



Policy Brief 2

SEEING THE GAP: TRENDS AND RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SOCIAL COHESION AND INEQUALITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

The Poverty and Inequality Institute's Social Cohesion Index (SCI)¹ assesses quantitative links and relationships between social cohesion and inequality in South Africa^a. The SCI uses four national data sets to triangulate data points related to the concepts of solidarity and cooperation, within and across group boundaries. Computation is based on five dimensions: feeling of belonging, cooperation, institutional trust, relationships, and identity. We also constructed a Variance Adjusted SCI for different race groups. The SCI (presented in Brief 1) defines and measures levels and changes in social cohesion in today's South Africa. Policy Brief 2 presents factors that drive the levels and changes in the SCI – particularly the role of inequality.^{2,3,4} Our findings are based on both objective measures (vertical and horizontal inequality) as well as individuals' perceptions of inequality^b.

South Africans remain sharply divided along racial and socioeconomic lines (Durrheim & Dixon, 2010; MISTRA, 2014; NPC, 2012).^{5,6} These challenges deepen existing social problems and may have adverse effects on long-run economic development and sustainable democracy in the country^c. Social cohesion and nation-building strategies resurface in policy discussions as a way to achieve an inclusive and united South Africa (Palmary, 2015; Abrahams, 2016).⁷ **Policy discourse remains at an impasse even though low levels of the SCI reveal that we have not been successful in moving away substantially from our inequitable and polarising history.**

Social cohesion must be built upon clear, unambiguous societal commitments to overcome poverty, inequalities, and exclusions and must be done in a way that actively gives voice and agency to the currently marginalised. **Addressing inequalities, education, and spatial separations are minimum requirements.** But

^a We use Burns et al (2018) definition such that *social cohesion* is understood as *the extent to which people are co-operative, within and across group boundaries, without coercion or purely self-interested motivation.*

^b Horizontal inequalities relate to living standards *between* different racial groups within provinces; vertical inequality measures inequalities between individuals *within* provinces. See David et al (2018:7).

^c For a good overview of South African context see Patel, 2015 as noted in Meiring, T. et al (2018: 5).



these will not necessarily guarantee a more cohesive society. **Our research shows that social cohesion hinges on overcoming prevailing prejudices, interracial mistrust, and negative attitudes towards integration.**

What we have learned:

If South African policy makers do not understand both tangible and perceived inequalities and exclusions and how they manifest in society, no manner of policy or implementation measures will be able to dismantle the legacies of apartheid still entrenched in the day-to-day realities of community members.

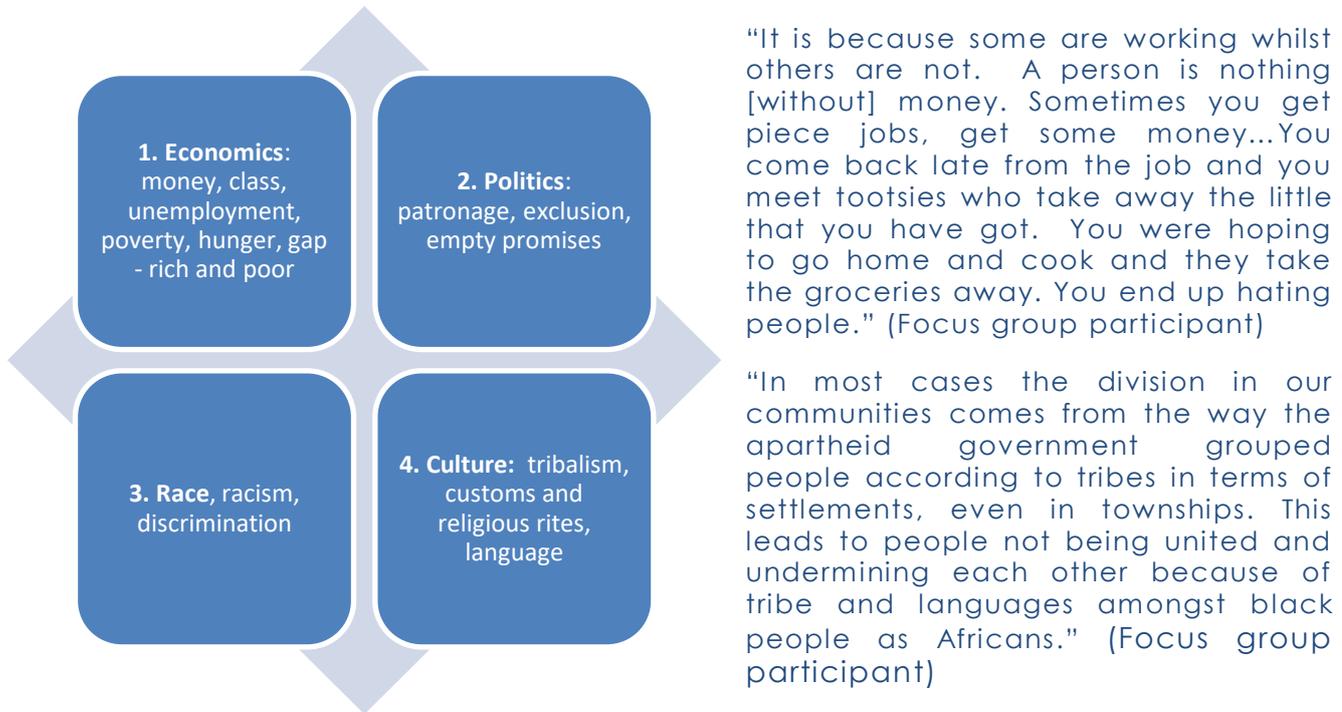
1. Perceived divisions: what do we think divides us? Why does it matter?^d

Individuals' perceptions of inequality matter

Perceptions show how individuals might have a sense of injustice against the distribution of resources and where and how lack of cohesion is fostered within and between different communities. Figure 1 shows how perceived divisions center on four systemic and structural issues – ranked in order and all linked to the legacy of apartheid. It is hunger that causes divisions.

^d See David, A., Guilbert, N., Hino, H., Leibbrandt M., Potgieter, E., Shifa, M. (2018). Social cohesion and inequality in South Africa. Cape Town: SALDRU, UCT. (SALDRU Working Paper Number 219). This work is also nuanced by a series of eleven focus groups that were conducted in 2016 and 2017 in four provinces in South Africa. See Lefko-Everett, K., et al (2018) Exploring South Africans' understanding of social cohesion. Cape Town: SALDRU, UCT. (SALDRU Working Paper Number 218).

Figure 1. Perceptions on what divides South Africans (Lefko-Everett et al, 2017)⁸



stand: Perceptions of relative inequality

What you see depends on where you

“There is a big space between rich and poor. The more we have, the more we want. And then we forget that there are poor people. The other day in Pick n Pay, I saw a person bought some grapes for R50. There are people in poor communities that do not even have a piece of bread. The divide between the rich and poor is getting bigger and bigger.”(Lefko-Everett, 2018)

The data shows that if you see yourself as the same or better off as others (financially), you are significantly less likely to consider inequality the primary social division in South Africa. The implication is that individuals who consider themselves better off do not recognize the pervasive inequality in South Africa; the most economically privileged are the most divorced from the plight of inequality in the country (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Population group perceptions of inequality (relative to each other) (Meiring, T. et al, 2018)

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| White | Economically better off, on average, but do not recognise inequality as a primary social division to the same extent as other population groups. |
| Coloured and Indian/Asian | More likely to consider income inequality as the biggest divide; Coloured respondents are more likely to report feeling worse off than other groups |
| Women | More likely than men to consider the gap between rich and poor to be the primary source of division in society. |
| Educated | People with higher levels of education are significantly less likely to perceive inequality as a primary social division. |
| Unemployed | Pensioners, homemakers, students consider the gap between rich and poor to be a bigger issue. |
| Formally housed | People who live in formal housing, as opposed to informal or traditional housing, are less likely to consider inequality as a main source of social division. |

2. Trends and relationships: Social cohesion since 1994⁹

Inter-racial interactions (IRIs) and inequality:

Given South Africa's history of long-term racial and socioeconomic segregation, we use inter-racial interactions (IRIs) as our main approximation of social cohesion as it represents the social relations dimension of the SCI⁹. This measure of inequality shows how respondents perceive the gap between rich and poor since 1994. **How people perceive inequality (or not) determines the likelihood of inter-racial interactions.**

- **Nationally, IRIs improved slightly (2003-2013) and then declined.** The percentage of South Africans who never interacted or socialised inter-racially decreased over the same period.
- **However, less than 1/3 of South Africans often or always talked or socialised with someone from a different racial group (2003-2013)**
- **No improvement of IRI among all race groups. From 2009 onward social cohesion declines** (in our aggregate Social Cohesion Index).
- **Education is a significant factor** in explaining IRIs. Individuals with higher levels of education (Matric and above) are more likely to engage in actual IRIs and report more desire to interact.

⁹ IRIs are based on South African Reconciliation Barometer Surveys (SARBS) and the Living Standards Measure (LSM) data sets which enable us to distinguish between two different types of social interactions: 1) how often do people talk to individuals from other racial groups on an everyday basis and 2) how often do people socialize with individuals from other racial groups. The LSM assesses levels of well-being and inequality based on dwelling type, access to services (water, sanitation, electricity, telecommunications, and home security), ownership of household consumer items (refrigerator, microwave oven, and television), access to domestic workers, and residence in a rural or metropolitan area. SARBS also reports respondents' perceptions of whether inequality improved, worsened or remained constant in recent periods in South Africa vs. 1994 levels.



Objective and perception data tell two different stories:

Objective data shows that vertical inequality (between individuals), as measured by the Gini coefficient of the Living Standard Measure (LSM), slightly increased from 2003 to 2008, then significantly declined in 2012. Horizontal inequality (between race groups;), as measured by the LSM, steadily declined between 2003 and 2012 – consistent with significant progress in the provision of basic services (i.e. water, electricity) and ownership of household assets in South Africa.

However, perception data highlights two main points:

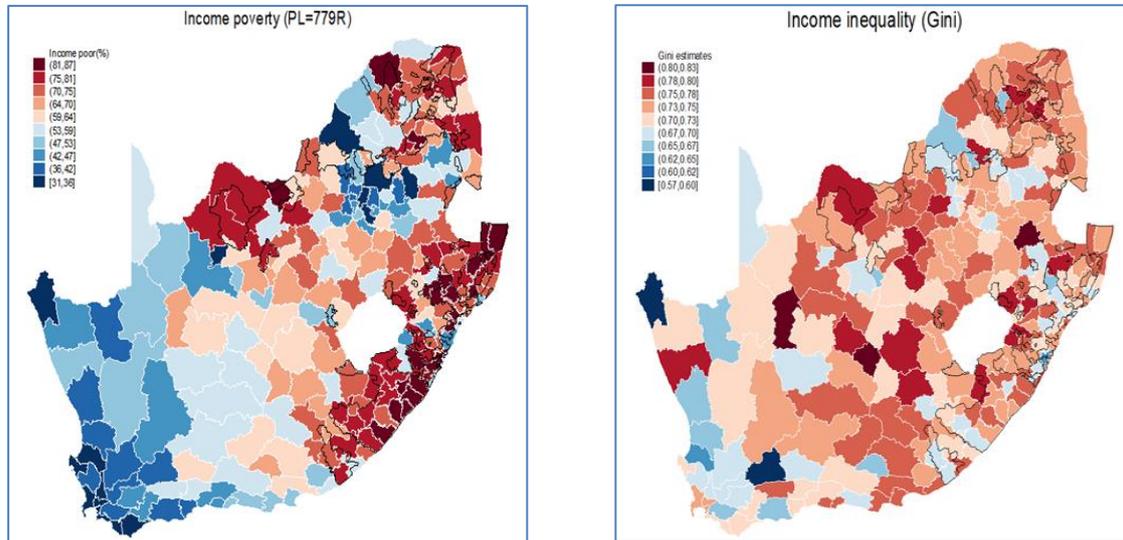
- Approximately 70 percent of South Africans perceived that the extent of inequality (the gap between the poor and the rich) has not changed much or has worsened over time.
- Provinces with higher vertical inequality (between individuals) have lower social cohesion compared to those with less inequality (measured using the aggregate SCI).

3. Municipalities: Local level analysis is critical¹⁰

We need to understand municipal inequality and poverty levels to implement effective anti-poverty policies. Higher urbanization rates and higher levels of education are positively related to lower levels of income poverty at the municipality level; and municipalities with higher levels of deprivation inequality also have a high incidence of income and multidimensional poverty levels. *Figures 3 and 4* show stark patterns of multidimensional poverty and inequality across municipalities in South Africa, and particularly high poverty and inequality clusters in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal provinces.

To benchmark and show progress in a national project to build an inclusive society we have to detail, update, and track these persistent local-level inequalities of contemporary South Africa. Municipal poverty levels are driven by local specificities of employment, levels of education and, critically, inequalities. Drilling down into municipal level realities gives us the tools to frame and prioritize policies and delivery at the local level.

Figure 3 and 4. Multidimensional poverty and inequality across municipalities in South Africa (David et al, 2018; Source: 2011 Census)



4. Policy Implications

High levels of inequality and the perception that our inequality has not improved in the post-apartheid period are the key impediments to social cohesion in South Africa. This importance remains even when inequality is analyzed alongside other clearly critical influences such as racial, spatial, and educational factors.

There are two minimum requirements for building a cohesive society in South Africa:

- Prioritize a defined and monitored agreement to overcome poverty, inequality and social exclusion; and
- Do it in a way that actively and legitimately ensures voice and agency for marginalised individuals and communities.

Our studies of social cohesion show that these bold policies to address socio-economic challenges must include behavior and practices in everyday life that demonstrate evidence of a society that is actually committed to overcoming remaining prejudices, interracial mistrust, and negative attitudes.

To build, track, and improve social cohesion we should start by operationalising a shared definition of social cohesion that includes five dimensions (inclusion, belonging, social relationship, participation and legitimacy).



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