

POLICY BRIEF

Strengthening Pro-Poor Policies Towards Social Cohesion in South Africa



MAPUNGUBWE
INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC REFLECTION (MISTRA)

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Research problem

In the paper, we investigate trust as an essential ingredient for social cohesion since it is essential to facilitating positive interaction and reciprocal social relations. The measure of trust used in this report relates to individual perceptions of adults regarding the likelihood that a lost wallet containing R200 would be returned by 'someone who lives close by' or by a 'complete stranger'. Thus, the focus of the paper was to examine the impact on trust as a critical indicator of societal cohesion in relation to one's access to resources, well-being and neighbourhood affiliation linked to demographics.

Social inequality undermines a vast array of social outcomes; with all, not only the poor, suffering the effects of inequality on well-being. We relied on studies that documented socio-economic inequality as having a negative effect on various societal phenomena such as emotional well-being, child abuse, bullying in schools, mental illness, economic growth and the environment (because of the link between intensifying consumerism as a result of social status competition). In South Africa, inequality is patent and, as noted by the Presidency in its 2010 *Development Indicators*, the functional distribution of national income has not improved since the dawn of democracy.

The extension of trust, however, is essential to foster reciprocal relations. The absence of trust inhibits people from fostering social relations and undertaking collaborative action, whether in the home, community, workplace or in other social settings. In other words, sustained positive interaction relies largely on trust. Social cohesion, on the other hand, is said to be present in societies to the extent that societies are coherent, united and functional, and provide an environment within which its citizens can flourish. Social cohesion is what holds societies together, and its opposite would be a polarised society.

Trust is thus the base component, or the 'glue' that holds the ideal society together and empowers stable economic activity among citizens. With trust comes shared ethical norms that encourage the creation of social relationships guided by security. Using the 2012 wave of the *National Income Dynamics Study* (NIDS) as an empirical dataset to support the investigation into social cohesion and inclusion in South Africa in the context of inequality, the paper found that the bulk of South Africans display low levels of trust; and this can be attributed to historical oppression and its persistence in the form of various manifestations of social inequality. This situation continues to harm all social groups. Whether the problem of inequality is addressed or not will have major implications for social cohesion going forward.

Aspects of findings relevant in informing policy intervention

The South African case illustrates the struggle for a socially cohesive nation which has not (yet) brought about the full inclusion of the majority of the population, economically and in other respects, in the post-apartheid society. Rather, society today still manifests elements of old forms of mass exclusion,

or produces new ones on such large scales that the process of social cohesion could be said to have been left inadequately attended to. While the emergence of a non-racial national business community and middle strata has assumed prominence, the urban and rural poor (mainly Black) remain largely marginalised.

Stark divisions and inequalities produced by colonialism and apartheid persist in post-apartheid South Africa – in its economic and social life. At the same time, the postcolonial state, under the conditions of globalisation, has lost much of its leverage effectively to promote social cohesion. If left unchecked, this will not only persist indefinitely but could also threaten the long-term sustainability of democracy in South Africa. As such, a minimum level of social cohesion is required for society together to pursue the strategy for economic growth and job creation, education and skills, and a capable and developmental state. On the other hand, attainment of social cohesion ultimately would depend on creating employment opportunities through faster economic growth; improving the quality of education, skills development and innovation; as well as building the capability of the state to play a developmental, transformative role.

Current policy context

The need to tackle social cohesion has been given considerable policy attention since 1994. We review these initiatives before concluding this brief with reflections on what needs to be done going forward.

Commissioned by the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) on behalf of the Social Cluster of Cabinet in 2007, the study, namely *Social Cohesion & Social Justice in South Africa*, provides data and analysis for assessing the social 'health of the nation'. In providing a framework for analysing the vitality of our social fabric, this report employs three key terms—social cohesion, social capital and social justice.

In March 2008 under the then Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, a report titled: *Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions* was published, with a particular focus on racism and to make appropriate recommendations to combat discrimination and to promote social cohesion.

The Committee responsible for the abovementioned report found that there was a need for the South African education system to be more responsive to issues of racism and classism, as well as to the pervasive issues of sexism and gender. In practice, this means persuading university councils to take far greater responsibility for the mandates of, and changes that they make, with regard to their institutions. It calls for Vice-Chancellors and executive management teams to develop practical strategies for engaging with their institutions, and to foster relevant discourses and practices that are consonant with their institutional vision and mission.



It also calls for students and their organisations to move from the periphery of university life to the centre, and to start engaging in meaningful ways with the issues that impede their full participation in university life and, more particular, in the area of learning. Academic staff, in the short term, need to become aware of and learn to understand the students they teach, by being much more sensitive towards these students. The forums in which they work, such as faculty boards and senates, must start the challenging task of understanding and responding to academic failure. In addition, non-academic staff throughout the system need to address the extremely challenging question of how their staff and union structures could develop a critical and productive approach to the knowledge production focus of the university; which would require a thorough review of the various governance structures.

Pieter Cloete and Frans Kotze, in consultation with Cornie Groenewald, developed a concept paper on Social Cohesion/Inclusion in Local Integrated Development Plans in 2009 (commissioned through the Department of Social Development). The paper considers a way for dealing with social cohesion at the local municipal level using the community development approach. The model promotes partnerships between authorities and communities in building social cohesion and capacity to take control of communities' own destiny within the context of a common vision.

The DAC in June 2012 published a draft National Strategy on Social Cohesion and Nation-Building intended for public comment. The draft responds to the ongoing and unfinished national project which began with the transformation of South Africa into a constitutional democracy in 1994 – this being the building of a just society which upholds and embodies the principles and values of an inclusive, non-racial democracy. It also responds to Outcome 12 of the set of 12 Outcomes adopted by Cabinet in January 2012; towards 'an efficient, effective and development oriented Public Service and an empowered, fair and inclusive citizenship'. It does so by talking to the national democratic project embarked on in 1994, further within the medium-term, a framework covering April 2010 to March 2014.

The South African Government and most of the political parties represented in parliament adopted the National Development Plan (NDP) as the cornerstone and blueprint for a socio-economic development strategy for the country. Its central theme centres on the notion that the country cannot achieve unity and social cohesion without reducing the gaps between rich and poor, black and white, women and men, city and countryside. In doing this, it is necessary to recognise the historical obligation for redress, to correct the wrongs of the past and to affirm the historically disadvantaged. Without unity, the nation cannot hope to correct the wrongs of the past. Without correcting the wrongs of the past, unity would be superficial.

In July 2012, the national government; through the DAC, convened a National Summit on Social Cohesion at the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication in Kliptown, Soweto. The summit featured discussions on the role of organs of state such as the judiciary, Parliament, political parties, as well as civil society, business and organised labour, and other NGOs such as the Foundation for Human Rights, Molo Songololo and Lead SA. What followed was the abovementioned Social Cohesion National Draft Strategy which was adopted by Cabinet in

the same year. The Strategy recommended that social cohesion and nation-building be retained as medium- to long-term national, provincial and local government priorities.

It was also recommended that community conversation be held to mobilise support for social cohesion and nation-building as a national priority, and that existing national campaigns championed by the DAC, other government agencies and organisations be expanded. Furthermore, a Social Cohesion and Nation-Building Project Management Manual and Toolkit for application at all levels was recommended and this would be developed for use by practitioners. Public and other research institutions were also encouraged to conduct regular cross-sectoral research and monitoring into social cohesion and national building developments and trends. Finally, National Social Cohesion Report-back Summits are to be convened at five-year intervals to report on and assess progress made in the medium term, identify new challenges, adapt indicators and set new targets.

'Towards a social cohesion barometer for South Africa' was published in 2012. Authored by Jarè Struwig, Yul Derek Davids, Benjamin Roberts, Moses Sithole, Virginia Tilley, Gina Weir-Smith and Tholang Mokhele, its aim was to build the evidence base and its use in policy-making to address poverty and inequality. This was funded by the Programme to Support Pro-Poor Policy Development (PSPPD), a partnership between The Presidency in South Africa, and the European Union.

In 2014, the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA) published a research report entitled, *Nation Formation and Social Cohesion: An Enquiry into the Hopes and Aspirations of South Africans*. The report focuses on the processes of nation formation and social cohesion in post-apartheid South Africa. It also dwells on the advances made and the challenges experienced with respect to these political and social dynamics since 1994. The MISTRA project confirmed that nation formation and social cohesion cannot be divorced from the economic and material needs and realities of a society. Therefore, the understanding that the formation of a united nation and the attainment of social cohesion depend, critically, on a sense of belonging that is related to the material conditions of life and an overarching common identity that recognises diversity.

In September 2014 The Archie Mafeje Research Institute for Social Policy (AMRI) hosted a series of national roundtables under the overriding theme entitled *Does Social Cohesion Exist? Engaging Issues of Diversity and National Identity in South Africa*. The roundtables brought together individuals who are invested in nation building – including members of government, academics, students and educators – to stimulate awareness of the crucial issues surrounding social cohesion, diversity, nationalism and patriotism. It conceded that nation building requires grassroots activity in all environments and regional contexts. Central to this effort is the partnership between government, academic institutions and the population. This is a process that includes all individuals within the society regardless of age or cultural background. Rather than a collective national identity that exists on the periphery of the community boundary, it should be enmeshed with the community identity.

In 2015, at the request of the National Planning Commission (NPC), MISTRA produced a discussion document titled *Towards a Social Compact for South Africa* based on a research report titled *Cohesion, Covenants and Compacts* (by MISTRA). It concluded that the pillars of a social compact should primarily include, amongst others, a basic framework of macroeconomic policies and interventions; a revision of sector charters so they align with NDP objectives; measures to realise the BBBEE programme including ESOPs; an incomes policy including minimum wage(s); an inflation policy that also addresses the cost of living for the poor, high mark-up prices in the product markets and the cost of transport; the implementation of mini-compacts on youth, gender and skills; and safety and security issues.

Gap in Policy Context

- Improving inequality through job creation
- Improving trust amongst citizens (especially youth) through access to sport and recreation activities thus providing participation opportunities
- Improving trust in leadership structures through the improvement of participation in national and local government elections, and ethical conduct on the part of the leadership
- Promoting citizen-based participation in monitoring all government service delivery channels
- Improvement of social development structures

Possible Policy Interventions

- Strengthening policies and programmes aimed at rapid job growth within especially the low-income earning groups;
- Streamlining the process of supporting sport infrastructure development, which should aid access to sport and recreation activities;
- Developing various programmes to improve voter turnout and general active citizenship including the improvement of leadership accessibility and accountability;
- Supporting outcomes of community forums through regular meetings with community leaders; exposing local communities to information of programmes before their implementation so as to ensure positive dialogue; directly involving the community in the various service delivery channels.

Responsible state actors

- The Presidency
- Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation & the Department of Social Development
- The Department of Arts and Culture
- Department of Labour, Department of Small Business Development,

- Department of Economic Development, Department of Trade and Industry
- Department of Infrastructure Development, Department of Cooperative Governance and
- Traditional Affairs, and Department of Sport and Recreation

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