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The Responsibility of Government and Society Towards Social Cohesion: A Family Perspective

Fred Bidandi

Faculty of Community and Health Science,
University of the Western Cape, South Africa

Nicolette Roman

Faculty of Community and Health Science,
University of the Western Cape, South Africa

Gregory Davids

School of Government
University of the Western Cape, South Africa

Fundiswa Khaile

School of Government
University of the Western Cape, South Africa

Abstract

Social cohesion, the foundation that keeps society together, is influenced by various inter-related factors such as education social, cultural, religious, and business, among others. Current debates indicates that unless social cohesion in its various dimensions is addressed, be it through reconciliation, tackling inequality, crafting a national identity, or bridging rural-urban divides, the implementation of any Southern African Development Plan will be challenging. In this paper, social cohesion is viewed as an intervention for coexistence; as an invitation to find common ground and allowing the sharing of social spaces; and to forge a common identity whilst recognising societal diversity. This paper postulates that although social cohesion is intended to contribute towards nation-building and national unity, government policies are fundamental to the advancement thereof. The paper defines, unpacks, and identifies the challenges

of social cohesion using South Africa as a case study. The paper argues that the family is instrumental in building social cohesion. Government through its policies processes has an important role to play in strengthen the family. The lessons learnt could contribute to the role of family towards social cohesion on the African continent.

1. Introduction

The African continent has a well-known history of colonialism, oppression, human rights abuse, poverty, unemployment and socio-economic inequality. South Africa likewise displayed similar characteristics. In 1994 the country held its first democratic election. The election did not change the dysfunctional and segregated societal fault lines of inequality, racism poverty and unemployment. To the contrary it seems that inequality and racial segregation increased post 1994 first democratically elected government. Social cohesion was identified as a national key priority to address the social inequalities and advance national building. A number of policy and strategic documents were promulgated to advance social cohesion. The Presidency's Macro Social Report (The Presidency 2012), *A Nation in the Making: Macro Social Trends in South Africa* (2012), which made a significant contribution to introducing the concept of social cohesion into policy discourse. This was followed by the Presidency's *Fifteen Year Review* (Rustomjee and Hanival 2008), the National Planning Commission's (NPC) *Diagnostic Overview* (2011b), the *National Development Plan – Vision for 2030* (2011a), and the Presidency's *Twenty Year Review* (2014). Furthermore, the most comprehensive and focused strategy on social cohesion emerged from the South African Department of Arts and Culture (SADAC) national summit on Building a Caring Nation which was held on 4-5 July 2012 at Walter Sisulu Square, Kliptown, Soweto (SADAC 2012). This strategy entitled, 'A National Strategy for Developing an Inclusive and a Cohesive South African Society' has become the authoritative government document that provides broad national guidelines on how to pursue social cohesion in South Africa.

Quite explicit, the National Strategy bequeath all spheres of government with

the responsibility to drive social cohesion (SADAC 2012). Equally, it envisages that civil society organisations, which include "trade unions, communities and citizens [participate] to build a just, prosperous, inclusive and cohesive society" (SADAC 2012:15). However, there is a lack of clarity regarding the nature of the responsibilities of both the government and society towards building social cohesion. In addition, the available literature on the subject does not adequately highlight the required nature of the relationship between government and society in order to harness their efforts in building social cohesion. To achieve this aim, this paper evaluates the family as an important unit and the building block of a well-functioning community and nation. Evidence indicates that many families across the continent and in particular South Africa are dysfunctional (Koonce 2011; Burns, Hull, Lefko-Everret and Njozele 2018). In the main it is attributed to the adverse socio-economic conditions and related societal ills such as substance abuse, unemployment, inequality and poverty. Importantly, family is a key building block of community and by extension social cohesion. Family is part of a network of families which forms communities and societies. A dysfunctional family therefore has a negative influence on the family network. It is therefore important that a renewed focus be placed on the role of the family and its contribution to social cohesion.

This paper used secondary data from sources such as books, the Internet, peer-reviewed journals, and newspapers to carry out the research (Koziol and Arthur 2011). Secondary data according to Johnston (2017) contributes to knowledge development considering important questions without some of the limitations of the original investigations. Furthermore, it is also an empirical exercise and a systematic method with procedural and evaluative steps, just as in collecting and evaluating primary data. According to Vartanian (2010), secondary data generates new hypotheses in which a researcher finds answers to questions that are different from the original work.

The rationale of using secondary data in this study was to delineate factors associated with the responsibility of government and society towards social cohesion in relation to family in South Africa, as well as to generate specific testable assumptions for future research. Using secondary data provided a broader understanding of the concept of 'social cohesion' in relation to family, and the responsibility of government and society in South Africa.

2. The Concept of Social Cohesion

Globally, social cohesion had been debated by academics and policy-makers since the late 19th century. Over the years, interest on the topic has been on major socio-economic and political change in the 1940s and 1970s (Jenson 2010 Snower 1997). The most recent wave of interest by policy-makers can be traced to the mid-1990s in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries such as Canada, Germany, Australia, and New Zealand. To place this term in context, the social cohesion concept has been used in policy to indicate certain public policy actions and to explain the social, political, and sometimes, economic changes a country may be experiencing (Hulse and Stone 2007; Jenson 1998; OECD 2001; Burns et al. 2018). The difference between these practices is often unclear. While the tendency of policy-makers is to employ the term as a policy concept, Hulse and Stone (2007) argue that they sometimes draw on academic literature which in itself is not explicit.

Social cohesion is a broad concept that encompasses a variety of factors ranging from community development, nation-building, diversity, globalisation, technology, economic performance, societal well-being, and legitimacy of democratic institutions. Furthermore, it is about belonging, employment opportunities, poverty reduction, building inclusive societies, peaceful co-existence, equality in urban or rural communities, socio-economic rights, freedoms, and citizenship, among others.

It has been argued that although social cohesion may not be clearly understood, it has the ability to cushion people from economic uncertainties and failures that may impede the provision of education, health, employment, and social grants that play a significant role in promoting prosperity (Snower 1997). However, according to Friedman (2019), social cohesion appears to be an avenue through which the elite dominate citizens by coercing them to suppress their differences while at the same time blaming them for community failures. This narrative points to contestations which seem to be based on the premise that some scholars have provided, for example, the rejection of the concept based on the understanding that the principles according to which social life and community are organised are problematic, especially the prevalence of marginalisation, poverty, and inequality (Beauvais and Jenson 2002; Stanley 2003; Williams 2006).

Scholars, such as Beauvais and Jenson (2002), Friedkin (2004), and Kazepov (2005), view the concept as a multidimensional phenomenon, or as a latent construct with multiple indicators, which does not address the problems of the nation in the way it has been defined. In this light, its effectiveness is questioned by those who believe that the concept does not in practice address the well-being of many, particularly regarding issues around racial inequality, social inequality, poverty, unemployment, housing conditions, false promises by governments, limited family support, skewed employment practices, limited participation in economic development, and negative mass perceptions, all of which have policy implications (Rhodes 1997; Echeverría, Diez-Roux, Shea, Borrell, and Jackson 2008; Heyneman 2011).

Nonetheless, in situations where a country struggles to provide employment opportunities to generate income, social cohesion alone may not hold the country for long (Beauvais and Jonson 2002; Stanley 2003; Burns et al. 2018). Despite these challenges, social cohesion seems to contribute to a wide variety of social outcomes, such as economic prosperity, job opportunities, creation of economic and social ties that have the potential to build enticements to work across boundaries and resolve societal challenges, be it health, education, poverty, or unemployment, for example. However, this can only be achieved with the aid of good policy practices. Fundamentally, even if the concept would seem to refer to social interactions and the ways in which societies manage collective decision-making with others in order to provide access to voices that can realise a sense of belonging, there is the need to consider the family as the key to achieve positive policy outcomes for the country as a whole.

3. Unpacking Social Cohesion Policy and the Role of the Family

The draft policy on *Social Cohesion and Nation Building* drafted by the SADAC to a large extent reflects the uniqueness of the South African concept of social cohesion (Palmary 2015). In this context, social cohesion is seen as a project of nation-building, whereas globally the concept is more localised. South Africa's project of social cohesion as a strategy towards nation-building, as argued by Palmary (2015: 64), "Is seen as precisely a response to, and remedy for, the effects of a racist and otherwise exclusionary past". In its pursuit to transcend the ills of racial, ethnic, and other social constructs that have an adverse effect on the socio-

political and economic landscape, the government has promoted social cohesion through a unified South African identity amidst diversity. There is an important element to social cohesion which is seldom highlighted in the draft policy of the DAC and the rhetoric of drivers for social cohesion in South Africa – the family.

According to Moissiard, Cokus, Cary, Feng, Billi, Stroud and Hale (2012:18), "Social scientists generally use the term family to refer to a group of closely related kin, not necessarily living together". These authors use the term 'household' to refer to a group of people, not necessarily kin, who live together (Moissiard et al. 2012). The family is the bedrock of society and the foundation of every nation/state. On this premise, the stability and well-being of families dictate the socio-political and economic standings of a community and the state at large (Moissiard et al. 2012). Families forms a network that influence and shape society norms and values. With emphasis on the socially created nature of society, it is obvious that government policies can have potentially pivotal roles in changing behaviour in families, and thus drive social change (Moissiard et al. 2012). In this case, the South African Government has, to a large extent, brought positive changes in the well-being of families by providing social safety networks such as social grants, free education and health services.

Families have a role to play towards moral regeneration and social cohesion. Families are significant to society and government as it is believed to be the micro ecology in which social and material needs are met for the majority of people (Callan 2010; Hewitt 2012). To succinctly state, family is essential for social cohesion and socialisation for individual well-being. Additionally, the family is the base from which individuals work and contribute to society (Callan 2010; DSD 2011). To Callan (2010), a strong family may help build robust and successful society. Evidence justifies that families are seen as both the problem and solution to a range of social ills (DSD 2011; Burns et al. 2018). For example, children being raised in a dysfunctional family environment are at high risk of engaging in immoral activities during adolescence and later in life, while a supportive family acts as a protective factor against such outcomes. According to the Green Paper on Families (DSD 2011), government attempts to shape family life through education and other social benefits, but unfortunately weak family structures remain problematic. A correlation seems to exist between family and social cohesion. In this regard Mokomane, Roberts, Struwig and Gordon (2019) are of view that weakness in family cohesion contributes to socio-economic

problems in a society and country at large. This seems to suggest that lack of cohesion is associated with the social-economic problems experienced in society and family.

While the government has the responsibility to provide social grants to the needy, it fails, for example, to recognise the role of families as a significant factor for social cohesion, particularly regarding issues such as education, poverty, and unemployment, among others. There is an old proverb that goes: 'Do not give me fish but teach me or show me how to fish' (Hewitt, 2012: 2). However, on the other hand, there is the tendency of many not wanting to learn or know how to fish because the few that have done so do not have or are denied access to fishing waters. Mokomane et al. (2019) aver that family has the responsibility to ensure their children attain education for themselves and family well-being. In other words, education opens employment opportunities which by itself contributes to the social economic development of the nation. This alludes to the importance of a holistic approach to education in regards to the family. Looking at the matrix of threats and challenges to social cohesion and nation-building as reported in *A National Strategy for Developing an Inclusive and Cohesive South African Society*, there is low primary performance and secondary education completion as a result of inequalities in learning conditions and teaching skills (Hewitt 2012). Social cohesion policy has not actually engaged to address the issue of education through the family unit. It is obvious that when a family acquires and adopts certain cultures, values, and aspirations, almost every member of that family aligns themselves with that vision which is eventually perpetuated among younger generations.

As McKie and Cunningham-Burley (2005: 12) explain, "[I]n contemporary terms, our engagement with other individuals, groups and organisations is often framed by the exchange of information on living and family arrangements". Academic education (formal and informal) has been seen as the key to the upliftment of individuals and society, but on the basis of social cohesion, it is tempting to ask if it actually meets the objectives of social cohesion policy. The policy does very little to place the family as the core or first port of call for a bottom-top approach towards social cohesion. If the concept of social cohesion is to yield results, then the family as a unit has to understand and appreciate its tenets. According to Burns et al. (2018), the provision of social welfare should not detract individuals from meeting their commitments to family and society

(Roman and Miller 2014). This speaks to the idea that although it is essential for the government to provide social services to sustain families and societies, it should not lose track of the fact that it is the responsibility of individuals to provide for their families and society, complemented by the government.

For this to be achievable, the state through its policy processes must invest in programmes that foster good moral, ethical, and socio-cultural practices. In South Africa, there is an intolerance to diversity and the prevalence of social ills such as drug abuse, rape, femicide, and xenophobia which negate the building of strong families, and ultimately, social cohesion (Mokomane et al. 2019). There is visibility of broken families as people constantly struggle for daily survival. This inevitably leads to a neglect of caring and nurturing the young and vulnerable. A major threat to social cohesion is racial profiling. Where people live, and where they come from, has led to the stigmatisation of certain groups of people. Even when people have attained economic and educational success, they still find rejection from certain communities (Mokomane et al. 2019). There is a need for ethical and moral values to be instilled in people, and this can be done mostly at the level of the family. An engagement of the challenges and dynamics of social cohesion is key to achieving this goal.

4. Challenges and Dynamics of Social Cohesion

The concept of social cohesion is habitually used by governments (policy-makers) in both South Africa and elsewhere on the continent when referring to socio-economic and political uncertainties in society, but fails to account for the role of the family as key to addressing the former. However, literature suggests that the concept is used to describe a process more than a condition (Snower 1997; Jenson 2010; Beall, Crankshaw and Parnell 2014). For example, after 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) promised a better life for all, but 26years later, the triple challenges of poverty, inequality, and unemployment still have dire consequence for families. In fact, the World Bank in 2015 pronounced South Africa as one of the most unequal societies in the world (Statistics South Africa 2019).

While the social cohesion concept is perceived as a sense of commitment and a desire to live together in harmony, social-economic benefits that flow in society and glue society together appear to be exclusive and benefit only a few (Beall et

al. 2014). Furthermore, the Government of South Africa has become less able to protect society and families, in particular, from economic uncertainties and its impact on unemployment and poverty. Against this background, two parallel worlds seem to exist in South Africa:

[One] being white, relatively wealthy regardless of gender has access to education and other benefits" while the other society being black lives under conditions of underdevelopment with limited opportunities to education and high levels of poverty and unemployment (Bojabotseha 2011: 3).

This seems to point to government's inability to address the needs of society in an equitable manner (Herr and Kazandziska 2011; Roman and Miller 2014). As a result, the majority of the people, especially black people, are still living in abject poverty with high unemployment, with many families struggling to afford even a basic meal (Armstrong, Lekezwa and Siebrits, 2008; Van der Berg 2011). To bridge the gap, an alternative trajectory should focus on empowering the family to become financially self-sustainable and able to participate in the economy.

The concept of social cohesion has been misunderstood as a *means* rather than as a *process* to the improvement of life. The early social cohesion policy pursued by Nelson Mandela's notion of a 'rainbow nation' meant that constitutionally South Africa belongs to all who live in it, meaning that nothing unites South Africans more than the Constitution (Bound and Johnson 1995; Republic of South Africa (RSA) 1996; Johnson 1997; Borjas 2002). However, the policy seems to impress that all groups have the freedom to access education, health, employment, and other social-economic rights. At this juncture, many in society feel that the government failed its constitutional mandate, as many South Africans remain in the poverty and unemployment trap. According to Findley and Ogbu (2011), the unemployment rate among black people is nearly 29 percent. These negative socio-economic conditions that many black South African families find themselves in is a hindrance to social cohesion.

Current narratives conflate social cohesion and Ubuntu(universal bond of sharing that connects society). Perhaps the nationalist philosophy of Ubuntu could deliver freedom and opportunities that address the values and employment among other issues from a multiracial and multicultural setting (Marx 2002). Hewitt (2012) indicates that the Ubuntu concept provides characteristics that reinforce democracy in South Africa and presents strategies for nation-building. Moreover, this was achieved through policy initiatives, such as the

Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), and Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), which in themselves intimate inclusiveness. With its emphasis on societal values, it promotes an attitude of conformity. However, the controversies around Ubuntu is that it is more of a rhetoric than a practical reality: "I am because we are". Yet, policy has neglected that social cohesion is about society, and more so families (Swanson 2007; Letseka 2012).

Nonetheless, the majority of South Africans who live in abject poverty continue to struggle, yet the government seems to have limited capacity to influence the much needed social-economic inclusion of this group. For example, the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE); the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR); Affirmative Action(AA); and Employment Equity(EE) were envisaged to achieve social-economic development to ensure social equity and to uplift the majority, but instead, it only benefits a few (Letseka 2012). This basically means that the government has failed to transform society simply because the policies benefited a minority, especially those in leadership, leaving the majority to experience inequality and social exclusion (Mbeki 2006; Chibba and Luiz 2011). Moreover, the distribution of wealth remains problematic and appears to erode the very essence of social cohesion. Additionally, the consecration of economic resources puts power in the narrow sector of the economy, and the concentration of wealth is tied to the concentration of power.

Social cohesion, being a base that holds society together, seems to present a paradigm shift in economic and social policy towards neoliberalism, which, in essence, provokes serious strains on rising poverty, crime, declining rural/urban economic development, and a loss of confidence in public institutions (Jenson 2010). Studies show that the microeconomic policies the South Africa Government adopted after 1994 exacerbated inequality. Thus, many proffer that different approaches must be designed since the current policy regime is not working for the majority of South Africans (Alexander 2007; Ponte, Roberts and Van Sittert 2007; Chibba and Luiz 2011). Other scholars contend that a need exists for economic approaches that accompany a certain microeconomic policy that fights poverty is required. For example, family-oriented anti-poverty policies in terms of income are required to satisfy those societal needs.

The lack of trust in public institutions affects the use or attainment of social cohesion. Satisfying the needs of society would require trust in public institutions. Friedman (2019) postulates that the loss of trust in public institutions has been

attributed to the rising levels of corruption. For example, the gap to reduce poverty in South Africa through social grants has been marred by serious corruption allegations (Gray 2006; Reddy and Sokomani 2008; Butler 2017).

In view of the above, other studies indicate that though South Africa has engaged in reassessing the responsibilities of institutional complexes as well as the public, private, and other sectors of the state as the country seems to be undergoing an economic contraction which, by and large, is seen as one of the contributing factors to unemployment which currently stands at 27% (Peck 2001; Stanley 2003; Geddes 2005; Makaringe and Khobai 2018). Whereas the post-1994 South African Government preaches the commitment to engage with all sectors of society through basic service delivery, on the contrary, the neoliberal policies of the Washington Consensus point to privatisation, the commodification of services, and minimal reduction on state involvement have increasingly given credence to the private sector. Interestingly, the private supplier of services is more into profit than the citizen's needs. This understanding provokes an extensive discussion among those who fear the social and economic costs of ignoring social cohesion (Ataguba and Alaba 2012).

While social cohesion policy envisages bridging the gap in terms of national development, diversity, societal well-being, belonging, trust, employment opportunities, poverty reduction, building inclusive societies, and social-economic rights, among others, for example, point to social-economic inequality in South Africa. Friedman (2019) postulates that the concept has no popularity, and it is about trusting government, even if it could do wrong. Further, he argues, for example, that social cohesion is not an answer to the high crime rate or substance abuse in the country, but rather, it is about dominance, which, in essence, fails to create opportunities and address the challenges of inequality.

In light of the above, studies seem to indicate that skewed employment opportunities are still experienced, and therefore, the country remains unequal with limited opportunities for many South Africans (Findley and Ogbu 2011; Letseka 2012; Beall, et al. 2014; Crankshaw and Parnell 2014). In more tangible terms, the country at large would benefit most from social cohesion if it were to realise the purpose of family in terms of facilitating equitable distribution of services and inclusive policy agendas.

5. Responsibility of Government and Society

Governments ought to provide for the well-being of their people and, as such, provide leadership, maintain order, and provide public services, national security, economic security, social security, and economic assistance. The concept of 'government as a provider' is largely about the provision of goods and services to those who cannot provide for themselves in society (Dexter 2003; Njozela, Shaw and Burns 2017; Makaringe and Khobai 2018). The government, in this understanding, is assumed to be a solution to collective action problems and the means through which society creates public goods that benefit everyone, but they are also subject to recourse problems without collective obligation. In other words, government is built on the idea of protecting and providing. For example, the protection of society from violence and the provision of public goods (knowledge, health care) at a level necessary to ensure a competitive economy and a well-functioning society (Koonce 2011; Kosmatopoulos 2011; Ataguba and Alaba 2012; Beall et al. 2014). Nonetheless, government has the responsibility to invest in citizens, especially the family capabilities, to enable them to provide for themselves in the increasingly shifting socio-economic conditions.

To achieve the shifting socio-conditions, government has the responsibility to shape the circumstance in which society is structured (Koonce 2011). This can promote social cohesion through public services, especially when they are provided fairly without any form of discrimination or other social barrier. Such outcomes may potentially be achieved through the empowerment of society and family.

Whereas social cohesion is shaped by government, it is also important to ensure that society and the family in particular become responsible for empowering themselves through education and other avenues. Easterly, Ritzen and Woolcock (2006) recognise three ways in which education contributes to social cohesion, namely: (1) it may help to provide public knowledge about the very idea of social relations among individuals and between individuals and the state; (2) it may provide the context within which society learns the appropriate behaviour for upholding national and societal values of how to deal with problems and opportunities society might encounter; (3) it may help society to understand and appreciate the very idea of a social cohesion. Friedman (2019: 3) on the other hand that: social cohesion is used to dominate the poor in this and

other ways. Its popularity gives a green light to more attempts to bully people in townships and shack settlements into behaving as others want. Social cohesion insists that we must all be the same when we have a right to be different. It assumes that we should obey the elite when we should hold them to account. It insists that society is to blame for what is done to them. And so, it is a licence for a minority to dominate the majority, not a recipe for a better world and as such going against the notion of shared values.

This understanding indicates a lack of clarity regarding values, especially in relation to family and society at large. Friedman (2019) elucidates that values are created by people who wield power, and for this reason, it is important to note that social cohesion policy does not provide clear objectives on families, especially about the shared values. Friedman (2019: 1) poses the question, who decides when values should be shared? This seems to indicate that there is a confused accountability and limited understanding of social cohesion. The case in point is the NDP 2030, which appears to have been driven by government, as there is no clear indication whether or how people took part in the *2012 Strategic Plan*, *Macro Social Report*, *NDP 2011*, and *A National Strategic Plan* by the SADAC initiatives. In contrast, Friedman (2019) views social cohesion as a buzz slogan cheered by those who consider themselves responsible and yet fail to recognise society, especially family, in policy decisions. Easterly et al. (2006) states that society has to trust the government if we are to realise the long-term gains of social cohesion. Though these authors point to trust, they fail to account for the family as the foundation on which society and the state itself are constituted. We, therefore, argue that all the spheres of government in the work with society, especially family, are to determine or practically test social cohesion.

The literature shows that the material conditions, such as employment, income, equality, health, education, and housing have not received significant attention in post-1994 period, despite these being fundamental to social cohesion in the new South Africa (Mubangizi 2008). Moreover, relations within communities/families suffer when people lack jobs and endure hardship, debt, anxiety, low self-esteem, ill health, poor skills, and harsh living conditions, to mention a few (Ravanera 2000; Andereotti, Mingione and Polizzi 2012; Beall et al. 2014). In fact, these are elementary provisions of life, and important indicators of family cohesion and shared values in society.

Moreover, Smith (2018) indicates, for example, that the State of the Nation

Address (SONA) is supposed to not only reflect on the progress of government's delivery of programmes and services, but should also include social cohesion, particularly the notion of the family, since it is of critical importance for the well-being of the country. Smith (2018) underscores that the invisible state of the nation is about the social cohesion of our society and can be explained as a state of developing a country through a common sense of identity and belonging.

Based on the above analysis to scrutinise social cohesion policies since 2004, there is a need to review the existing policies to establish common problems related to societal values so that the state can induce political will that encourages civic participation, particularly the involvement of families in state activities. Perhaps more importantly, social cohesion needs advocacy in families, and by extension, our communities, to ensure that vulnerable people within these spaces have access to information about government services and opportunities. Local government is ideally placed to advance social cohesion because it is the third sphere closest to the people.

6. Policy Implications

The study hold policy implication for the continent generally. In the case of post-1994, South Africa emerged from a challenging and long history in which race, ethnicity, and culture were used as the basis to impose divisions, inequality, and classification of society that excluded the majority of the population from citizenship, and social-economic benefits (Dragolov, Ignacz, Lorenz, Delhey, Boehnke and Unzicker 2016; Njozela et al. 2017). Although the ruling African National Congress (ANC) has attempted to improve the situation through various institutional and legislative frameworks (NDP's vision 2030), the inherited socio-economic order has had far-reaching policy implications to this day (Njozela et al. 2017).

The legacy of apartheid still lingers and negatively impacts on the political, social, economic, and cultural life of many South Africans 26years on. This seems to permeate the social fabric constructed on a racially exclusive society in which only a minority enjoy the national cake. However, in this light, serious policy implications for social cohesion could be experienced since different policy trials to strike a balance seem not to have yielded positive results, possibly due to the fundamental political mandate of the long struggle for democracy which

still faces the realities of inequality, poverty, unemployment, homelessness, and landlessness, and others which remain complex for policy (DAC 2012; Statistics South Africa 2019).

Other areas with serious policy implications include uneven and inadequate local government service delivery in historically marginalised groups. Its continued manifestation has an enormous strain on the social fabric and the economy. Currently, crime is spiralling upward in marginalised communities. If left unaddressed, the escalation of these disorders presents a direct threat to social cohesion and the prospects of economic development.

The policy acknowledges that slow pace of economic growth and transformation impacts directly on the capacity of the state to expand economic participation and inclusion for all South Africans. This in itself is an indication of continued economic exclusion, unemployment, poverty, and inequality for those historically excluded from productive and gainful livelihoods (Williams 2006; Chipkin and Ngaqulunga 2008; DSD 2012).

Last, but certainly not the least, the country's wealth has not been essentially associated with adequate employment opportunities, more formal jobs, or better gender outcomes (Eizaguirre, Pradel, Terrones, Martinez-Celorrio and Garcia 2012; DSD 2012; Hunting 2015). The economic growth appears to have increased both the pace of urban migration, which in essence exacerbates the challenges that social cohesion faces in integrating people who migrate circularly, interprovincial, and even, internationally. This contributes to the demand for housing, land, and job opportunities, among many others, which compromises social cohesion.

7. Recommendations

The family is an important contributor to social cohesion and hold the key in building society.   The following recommendations are therefore made:

Government through its policy process must address the underlying structural issues such as unemployment, inequality, and poverty in order to advance social cohesion

Government policy formulation process generally must take into consideration the family perspective to understand its contribution to social cohesion.

Government should create civic education platforms with a view of addressing

social inclusion or integration of families into the mainstream institutions of civil society. This should also include people's sense of belonging to various spaces, be it urban or rural, to strengthen shared experiences, identities, and values between those from different backgrounds.

Citizenship advocacy is needed to address structural issues, such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality, among others.

The above recommendations are built on the premise that social cohesion needs a family focus in order to meet the specific needs of the community in South Africa. Fundamentally, families in South Africa should be tasked to evaluate their social cohesion efforts to ensure resources are allocated efficiently and effectively. By achieving this undertaking, there is a need for government to work with the community, especially families, to identify how to measure the appropriateness, identify opportunities, effectiveness, and efficiency of actions.

8. Conclusion

This paper analysed and unpacked the challenges and dynamics of the concept of 'social cohesion', and postulated the important role of the family unit in advancing social cohesion. Some studies view the concept from social justice, lack of equitable outcomes, or systemic discrimination, but literature also stress that the conversation about the concept has been debated by academics and policy since the late 1900s to draw attention to the major social-economic and political change in the 1940s and 1970s. The OECD countries, for example, use the concept in policy to indicate certain public policy actions and to explain social, political, and sometimes, economic changes these countries have experienced over time. Whereas policy-makers may use social cohesion as a policy concept, they sometimes draw on academic literature which in itself is problematic.

Social cohesion in South Africa started as early as 1994 after the collapse of apartheid. However, during this period, different policies were tested to ensure greater inclusiveness, more civic participation, and the creation of opportunities for all, but this dream became almost impossible to attain due to multiple global trends such privatisation, neoliberal economics, among others, all of which had a negative effect on social cohesion policy in South Africa. For example, GEAR and BEE did not seem to work in the interest of the many, especially the marginalised. The realisation of social cohesion as one of the key national

priorities in a number of policy and strategic documents since 2004 was driven on the principle of earlier policies but with more focus on creating opportunities in the economy to address high unemployment, education, race, inequality, and other social-economic and political issues.

We have observed that the history of inequality, unemployment, poverty, crime, racial segregation, classification of society, economic exclusion, to mention a few, still linger negatively on the political, social, economic, and cultural life of many South Africans 26 years since 1994. This understanding seems to erode the social fabric constructed on a non-sexist and non-racialist society. One would, however, suggest that serious policy implications for social cohesion could be experienced if the policy does not address reality. We would, in addition, suggest that social cohesion policy should be tested or driven from the family's perspective since the family is said to constitute a nation. Ways to bridge the gap between policy and actions require further research to develop a conceptual framework to identify factors that are fundamental to understanding families in order to contribute to the development of social cohesion. The study although using South Africa as a case study contributes to the discourse on the African continent of role of the family and government to advance social cohesion and nation building.

Acknowledgements

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