, foster entrepreneurship and encourage active participation in governance and civic life, including through youth councils and volunteer opportunities. The session will also explore the unique role young people play in bridging divides, promoting social cohesion and addressing pressing urban challenges and how local governments can empower young people to assume this role. Participants will assess how the policy briefs' recommendations align with the challenges and opportunities faced by cities in South Asia and identifying other steps these cities can take to empower young people as partners in hate prevention and response. They will also identify key actions to implement these recommendations, tailoring them to local contexts and prioritising practical, achievable steps to enhance youth engagement and resilience.

14:45 – 15:40 Breakout Session IV: Empowering Cities in South Asia – The Path Forward

This breakout session will focus on identifying actionable strategies for cities in South Asia to address pressing challenges to social cohesion. Participants will collaborate to develop city-specific recommendations that emphasise local innovation, regional collaboration and sustainable practices.





15:40 – 15:55 Coffee & Tea Break

15:55 – 16:30 Brief-back and Discussion: Breakout Group Session IV

16:30 – 16:45 Closing Remarks, Way Forward and Survey

