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Working Paper Series
Number 218, Version 1

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This paper was prepared by the Poverty and Inequality Initiative (PII) at the University of Cape Town, with the support of the Agence Française de Développement (AFD).

[Recommended citation](#)

Lefko-Everett, K., Burns, J., Nontshokweni, S., Njozela, L. (2018). Exploring South Africans' understanding of social cohesion. Cape Town: SALDRU, UCT. (SALDRU Working Paper Number 218).

ISBN: 978-1-928281-79-5

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Saldru Working Paper 218
University of Cape Town
January 2018

Introduction

Since the late 1980s, there has been a growing interest among governments, international organisations and others in promoting and pursuing social cohesion. This has particularly been the case in societies undergoing transition or navigating internal divisions or challenges, related to events such as major economic downturns, changing migration patterns or ethnic or cultural conflict. A critical yet often elusive challenge, achieving social cohesion has become a panacea for a wide range of societal issues, and is often associated with positive outcomes including more stable and participatory democracies, greater economic productivity and growth, inclusivity and tolerance, effective conflict management and resolution, and a generally better quality of life for people (Lefko-Everett, 2016, p. 8).

South Africa, a country deeply divided by hundreds of years of colonialism and apartheid, has similarly recognised the importance of social cohesion. It has been identified as a national priority in numerous policies and plans, including the President's Twenty-Year Review and the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. The Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) 2014 – 2019 (Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation [DPME], 2014a, p. 6) identifies social cohesion – together with nation building – as one of eight main priorities associated with the electoral mandate for this period, attached to specific and measurable outcomes, plans and activities. Acknowledging that the “privilege attached to race, class, space and gender has not been fully reversed” and that the “social, psychologic and geographic elements of apartheid continue to shape the lives and outlook of many South Africans”, Outcome 14 of the MTSF focuses specifically on nation building and social cohesion (DPME, 2014b, p. 2).

Despite this recent interest in South Africa and elsewhere, the concept of social cohesion is not new. Its origins are evident across a wide range of disciplines, and are often traced to the early works of theorists including Emile Durkheim, Ferdinand Tönnies and Talcott Parsons. Durkheim explored the concepts of solidarity and shared loyalty in “The Division of Labour in Society” (1893).

He distinguished between mechanical solidarity, referring to the “traditional uniformity of collective values and beliefs”, and organic solidarity, which resulted from modern relationships between individuals able to work together while developing an autonomous and even critical personality with respect to tradition (Lefko-Everett, 2016, p. 11; Fenger, 2012, p. 40; Hassan, 2013, p. 2). These key elements, he proposed, provide the foundation for social order and established bonds and interdependence between individuals (Lefko-Everett, 2016, p. 11; Manole, 2012, p. 128).

Berman and Phillips (2004, p. 4) also find evidence of the concept of social cohesion in the work of German sociologist and philosopher Ferdinand Tönnies, as well as American sociologist Talcott Parsons’ theory of normative integration. Tönnies found that the strong traditional interpersonal bonds that developed in small social structures (*Gemeinschaft*) were replaced with loose, rational, associational bonds in industrialised societies (*Gesellschaft*) (Lefko-Everett, 2016, p. 11; Giddens, 2009, p. 8; Beumer, 2010, p. 1) Parsons examined shared norms and values, which would enable people within a society to “identify and support common aims and objectives, and share a common set of moral principles and codes of behaviour through which to conduct their relations with one another” (Kearns and Forrest, 2000, p. 997; Berman Phillips, 2004, p. 4).

However, despite more than a century of study, there remains relatively little consensus over the meaning of the term social cohesion. Rather, it is often defined as a collection of qualities that a society should – or should not – have, including “strength of social relations, shared values and communities of interpretation, feelings of a common identity and a sense of belonging to the same community, trust among societal members as well as the extent of inequality and disparities” (Berger-Schmitt, 2000, p. 3; Woolley, 1998; Jenson, 1998). Maxwell (1996, p. 13) adds that social cohesion also involves “generally enabling people to have a sense that they are engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges, and that they are members of the same community”.

As an often-imprecisely defined term of art, one of the risks of social cohesion is that it is liable to be dismissed as meaningless, and is vulnerable to various forms of abuse. In particular, and given that the term is often used by governments and influential organisations, there is a real danger that it will shift in sense from context to context, acquiring the meaning which suits the interests of the most powerful party as has been the case with other ambiguous social-scientific terms such as “sustainability” and “transformation”. Chan *et al* (2006, p. 274) confirm that the term is largely ill-defined, and describe social cohesion as a “‘quasi-concept’ or concept of convenience that is ‘flexible enough to allow the meanderings and necessities of political action from day to day’” (Bernard, 2000, pp. 2-3, in Chan, To & Chan, 2006, p. 274). This poses particular challenges with regard to the measurement of social cohesion, and determination of progress.

Furthermore, despite far-reaching debate over the meaning of social cohesion, there has been relatively little qualitative inquiry into the meaning of the term. Definitions of social cohesion, and the plans put in place to promote it, have largely been developed without input from ordinary people. In South Africa, the term has rarely been defined within the policy sphere, despite the drafting of policies and related plans and activities. Little is understood about whether – and how much – social cohesion exists in the country today, and how its extent or deficit could be measured.

In 2016, the Poverty and Inequality Initiative (PII) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) embarked on a new project that aimed to meaningfully define and measure social cohesion within the South African context, with support from the Agence Française de Développement (AFD). As part of this project, the PII convened a series of qualitative focus group discussions (FGDs) between 2016 and 2017 in various parts of South Africa, for the purpose of eliciting new and inclusive inputs and contributing to a better understanding of the meaning and extent of social cohesion in the country today. This article analyses the results of the FGDs, with the aim of achieving an expanded and relevant conceptualisation of social cohesion within the South African context, and one that allows for meaningful measurement of progress and change.

Methodology

A total of 11 FGDs were conducted in late 2016 and early 2017 across four provinces of South Africa: Gauteng, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape. FGDs were convened and facilitated by a Cape Town-based research service provider, Southern Hemisphere, with additional support in recruiting participants provided by Knowledge Pele.

Each FGD consisted of between five and 11 research participants, with the aim of achieving a relative balance between males and females. FGDs were conducted in both urban and rural areas, and were divided into groups according to both age¹ and historically-defined race group, as shown Table 1. However, there were particularly low levels of participation by white South Africans, and this group was under-represented in the research sample. FGDs lasted approximately two hours each, and participants were provided with basic refreshments and a small stipend to cover transportation costs.

Table 1: Composition of FGDs

No	Province	Town	Gender		Age
			M	F	
1	MP	Balfour	8	2	18 – 35 years
2	GP	Mohlakeng	6	5	18 – 35 years
3	GP	Mohlakeng	5	5	18 – 35 years
4	GP	Mohlakeng	5	5	35+ years
5	MP	Balfour	9	2	35+ years
6	KZN	Kokstad	5	5	35+ years
7	KZN	Kokstad	5	5	18 – 35 years
8	WC	Touwsrivier	5	5	18 – 35 years
9	WC	Touwsrivier	3	3	35+ years
10	WC	Touwsrivier	5	5	35+ years
11	WC	Cape Town	3	2	35+ years

¹ PII theorised that the views of younger South Africans, and the “born free” generation in particular, might differ from those of older participants with greater lived experiences of apartheid.

A total of 103 people participated in the FGDs, ranging in age from 16 to 87 and with a relatively even split between youth (ages 18 to 35) and older persons (ages 36 and above).² Just over 40% of participants were female. Focus groups were largely comprised of people of the same historically-defined race group, and most were life-long residents of the same community. Consistent with national population demographics, most participants were black. Further, many participants described themselves as unemployed.

Each FGD was facilitated using a discussion guide developed by PII, which included open-ended questions in six key thematic areas. These content areas included the following:

1. Division and unity: Research participants were asked about their perceptions of current sources of division within the country, as well as the things that unite South Africans and bring people together.
2. Identity: Given the focus within the literature, as well as in South African policy, on the importance of a shared common identity, participants were asked about how they primarily identify themselves.
3. Trust: Much of the literature underscores the importance of inter-personal trust as a necessary pre-condition for social cohesion.
4. Cooperation: The PII has theorised that cooperation, and the willingness to work with others to achieve common goals, is an indicator of social cohesion.
5. The Rainbow Nation: Participants were asked about the metaphor of the “Rainbow Nation”³, and whether or not this narrative holds currency in uniting South Africans.
6. Social Cohesion: Participants were asked about their understandings, and the meaning of the term social cohesion, with a view to contributing to an inclusive and relevant definition for South Africa.

Research findings with respect to each of these content areas are discussed in subsequent sections of this article.

FGDs were facilitated in the predominant first language of research participants, as shown in Table 1. Fieldworkers then translated each FGD text into English⁴ for analysis.

What divides South Africans?

Much of South African policy discourse is premised on a lack, or deficit of social cohesion within the country. The NDP and Vision 2030, for example, states,

² Specifically, the age distribution was as follows: 15-24 years (23.4%); 25-34 years (28.8%); 35-44 years (24.7%); 45-54 years (15.4%); 55-64 years (0.03%) and 65+ years (0.03%).

³ The term “Rainbow Nation” was originally coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu following the end of apartheid and the first democratic elections, held in 1994.

⁴ As the result of this translation, interview texts are not strictly verbatim quotes as originally articulated in other languages.

“Despite progress since 1994, South African society remains divided. Many schools, suburbs and places of worship are integrated, but many more are not. South Africa remains one of the most unequal economies in the world. The privilege attached to race, class, space and gender has not been fully reversed.” (DPME 2012, p. 458)

Through the FGDs, the PII sought to better understand what South Africans perceive to be the main sources of division in the country today. Research participants were asked about what divides South Africans at present, and analysis of FGD texts revealed a wide variety of responses. These included, among others: jealousy; people who “look down” on others; intolerance; the legal system; government; the national anthem; drug and alcohol abuse; lack of community involvement; sports rivalries; religion; differing beliefs; economic competition; lost values; politics; gender; race/racism; people not working together or helping one another; the economic situation (including poverty and hunger); nepotism and limited access to jobs; lack of access, or low quality of amenities/services (e.g. housing, education, land, community services); the legacy of apartheid and colonialism; crime; cultural differences and “tribalism”; stereotypes and prejudice; and language.

Across all of the FGD’s, the most frequent responses to questions about current sources of division in the country broadly related to the current economic situation. For some participants, there are simply problems of “money” in South Africa. Others linked current divisions to the issue of different socioeconomic classes, as evident in the following texts:

“Money divides us in South Africa and in the community. There’s money identity issues based on class – poor people and rich do not mix or there are some places you cannot go into because of money.” (Group 5, Participant 4)

“Class also causes division, you have upper, middle and lower class from which are people who depend solely on government.” (Group 4, Participant 3)

“Economics - socio-economic status, conditions and class divide people.” (Group 1, Participant 2)

Similarly, some other participants referred to economic inequality and the gap between rich and poor as significant sources of division in the country today. They explained,

“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.” (Group 8, Participant 9)

“Being poor and rich divides us.” (Group 2, Participant 1)

Further economic concerns, including the related issues of poverty, unemployment and hunger were also identified as leading sources of division. Participants commented,

“...things that divide people are things like unemployment and poverty.” (Group 3, Participant 8)

“Unemployment. There are different levels of income between households because in some households, children work and bring income into the household whereas in another household the children may not be employed and thus do not bring income into the household... The unemployment figure is very high.” (Group 9, Participant 5)

“It is hunger that cause divisions. It is because others are working whilst others are not. Those who have money go together and the one without money also go with people like him. A person is nothing if he has no money. Sometimes you get piece jobs and get some money. Sometimes you come back late from the job and you meet tsotsis who take away the little that you have got. You were hoping to go home and cook and they take the groceries away. You end up hating people.” (Group 6, Participant 6)

The identification of divisions resulting from poverty and inequality was common across multiple focus groups.

A second major source of division identified by FGD participants related to the country’s current political situation. Analysis of FGD texts revealed discussion of a number of different divisive facets of political life. For some participants, divisions simply resulted from rivalry and competition between political parties and their members. As one participant in Group 4 in Mohlakeng, Gauteng explained, politics have “brought division because people support different political parties” (Group 4, Participant 6). Others added,

“Many people cannot tolerate each other if they belong to different political parties.” (Group 9, Participant 2)

“Currently our biggest division is how you politically identify yourself - there’s a huge fuss about political parties and who you follow... Political affiliation has become a big identity for people - belong to the EFF, the ANC.” (Group 2, Participant 6)

An additional participant in Group 6 in Kokstad, KwaZulu-Natal further described how the “ANC is said to be divided in two” between the “young and the old”, causing in-fighting in the local area (Group 6, Participant 1).

Rivalry between different parties and their members was not the only divisive issue identified within the political sphere. Some participants expressed the view that South Africa has too many political parties (Group 10, Group 8), with one participant in Group 10 suggesting that “our country probably has the most political parties in the world”, leading to “political in-fighting [that] directly affects the citizens of the country” (Group 10, Participant 10). Participants in Groups 1 and 5 also cited nepotism based on political party membership as a source of division:

“Politics go with power, politics and money influence tenders processed. If you are not part of the political party you will not get the tender-you don’t get authorised for a

project if you not an ANC, or an inexperienced person can get a tender... If you don't have political power - [that] divides us." (Group 5, Participant 10)

"...belonging to different political parties makes people to be against one another. People must be treated equally and not based on the political party that they belong to, in terms of accessing work and business opportunities... There must not be favouritism, this leads to divisions and fights." (Group 1, Participant 5)

Finally, Participant 8 in Group 7 in Kokstad, KwaZulu-Natal also commented on the divisiveness of "empty promises" made by local government councillors after elections, as well as the tendency of leaders to change political parties.

A third major source of division identified by FGD participants, in addition to politics and the country's economic situation, was race – and in some cases, specifically issues of racism and discrimination. One participant in Group 4 in Mohlakeng, Gauteng suggested that "white people believe they are superior to black people, [and] some black people who believe they are superior to white people" (Group 4, Participant 3). A second participant in Touwsrivier in the Western Cape described racism as an important "topic" in South Africa today, and a source of conflict and division:

"I think racism is also a topic now. I think that is also one of the issues that divides us in South Africa. People think it's a white thing, people think it's a black thing but we all live in one country. Sometimes I don't understand people. They come together for sport to support one another but not when there are issues that you can't use this or you can't do that because I am white. Some people have still that issue in their lives, about racism. Whites must have more of that, and blacks must fight for that and Coloureds must just follow wherever." (Group 8, Participant 10)

Other participants also shared concerns, as well as personal experiences of racial discrimination:

"Skin colour, I can quote a personal example - I was in Sandton at a restaurant. You can see that waiters don't treat you the same as the other races, like they treat whites, as a black person." (Group 2, Participant 1)

"... in a workplace people are discriminated according to colour, white people are employed more." (Group 3, Participant 6)

"Race is a problem just like how black people were treated at the universities and school because of the nature of black hair. Children were discriminated because of hair... But this race problem started a long time ago and there is nothing to be done. The main problem is mainly with black and white. Coloureds and Indians fall under blacks. But it is mainly boers called boeremag [that] hate black people..." (Group 7, Participant 8)

Participant 5 in Group 1 in Balfour, Mpumalanga also linked tensions between race groups to political party affiliation in South Africa, explaining that "black people believe that the ANC should rule because it took us out oppression" while "whites see blacks as taking over the country from

them". The same participant added that "black people fear that the DA will reverse the country back to Apartheid, that's why blacks are against whites" (Group 1, Participant 5).

A final source of division frequently identified across many of the FGDs related to culture differences between South Africans. Participants in several FGDs discussed divisions "along tribal lines" in the political leadership of the country (Group 5, Participant 4), as well as within communities – attributed in part to the legacy of apartheid:

"Culture, for example in the community, settlements are divided by tribes in the townships and this courses divisions or separatism." (Group 2, Participant 1)

"In most cases the division in our communities comes from the way the apartheid government grouped people according to tribes in terms of settlements even in townships. This leads to people not being united and undermining each other because of tribe and languages amongst black people as Africans." (Group 4, Participant 1)

Other participants also referred to divisions resulting from differing cultural practices:

"We have rituals which we do and other houses do not do it. When I see that the person is not doing the culture that I am doing, I undermine him. The example is the culture of circumcision. Those who are circumcised look down upon those who are not circumcised." (Group 6, Participant 5)

"Culture contributes to divisions. It is between people who are born again and other churches. If my neighbour is saved and I am not saved but we all go to church. If I invite her to a ritual function she will say she does not believe in it and she will not attend that ceremony even if she was invited. We are divided." (Group 7, Participant 6)

One participant explained that in general in South Africa, when compared with other countries – for example, with a single national language - the "cultural gap is too deep" despite the factors that bring people together, such as the workplace (Group 11, Participant 5).

Analyses of FGD texts confirmed that research participants agreed that there are significant divisions in South Africa today. Overall, these most frequently-cited sources of division were systemic and structural – economic inequality, political competition, racial discrimination and cultural difference – and were linked to the legacy of apartheid.

What unites South Africans?

In addition to the sources of division within the country, FGD participants were also asked about what unites South Africans. Questions about what brings people together similarly elicited a wide range of responses. These included, among others: economic activities (trade, looking for jobs together); elections; language; common interests; alcohol/drug use; community development; participation in protests; diversity activities; shared beliefs; technology; food; the festive season; holidays/vacations; religion; sport; equality; values (including respect, tolerance, love, honesty, faith,

ubuntu and traditional values); government programmes; socialising; economic circumstances; fighting crime; communication; skills; culture; entertainment; special events (festivals, funerals, weddings, church events, public holidays); schools; music; and facilities/amenities. The most common responses across multiple FGDs were shared values, religion, and sport.

When asked about the things that bring South Africans together, notably, participants from across the eleven FGDs discussed values. However, these were not necessarily values associated with, for example, South African citizenship, national identity or the Constitution. Rather, many mentioned values linked to inter-personal relationships. Among the most frequently-mentioned of these values was respect:

“Respect, because if you respect my views and opinions I will do the same but if you don’t I will also do the same and not respect yours.” (Group 5, Participant 10)

“Respect brings us together. We talk nicely together and we try to know each other and share ideas.” (Group 7, Participant 5)

“What I was taught is that everybody is a human being who deserves respect and compassion. It does not matter who they are, where they from, how much money they have, what their gender and race are. For me it’s important to share a value with others, when they treat people with respect, are thoughtful and kind, and have integrity.” (Group 11, Participant 2)

“If we have respect for each other, it will bring us closer together. If we care for each other, and treat each other with respect.” (Group 9, Participant 2)

“Human dignity and respect brings us together. Respect works with truth and being reliable and being humble. To earn respect you must give respect.” (Group 4, Participant 4)

Participant 7 from Group 10 added that respect in terms of “how we address and approach each other matters a lot”, while participant 3 in Group 9 similarly added that simply “respect of each other can bring us together”.

Participants across multiple FGDs also mentioned love as a value or practice that brings South Africans together. They explained,

“Love brings people closer to each other. If we love each other, then God will help us bring things together.” (Group 9, Participant 4)

“Our parents taught us that we must love others like we love ourselves.” (Group 8, Participant 9)

“We can say natural love bring us together.” (Group 3, Participant 8)

Participant 1 in Group 10 also suggested that “when you have love for your fellow men, you will care for others and give selflessly without expecting anything back in return”. However, it was not clear whether or not participants felt that these values – respect and love – are sufficiently prevalent in South Africa to overcome current divisions.

A second common response to the question of what unites people in South Africa was religion. One participant explained that “religious values hold people together” (Group 1, Participant 4). A second (Group 9, Participant 2) discussed the importance of faith as well as “praying for unity and improvement” within communities. Several participants referred specifically to Christianity as bringing people together:

“Our Christian faith. Praying as Christians over common issues bring us together in South Africa.” (Group 10, Participant 9)

“What brings people together is Christianity, like churches because they promote values of respect, dignity to all, forgiving one another and forging unity. (Group 4, Participant 6)

Others referred to the role of churches and related faith-based activities in bringing people together:

“...religion is a big part here in South Africa. It brings people together... You meet different people during church conventions, when people come from other towns.” (Group 8, Group 6)

“Church revivals bring people together.” (Group 5, Participant 6)

“The other thing that makes people come together is churches, through their church activities bring people together.” (Group 2, Participant 7)

“Churches – they cater and meet the needs of people who are needy or the sick.” (Group 5, Participant 6)

There was little mention, however, of other religions aside from Christianity.

Finally, a third commonly-mentioned source of unity raised across multiple FGDs was sport. Research participants discussed the personal relationships that can result from shared attendance or participation in sporting events:

“Sport brings people together if you have money to attend sport events, you may sit next to someone that you do not know, you start talking and before you know you are socialising at each other’s homes.” (Group 8, Participant 10)

“...sports has a huge influence, it makes people have a similar interest and this leads them to unite.” (Group 3, Participant 2)

“Sport - it provides a common goal, an external glorification of a team or by peer participation. The suffering together binds people and they enjoy the glory and joy together. Also, you have groups of people supporting a team. (Group 11, Participant 1)

The ability of sport to bring South Africans together was mentioned in relation to large national and international events:

“Sport also brings people together in South Africa. Stadiums are filled when the Springboks and Proteas play.” (Group 10, Participant 8)

“Sports events like the World Cup brought people together.” (Group 2, Participant 7)

Sport was also identified as a unifying force at local level:

“The soccer tournament takes place during the school holidays. Many of the kids play in the tournament. During the tournament, we communicate with each other. It brings us closer to each other, we understand each other. There are even grownups who watch and talk to each other, whereas they’ve never spoken to each other before. Sports bring people together.” (Group 8, Participant 2)

Participant 7 in Group 5 in Balfour, Mpumalanga, similarly added that sport unites people “because everyone enjoys it – at community level”.

These analyses yielded interesting results. While, as discussed in the previous section, participants identified significant structural and system divisions within South African society – the economy, politics, race and culture – sources of unity did not correspond closely with these, rather focusing on inter-personal relations characterised by respect and love, and opportunities for collegial contact through religious, sporting and other events. Notably, these align with some elements of the social cohesion policies and plans put in place by government: Outcome 14 of the MTSF, for example, stipulates a range of initiatives that aim to promote constitutional values, encourage interaction and integration, provide opportunities for “mass participation” and increase access to sports and recreation activities (DMPE, 2014b). However, it was unclear from the FGDs how participants believed these unifying factors would lessen the impact of the divisions they identified.

Identity

In addition to source of division and unity in the country, the FGDs explored the theme of identity among research participants. Much of the literature on social cohesion refers to the importance of individual and group identities as key factors influencing relationships within societies. Often, these are weighed against the currency of a strong national identity, with the hypothesis that a singular unifying identity should supersede others in a highly cohesive society. Berger-Schmitt (2000, p. 3) refers to “feelings of a common identity and a sense of belonging to the same community” as important aspects often mentioned in describing social cohesion. In South Africa, the Twenty-Year Review 1994 – 2014 refers to the importance of an “overarching national identity”. This is symbolised in the post-apartheid period by a new Constitution, flag, anthem and coat of arms, which

play a potentially “stronger role in forging an overarching national identity than in a country with a single cultural, religious or ethnic identity” (DPME 2014c, p. 77).

The research sought to explore the identities espoused by South African participants, and the prevalence of “feelings of a common identity”. Research participants were asked about how they identified themselves, and what defined them most as people. Analysis of interview texts revealed enormous variation in response to these questions. Participants mentioned personal identities that were derived from, among others: gender; marital status; race; ethnicity; sexual orientation; birthplace/geographic location; religion; socioeconomic status; individual attributes; personal interests (e.g. sports, music); roles within families (e.g. mother, father, single parent, teenage mother); and roles within communities (e.g. volunteer, working with children, working with the elderly). Critically, an important finding was that research participants rarely identified themselves in singular terms. Rather, most identified themselves in multiple ways, as evidenced by comments including the following:

“I am... a female, I work as a life guard, I am single mother raising two children. I love sports.” (Group 3, Participant 7)

“I am a white, gay, professional, spiritual traveller.” (Group 11, Participant 1)

“I am a coloured. I work in the garden and assist my wife at home. I am 69 years old. I love being at church, where I sing in the choir.” (Group 9, Participant 1)

Referring to multiple identities was common across participants across all FGD’s, and these diverse characterisations far exceeded narrow conventional social groups or categories.

Among these multiple identities, however, it was most common for South African research participants to describe themselves in terms of their personality and individual attributes, ethnicity or race. With regard to the former, when asked about how they identified themselves, some participants responded that they were respectful or “well-behaved” people. Others across multiple FGD’s self-identified as “people’s persons”, or as leaders or “go-getters”. Again, personal attributes were described in terms of multiple individual identities:

“I am the person who is well-behaved and I stay with his mother and brother who is also unemployed.” (Group 6, Participant 2)

“I am a mother. I love leadership in me, I identify myself around leadership... (Group 5, Participant 6)

“I am compassionate type of person in the nation, I respond to other people’s pain and needs. I empathise with people’s situation because of my background and understanding what humanity means. Respecting and getting on with others defines me. (Group 4, Participant 7)

“...a respectful, honest person - a jolly person.” (Group 2, Participant 1)

Self-identification in this way was not always limited to positive personal qualities or attributes. Some participants also identified themselves as “naughty” or “rude”, and in the case of one participant in Group 5, as a “hustler”.

Analysis of FGD texts also found that it was common for participants to identify themselves according to their ethnic groups. As described by several participants,

“Being a South African my identity begins with being a Basotho by following my traditions and customs and being proud of being a Basotho.” (Group 1, Participant 4)

“I am Xhosa. But I can speak isiZulu well.” (Group 7, Participant 8)

Once again, ethnicity was described as one of multiple sources of identity:

“I’m Pedi and I’m a black person and like all black people I have my culture but I’m also a Christian...” (Group 1, Participant 2)

“My father is a Xhosa and my mother is a Coloured... I am proud to be a South African. My skin colour shows that I am one.” (Group 9, Participant 6)

In addition to ethnicity, many participants also articulated a racial identity. This was true of participants from multiple historically-defined race groups:

“I’m a hundred per cent black African – proudly South African.” (Group 5, Participant 7)

“I am a coloured. My father was white and my mom a coloured...” (Group 9, Participant 5)

“I am a black South African woman...” (Group 4, Participant 6)

“I identify myself as a single, gay, white working professional male. (Group 11, Participant 3)

The mention of both ethnicity and race as sources of identity was common among participants across most FGD’s.

The key finding that South African research participants identified themselves in a multitude of different ways brings into question the extent of an “overarching national identity” within the country. However, notably many participants mentioned being South African as a key part of their identity, albeit together with other descriptors. Further, this national identity was often discussed in positive terms and as a source of personal pride, as captured in the following texts:

“I am proud to be a South African because I was born here. It is the only country I know. (Group 6, Participant 6)

"I'm South African. I am proud to be a South African. I wish that all South Africans can work so that South Africa can become rich and be economically active so that we can build a better South Africa that we are proud of - better than how it was in apartheid times." (Group 5, Participant 11)

"I am proud of being a South African because I can see that other nationals love and are very interested in our country." (Group 4, Participant 8)

For some participants, this national identity was specifically linked to the country's political history, and the rights and freedoms now guaranteed to citizens after the end of apartheid. They commented:

"...our struggle makes me feel South African - because of the struggle of our parents and today as result we as the youth we have better opportunities... I feel free and can associate with any one in South Africa, I don't have to struggle like my parents." (Group 2, Participant 10)

"Being South African simply means you live in a free country - whatever you want to do you can do." (Group 5, Participant 4)

"I identify myself as a South African because of the freedom that we have and because we can practice our cultures." (Group 3, Participant 7)

Some participants in Group 1 in Balfour, Mpumalanga, in particular also discussed how being a South African citizen entails certain responsibilities. These included actively contributing to the economy and supporting local brands and products. As described by one participant, "we should change and not expect government to do everything but try to do something for ourselves even though we are uneducated" (Group 1, Participant 5).

These research findings suggest that South African FGD participants identified themselves in multiple and diverse ways – a potential indicator of low levels of social cohesion. However, these multiple identities did not appear to detract from a shared "overarching national identity" and positive associations with South African citizenship.

Trust

Much of the literature on social cohesion, as well as the related concept of social capital, refers to the importance of trust. Chan *et al* (2006, p. 289) for example, suggest that among the key criteria of cohesive society in which people "stick" together is that they can "trust, help and cooperate with their fellow members". Focus group participants were asked about the relationships between different people in the country, and the extent that South Africans trust one another. Analysis of FGD texts showed very low levels of trust overall, across research participants. In fact, only participants in Group 8 (Touwsrivier) and Group 11 (Cape Town) mentioned trusting other South Africans, for example, explaining that "I trust others because I trust myself" (Group 8, Participant 9)

and that “you can trust people who want to help uplift you, someone who want to help you, who want to see you achieve success” (Group 8, Participant 10). One participant in Group 11 trusted South Africans “more than I trust people in other countries” because there “is a kind of openness here - people are prepared to expose themselves and to share and chat to each other” (Group 11, Participant 4).

Comparatively, it was far more common for focus group participants to express high levels of distrust towards others, and the view that most South Africans do not trust each other. Comments included that,

“There’s no longer trust in the country and in communities because of loss of good values and cultural values...” (Group 1, Participant 2)

“We don’t trust one another in different relationships, whether it is a friendship, relationships or in business...” (Group 2, Participant 6)

“No, we don’t trust each other in the nation.” (Group 3, Participants 1, 3, 5)

“I have zero percent trust. I think we don’t trust each other – we are just living together but there’s no trust.” (Group 5, Participant 4)

“I trust nobody.” (Group 6, Participant 9)

“No, they do not trust each other. We do not trust each other because we do not know each other well.” (Group 7, Participant 2)

“Here in South Africa, I think it’s the same, trust is a big issue. Not everybody trust everybody... Everybody is looking out for themselves in South Africa.” (Group 8, Participant 6)

“I trust myself. I do not trust others.” (Group 9, Participant 5)

Research participants were asked about the reasons behind these low levels of trust between South Africans. A number of common explanations were given across groups, including: high levels of crime and violence (“We as black people do not trust one another. You cannot trust a boy that comes to your house because he may be rapist.” [Group 7, Participant 9]); dishonesty and a lack of follow through among political leadership (“Trust is no longer there because political leaders break trust first because they are not fulfilling or keeping their promises to people...” [Group 1, Participant 5]); money and self-interest (“Money is also a driver of mistrust in relationships because people look out for their own interest...” [Group 2, Participant 6]); and changing social values, such as increasing dishonesty, cruelty, and self-interest. Participants in Groups 7 and 9 in particular discussed the lack of trust between parents and children, and one participant in Group 4 mentioned distrust between men and women.

Further prompting was used to elicit participants' views on the most, and least trustworthy people. Across the 11 focus groups, participants were most likely to answer that God/Jesus was most trustworthy, or members of their own family:

"I only believe in Jesus. He is one that will help you. Friends are backstabbers." (Group 8, Participant 7)

"... there is only one real friend, and that is Jesus. I struggle with it, but you can't really trust anybody because you never know when someone is sincere." (Group 9, Participant 2)

"I trust my father because I come from far with him. He has ensured my survival and the person I am now." (Group 5, Participant 10)

"I only trust my mother and my brother." (Group 6, Participant 2)

"I trust my mother than any other person." (Group 1, Participant 5)

Even among those who indicated that they trusted family member, levels of trust were sometimes qualified:

"I trust my wife and give her only fifty percent." (Group 6, Participant 6)

"I trust only my son because he is still young but when he reaches a certain age I will stop trusting him because of the influence from others." (Group 5, Participant 3)

Several participants in Groups 6, 7 and 8 also mentioned trusting their neighbours and close friends. According to participant 2 in Group 11, people "trust the group they identify with more than other groups".

Some participants also named specific groups of people perceived to be more trustworthy than others. These included: older people ("Senior citizens are the most reliable people to work with" [Group 4, Participant 4]); people of specific race or ethnic groups ("[You can trust] a white person but not Boeremag." [Group 7, Participant 5]); and, people of a specific religious group ("[People you can trust] the most is Muslims because they do not deviate from what they have learnt [from their religion] – they have one denomination" [Group 5, Participant 3]).

Notably, some of the people identified as most trustworthy by select research participants were also identified as least trustworthy by others. Participants in Group 7 in particular discussed a lack of trust in even close family members ("If you tell the mother she will tell her sister who will tell someone else" [Group 7, Participant 6], while those in Group 6 shared distrust of "people in the church" (Participants 4, 7, 8, 9, 10). Participants in several different groups identified politicians and government officials as the least trustworthy people:

*"I don't believe in political parties because I don't know what goes on in their heads."
(Group 8, Participant 2)*

*"I trust politicians the least, they don't have truth. What they promise does not happen."
(Group 4, Participant 3)*

"I trust politicians and government officials the least. How do you trust them when you hear rumours that they have misused money?" (Group 1, Participant 2)

*"Now we don't trust our leadership. The word trust doesn't mean much nowadays.
(Group 5, Participant 4)*

Participants in Groups 5 and 6 also expressed distrust of people of specific ethnic groups and races, including "blacks and whites", "Venda people", "Indians", "Xhosa" people, and people of other races in general.

Participants were also asked about the kinds of support they expect from the people they trust the most. Many, like participant 6 in Group 6, mentioned that they expect those they trust to "help" them when necessary: "I expect them to help me in every possible way. I expect them to do good things for me in everything that I ask them to assist me with." Forms of "help" mentioned across focus groups included comfort and emotional support, encouragement, advice, spiritual support and, for several participants, financial support when needed.

Cooperation

The PII theorised that cooperation, and the ability of people to work together, is an important indicator of social cohesion. Others, including Beauvais and Jenson (2002, p. vi), refer to the importance of "the capacity to cooperate, as well as to trust" as a key element of a cohesive society. FGD participants were asked about their experiences of cooperating with other people. Analysis of FGD texts reveals a wide range of different types of cooperation, including in the areas of: arts projects; collaboration with local government; social movements (#FeesMustFall); and educational initiatives. The most common examples of cooperation across all focus groups appeared to be in the areas of community development, social support, sports and economic/entrepreneurial endeavours, as captured in the selected texts below:

"In Ward 21, we spoke with people who were occupying backyard room as a community to be patient with the government who was going to build these houses for them, and they listened to us." (Group 4, Participant 4)

"Our school was not fenced. The school children, teachers and principal agreed together that we will stay away from school until the school gets fenced because the children felt unsafe at school. Gangsters came to school and hurt the children during recess or sold cigarettes to the kids. We were successful because the school continued like normal once it was fenced." (Group 8, Participant 2)

“In the community we have Mohowu⁵ who do community work like visiting people who need special care, like the elderly who get medication, indigent people, orphans and those that are destitute.” (Group 2, Participant 7)

“I stay in this township in Ward 1. There was a time when we helped each other when there was a death and we were helping for the funeral. Neighbours contributed rice or mielie meal or money like R50. It worked well. Many families benefitted.” (Group 6, Participant 8)

“The community started a community horse race. It started from the bottom as the winner used to get matches and towels later they got blankets. Now it has become too big and competing in Dundee July. The municipality assists with transport to the race and transport for the horses.” (Group 6, Participant 4)

“I’m part of a cooperative that I joined for money, it was not because I love them, or I knew the people or had any other thing in common with them. We had challenges but because of money as important to all of us we found ways to work together...” (Group 5, Participant 6)

“In Bloemfontein there is a situation where black people in the community worked together to buy a mine, that type of working together and coming together as a community made the venture successful.” (Group 3, Participant 6)

“There are stokvels, where people contribute money to improve their lives. There are such examples in Touwsrivier. People contributed money, then at the end of the year they buy groceries in large quantities, and everybody who contributed gets a grocery hamper.” (Group 9, Participant 2)

The success of these cooperative efforts, and the relationships between collaborators, appeared to be mixed. While some participants described achieving positive results through cooperation, others mentioned problems – in a number of cases, related to theft, mismanagement or disagreements over money.

Research participants were further asked about why they decided to cooperate with others in the circumstances they described. In response, most described their motivation as the result of a shared social purpose or cause, an economic challenge or goal, or for religious reasons:

“I felt strongly about the issues that affect the community as community member and as a Christian.” (Group 2, Participant 7)

“There was chaos at school over weekends...The department, the police station, everybody knew that the school needed a fence.” (Group 8, Participant 2)

⁵ A local community-based organisation.

“A common goal and dedication to save and do something out of the savings accumulated in the stokvel.” (Group 3, Participant 1)

“I participated in the stokvel because I could, for example buy a fridge if I did not have one. I think most people participated for the same purpose; to obtain things they did not have.” (Group 9, Participant 2)

Participant 4 in Group 4 also acknowledged the greater power and likely impact of collaborative efforts, particularly when working with government.

Research participants were also asked about the types of people who are the most reliable collaborators. Those identified as most reliable varied widely, and there appeared to be little consensus among participants. The most reliable collaborators included: men (“women don’t have truth” [Group 2, Participant 4]) and women (“business women contribute to community projects” [Group 2, Participant 7]); youth (“they have experience in different things” [Group 3, Participant 2]) and older people (“they are trustworthy, reliable and faithful” [Group 4, Participant 4]); and a range of people of different racial, ethnic and religious groups. Many research participants agreed that they would be likely to cooperate with others again in future, in the right circumstances and with the right people.

Rainbow Nation

The PII was interested in exploring whether or not the idea of South Africa as a “Rainbow Nation” – a term credited to Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu – was viewed as relevant among research participants, or was likely to influence social cohesion. When asked about the meaning of the Rainbow Nation, initial responses were generally quite positive:

“South Africa is a rainbow nation, I believe that indeed it is a Rainbow Nation because of diversity, we have diverse cultures and languages...” (Group 2, Participant 7)

“I can use the example of the spectra of the rainbow as it symbolises different cultures and beliefs coming together as people and as a nation.” (Group 1, Participant 2)

“It means that we’re a loving country, because if you look at South Africa it has and accommodates all cultures and ethnic groups.” (Group 3, Participant 8)

“When Tata Mandela referred to us as a rainbow nation he meant that we are a non-racial country where all races are equal and everything is open for everyone and not discriminating according to race, tribes, ethnicity. Now we have integrated school, there’s African language in model-C schools.” (Group 4, Participant 1)

“I think it’s because we are different kinds of race people in our country – black, white, Muslim, maybe Indian, but we serve one nation and one country. We support South Africa. That’s why we call it the Rainbow nation.” (Group 8, Participant 10)

"We are all equal. There is no differentiation between white, black and brown." (Group 10, Participant 7)

The idea of the Rainbow Nation was commonly associated with diversity, integration, and as a symbol of freedom and democracy.

However, support for the idea of the Rainbow Nation was not universal. This was particularly evident in Group 5 in Balfour, Mpumalanga. Participant 3 described the Rainbow Nation as a term that "dilutes or takes away our culture", and suggested that even the image itself excludes black South Africans:

"The Rainbow Nation means that they were separating blacks from other cultures because rainbow doesn't have black – which means black is not included, rainbow does not have black." (Group 5, Participant 3)

Participants 4 and 6 in the same FGD expressed similarly negative views:

"The Rainbow Nation is something that comes with white people, only for people who believe in rainbow nations, like whites, Indians. Blacks are just there to help the whites to achieve what they want." (Group 5, Participant 4)

"The Rainbow Nation means that we as black people take our house [South Africa] and put all white people and others in it. Whites are still keeping what they have, their house, but we share what is ours." (Group 5, Participant 6)

Participants also criticised the difference between the ideal of the Rainbow Nation, and the reality of life in South Africa today. As described by one participant in Group 3, referring to a recent high-profile court case, "We can't be a Rainbow Nation if people are being brutalised racially like the guy who was put in the coffin, the recent event where two white males assaulted and terrorised a black male by putting him in a coffin, the black male was caught by the two stealing something" (Group 3, Participant 4). Others also commented on the contrast between the image of the Rainbow Nation, and the reality of lived experiences. As one explained in Group 11, "when your day to day reality is so bleak, Rainbow Nation becomes a hifalutin ideal" (Group 11, Participant 5).

Research participants were also asked about the extent that they believed South Africa has achieved the ideal of the Rainbow Nation, with mixed responses. Some felt that that the country has realised this ideal, citing evidence including diversity, freedom, social progress and a lack of discrimination:

"...I believe that indeed it is a Rainbow Nation because of diversity, we have diverse cultures and languages - for example there are white people who speak African languages, we beat other nations with language and cultural diversity." (Group 2, Participant 7)

"South Africa is a Rainbow Nation. All South Africans are free to be anywhere..." (Group 3, Participant 4)

"I believe the Rainbow Nation is on track, the society is more open and we are learning to become the nation that we want to become..." (Group 4, Participant 1)

"It's [the Rainbow Nation] a very real thing. I've heard whites say that they are discriminated against, but I've never felt it... From people of other races, I've felt collegiality and welcome." (Group 11, Participant 5)

For others, the Rainbow Nation has not yet been achieved, for reasons including: corruption; racial divisions/racism; inequality; government and the political situation; and a lack of progress since the end of apartheid. Examples included:

"It is true South Africa has come a long way from the problem of the past, but it is difficult for me to say we have arrived at this [Rainbow Nation] because of poor implementation by government and secondly the political situation in the country takes this back." (Group 3, Participant 4)

"For me the abolishment of apartheid was the only thing that emerged from the change. With the things that are happening after that, some are favoured and others are left behind. The same apartheid remains between our cultures. Those who are poor remain poor, and those who have money only get more and more. There is no improvement." (Group 9, Participant 2)

A number of participants referred to the lack of progress in race relations as evidence that the Rainbow Nation has not been achieved as yet. They commented:

"The Rainbow Nation has not happened the way it was preached I the beginning - white people have not embraced black people. You see it when you approach or go past [white] people's cars, they close their windows showing that black people are not to be trusted. The other example is that they put up 'No Employment' signs at their shops meaning that they want us [black] people at arm's length." (Group 1, Participant 2)

"My issue with the concept of Rainbow Nation is that you don't find white people wanting to live the experience that is lived by most black people, for example, a white person leaving their suburb home with running tap water, with gomme gomme sofas, opulence, variety and choice - and come and experience a lived experience. We're not a Rainbow Nation until there some equality and shared experiences between whites and black..." (Group 2, Participant 6)

"The way I see it, I don't think how the Rainbow Nation was envisaged is how it is today. I say this because of the way black people are still suffering and the white people are holding back resources and support to uplift the majority of black people, when they can. In fact reconciliation should have been from their [white people's] side." (Group 3, Participant 3)

Although the Rainbow Nation thus seemed to be positive for some, it did not appear to be a universally espoused metaphor for post-apartheid society that could usefully aid in bringing together or unifying South Africans.

Social Cohesion

Finally, research participants were asked about whether or not they had heard of the term social cohesion before, and what it meant to them. Analysis of research texts showed mixed results. In some FGDs, such as Groups 1, 3 and 4, very few participants were familiar with the term. Participant 2 in Group 3 commented, "I have never heard of social cohesion, it is a strange word." In Group 1, only one person had heard of social cohesion "because I have attended workshops on it", and described the term as being "about bringing together all people of different cultures to discuss things and come up with solutions" (Participant 3).

Participants in other FGDs were more familiar with the term social cohesion, and had a wide range of ideas about what it meant. Some explained,

"Social cohesion means that as a nation need to work together, coming up with strategies to unite and team-up as South Africa, and become one team." (Group 3, Participant 4)

"Social is working together across the colour bar, side-by-side. It is about understanding one another and accepting one another and not just tolerating one another but living as a real Rainbow Nation." (Group 4, Participant 4)

Participants in Group 6 in Kokstad, KwaZulu-Natal discussed the meaning of social cohesion, with a variety of inputs and explanations from different individuals:

"It is working together of the community." (Participant 10)

"It is true. It is working together and trusting one another." (Participant 8)

"It is cooperation." (Participant 7)

"It is love and peace. Where there is peace everything goes well." (Participant 6)

"It is helping someone else instead of undermining him." (Participant 5)

"Since we are Africans and not South Africans we have to unite. For example, if he goes to buy something from the shop. If he buys a full basket with lots of goods and there is a person who bought drink only, let that person pay first because it is one item. White people do, letting you pay first. (Participant 2)

"Help each other and just have a listening ear." (Participant 1)

A similar discussion with a variety of inputs took place in Group 7, also in Kokstad:

"It is to trust yourself and it must make you proud." (Participant 5)

"In English, they say you can never live in isolation. You cannot manage to live alone in the world. If there are no people around you it is not like a human being..." (Participant 7)

"I think that interaction is very important. Social cohesion has nice ideas about how to live as a community, how to get out of problems and how to help one another..."

(Participant 8)

"I like it because it has brought us together as people and able to speak about what is inside us and I now know how to be successful and what I need to do in life." (Participant 1)

"We need to help each other because the community that we live in today is very bad."

(Participant 2)

"How to live as a human being and that we can still work together." (Participant 3)

"Social cohesion can help communities and street kids and perhaps they will come back from the streets." (Participant 4)

"Social cohesion has taught me about respect and how to fight crime." (Participant 6)

"It taught me to not undermine other people and to engage in something where we gain something important." (Participant 9)

"It is right thing to do because when people work together it can improve lives for other people through working together." (Participant 10)

Unity, diversity and working together were common themes articulated by participants across multiple FGDs. Table 2 shows the terms and concepts associated with social cohesion in each FGD.

Table 2: Terms and concepts associated with social cohesion

Group	Terms/concepts
1	Bringing different people together to come up with solutions
2	Coming together of the nation; unity
3	Working together; NGOs helping communities
4	Working together across racial lines, acceptance, living as the Rainbow Nation
5	Diversity, learning about others; diversity of eco-systems
6	Working together; trust; cooperation; love and peace; helping others; listening
7	Trusting yourself; not living in isolation; interaction; living as a community; solving problems; helping one another; bringing people together; speaking openly; knowing how to be successful; living like a human being; helping communities and street kids; respect; fighting crime; not undermining others;
8	Prospects and a good future; growth for the community; exchanging ideas; learning from one another
9	[referring to Ubuntu] Caring; contributing to organisations that help others; giving to those in need; cooperation and help
10	People coming together from different race groups and cultures
11	[referring to Ubuntu] Grandmothers taking responsibility; communities; trust and caring

Participants were also asked about how social cohesion can be increased. Responses included: political leadership; economic transformation; showcasing/learning more about other cultures; festivals that bring people together; training opportunities; freedom of speech; raising awareness;

promoting South African content/stories; more job opportunities; reducing dependency; improving standards of living; returning to traditional practices; eradicating racial divisions; holding workshops and creating opportunities for dialogue; and developing shared values. However, there was very little consensus, and most of these suggestions were isolated.

Conclusion

Social cohesion has become an important, if elusive policy goal for many countries, including South Africa. However, the meaning of the term is often opaque, and there has been little qualitative inquiry into the concept and its various dimensions. This article has presented the results of a series of FGDs exploring social cohesion in South Africa, with a view to increasing understanding of its meaning in this context.

FGD results confirmed the view that, among research participants, South Africa remains a divided country. The most frequently identified sources of division included the economic situation, politics, race and racial discrimination, and cultural differences between people. Participants also identified things that bring South Africans together, but notably, these were largely unrelated to the aforementioned divisions. Sources of unity included, among others, the values of respect and love, religion and sport.

Research findings also suggest that South African participants identified themselves in multiple ways. This included defining themselves according to groups, such as by ethnicity or race, but also by their personal attributes. Importantly, multiple identities did not detract from still articulating strong national identities, with many expressing pride in being South African.

Levels of inter-personal trust were found to be very low among research participants. Reasons for this included the fear of crime and violence, a lack of follow-through by political leadership and individuals' preoccupation with self-interest and money. Participants generally only mentioned trusting in God/Jesus or close family members. This lack of inter-personal trust, some of the literature would suggest, is indicative of low levels of social cohesion. However, at the same time, research participants also shared past experiences of cooperating with others in a variety of circumstances, and a willingness to do so again in future: evidence of possible cohesion in terms of this dimension.

The research also explored the image of South Africa as the Rainbow Nation, and participants' perspectives on the meaning and relevance of this metaphor. Although some responded positively, other participants felt Rainbow Nation has not been realised, and its ideals remain far from the lived realities of many South Africans. As such, the idea of the Rainbow Nation appears to have limited ability to meaningfully bring together South Africans.

Finally, the research looked at South Africans' understanding of the term social cohesion, with mixed results. While some participants were familiar with the term, it was new to many others. Nonetheless, participants provided a variety of inputs on the meaning of the term, including frequently referring to the qualities of unity, diversity and working together. These inputs may be

considered in broadening understanding and conceptualisations of social cohesion in South Africa going forward.

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SALDRU

Southern Africa Labour and
Development Research Unit

The Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) conducts research directed at improving the well-being of South Africa's poor. It was established in 1975. Over the next two decades the unit's research played a central role in documenting the human costs of apartheid. Key projects from this period included the Farm Labour Conference (1976), the Economics of Health Care Conference (1978), and the Second Carnegie Enquiry into Poverty and Development in South Africa (1983-86). At the urging of the African National Congress, from 1992-1994 SALDRU and the World Bank coordinated the Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development (PSLSD). This project provide baseline data for the implementation of post-apartheid socio-economic policies through South Africa's first non-racial national sample survey.

In the post-apartheid period, SALDRU has continued to gather data and conduct research directed at informing and assessing anti-poverty policy. In line with its historical contribution, SALDRU's researchers continue to conduct research detailing changing patterns of well-being in South Africa and assessing the impact of government policy on the poor. Current research work falls into the following research themes: post-apartheid poverty; employment and migration dynamics; family support structures in an era of rapid social change; public works and public infrastructure programmes, financial strategies of the poor; common property resources and the poor. Key survey projects include the Langeberg Integrated Family Survey (1999), the Khayelitsha/Mitchell's Plain Survey (2000), the ongoing Cape Area Panel Study (2001-) and the Financial Diaries Project.

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