



# MEASURING SOCIAL COHESION: TOWARD A SOCIAL COHESION BAROMETER FOR SOUTH AFRICA

*This policy brief presents the South African Social Cohesion Barometer and key findings and recommendations that emanated from the application of this measurement tool. We perceive social cohesion as consisting of three components (domains): economic, socio-cultural and civic.*

*Three key results emerged when we examine each domain using the 2009 and 2010 South African Social Attitude Surveys (SASAS):*

- *Firstly, the social cultural domain received the lowest score, which suggests that South Africans measure low on social trust, racial tolerance and interracial contact.*
- *Secondly, the civic domain recorded the highest score, indicating that the country is most socially cohesive as a result of higher levels of national identity, participation and interest in political activities.*
- *Thirdly, across all the three domains, one observes socio-demographic inequalities in attitudes and behaviours towards social cohesion.*

*Based on the analytical results we recommend that:*

- 1, The Department of Arts and Culture should spearhead the government's National Strategy and Action Plan on social cohesion and ensure that government continues its efforts to improve the nation's economic conditions in order to achieve its social cohesion objectives.*
- 2, The South African Local Government Association (SALGA) must work with the Department of Arts and Culture to address high levels of domestic violence, criminality, decline in social values as well as levels of social solidarity that are threatening social cultural cohesion at community level.*
- 3, To improve civic cohesion government will have to be mindful of a general lack of trust among South Africans in all spheres of government as well as lack of electoral participation among youth.*
- 4. Finally, we recommended that the Presidency complement the existing Development Indicators with measures used in the Social Cohesion Barometer to arrive at a more comprehensive social cohesion measure.*

## Introduction and background

The promotion of unity and social cohesion continues to be a key goal of the ANC and its government – African National Congress (2011: 14)

Over the last decade there has been increasing reference to a number of perceived threats that are collectively eroding social cohesion in the South African society. The Presidency's Fifteen Year Review (FYR) listed 'building social cohesion and state legitimacy' as a key element of the government's development strategy. Specifically, the FYR raises concerns about persisting income inequality, criminal victimisation, declining

public confidence in political institutions and state performance, low levels of interpersonal trust, racism, xenophobia and the straining of traditional family and community safety nets (The Presidency, 2008).

More recently, the National Planning Commission's diagnostic document on nation-building refers to a series of fault lines that serve as an impediment to social cohesion and that need addressing as a matter of policy urgency. These are: the divisive effects of institutionalised racism; class divisions; social fragmentation; language; spatial exclusion; gender and sex; unemployment; crime, corruption, unequal experiences of the law, and moral decline (NPC, 2011).

The government's Programme of Action for the Social Cluster has firmly included the promotion of social cohesion as one of its core priority actions. In addition, the Department of Social Development has developed a concept paper on social cohesion and integrated development planning, which as of mid-2011 has been incorporated into the Department of Art and Culture's National Strategy and Action Plan on social cohesion.

It is against this background that the Programme to Support Pro-Poor Policy Development (PSPPD) contracted the HSRC to develop a measurement tool to monitor government's progress in building social cohesion. The purpose of this policy brief is to present the South African Social

Cohesion Barometer and key findings and recommendations that emanated from the application of this measurement tool.

## Defining and measuring social cohesion

Social cohesion is a not new concept, but it is extremely complex and difficult to define and to measure. Frequently, people seeking to translate 'social cohesion' into empirical research or real-world policy have been hindered by its definition. Upon further examination, 'social cohesion' seems to disaggregate into factors considered to feed into or spring from it, such as health care, education and jobs. Such factors have robust track records in both research and public policy, but researchers lack clarity or are uncertain when confronting such components within the social cohesion context. If 'social cohesion' reduces to a cluster of social conditions, then can it truly be assessed simply by considering the sum of relevant indicators, such as jobs, education and hiring patterns? Intuitively, 'social cohesion' seems to allude to more than the sum of several parts, suggesting that some larger, overarching quality or condition in society either drives those indicators or emerges from their combination. Otherwise, why use the term at all? But if social cohesion is a distinct quality or condition of society, how is that quality identified and measured? And precisely how will South African public policy benefit from doing so?

The study underpinning this policy brief has therefore developed a framework for conceptualising and measuring social cohesion in South Africa. In common with authors such as Jensen (1998, 2007), Bernard (1999), Chan et al. (2006), Dickes et al (2010) and Vergolini (2011), we perceive social cohesion as consisting of economic, social cultural and civic domains. The South African Social Cohesion Barometer uses these three domains to measure attitudes and behaviours in each (Figure 1). For example, the economic domain measures attitudes towards socio-economic inequalities and redress measures such as affirmative action and preferential hiring of Black South Africans and women. Other economic domain variables include assessments of access to health care,

education, jobs and basic services such as water and electricity. The socio-cultural domain measures aspects such as social trust, family life and gender roles, levels of personal well-being, discrimination and racial tolerance, interracial contact and crime. The civic domain examines attitudes towards national identity, satisfaction with government performance, and participation and interest in political activities.

**Figure 1: Conceptual framework for social cohesion**



## Research methodology / Research data

Data from the 2009 and 2010 South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) was used to populate the various social cohesion domain indicators. The SASAS survey covers a wide range of topics including attitudes about democracy and governance, service delivery, race relations, crime, moral issues, and poverty and is designed to yield a representative sample of adults of 16 years of age and older, regardless of their nationality or citizenship (Pillay, Roberts & Rule, 2006).

During this study, a theoretical framework was developed that provided the basis for the respective selection and combination of single indicators into the three domain composite indicators. In addition, all the indicators selected for the domains were first tested for analytical soundness, measurability and relevance to the particular domain and social cohesion in general, and then standardised to a 0-100 scale. The indicators for each domain were then combined or added and average scores were calculated for all three domains. These scores indicated the level of social cohesion for each domain.

A higher score indicated a higher form of cohesion on the particular domain scale. This was done to enable the researchers to compare and plot findings of the various domains on a single platform.

## Key findings

Three key results emerged when we examine the standardised scores of each domain of the social cohesion barometer tool (Figure 2). Firstly, the results indicate that the social cultural (40.38%) domain received the lowest score. This result suggests that South Africans measure low on social trust, levels of personal well-being, racial tolerance and interracial contact.

Secondly, the civic domain (47.45%) recorded the highest score. In other words, the country as a whole is most socially cohesive as a result of higher levels of national identity, satisfaction with government performance, and participation and interest in political activities when compared to the economic and socio-cultural cohesion indicators.

Thirdly, across all the three domains, there are socio-demographic inequalities in attitudes and behaviours towards social cohesion. Figure 3 illustrates the influence of race in shaping different attitudes and behaviours towards social cohesion in South Africa. In the economic domain, Coloureds, Indians and Whites scored higher, indicating that they were more economically cohesive compared to Black Africans. This overall result suggests that Whites, Coloureds and Indians have a more positive perception about their economic circumstances, while Black African respondents had a more negative perception of their economic situation. When cohesion in the socio-cultural domain is considered, Whites are less tolerant and more fearful of crime than Black Africans, which in turn impacts on their overall satisfaction in life score. In terms of the civic domain, Coloureds, Indians and Whites are much less likely to vote, less likely to have trust in institutions, and less likely to be satisfied with democracy and service delivery.

In terms of geography, in the economic domain, people from urban informal settlements scored the lowest in terms of

economic social cohesion when compared to the other areas and were more negative about redress of basic services compared to those in the urban formal areas. In the socio-cultural domain people living in traditional authority areas are significantly different from people in urban formal areas, being notably less tolerant.

When the socio-cultural domain scores are compared by age group it is interesting to note that the youngest age cohort (16 to 19-year-olds) is significantly more tolerant towards immigrants and gays, has much more interracial contact, feels less discriminated against and is generally more satisfied with life. However, when the civic domain is analysed, the youngest age cohort is considerably less civically cohesive than older age groups and is less likely to participate in traditional forms of activities such as voting.

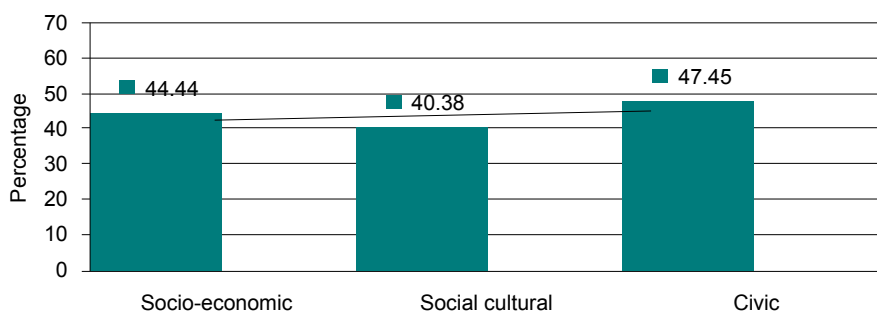
#### Recommendations

The analytical results highlighted in this policy brief demonstrate that social cohesion is multi-dimensional and complex, and is impacted by various socio-economic, socio-cultural and civic factors. As such we recommend that social cohesion must be addressed in a comprehensive manner. The Department of Arts and Culture in particular should spearhead the government's National Strategy and Action Plan on social cohesion and ensure that all government departments and institutions incorporate social cohesion to achieve the government's overall social cohesion objectives. Moreover, we believe that an approach to social cohesion that simply emphasises its component inputs such as socio-cultural development or specific policy areas tends to sideline the entire question of social cohesion. The recommendations proposed in this policy brief are therefore not directed at a specific government department or institution, but to all those tasked with social cohesion. We have grouped our recommendations according to the three domains - 1) economic, 2) socio-cultural and 3) civic – which based on international consensus and research, are the core measures of social cohesion.

### 1. Economic Domain

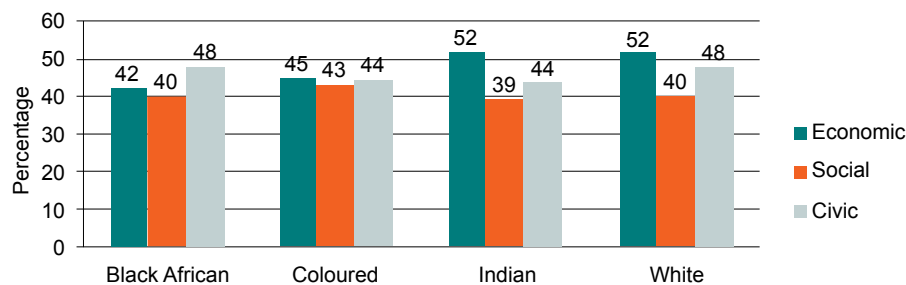
For economic cohesion we argued

**Figure 2: Social Cohesion Domain Scores**



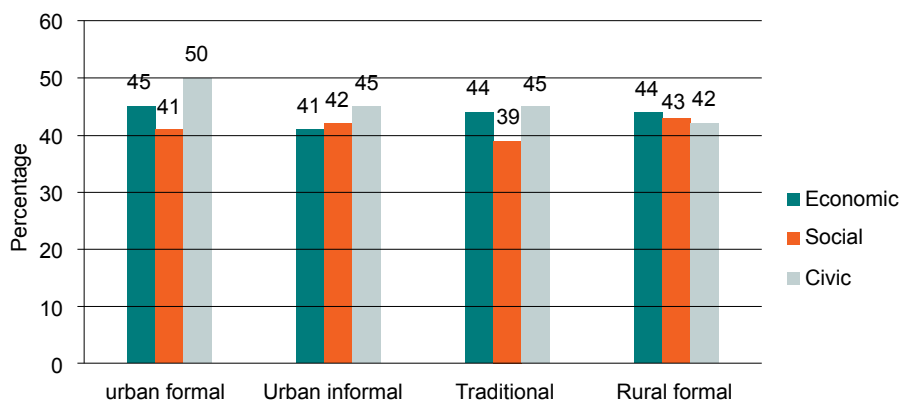
Source: SASAS 2009 and 2010

**Figure 3: Social cohesion by race**



Source: SASAS 2009 and 2010

**Figure 4: Social cohesion by geographic location**



Source: SASAS 2009 and 2010

that inequality among the various demographic strata such as race and geographic location must be addressed to achieve a more socially inclusive society. We therefore recommend that government continues its efforts to improve the nation's economic conditions in order to achieve its social cohesion objectives. In specific, it will be necessary to:

- Increase economic growth and jobs
- Improve the quality of education
- Provide access to adequate health care for all
- Increase access to basic services such as supply of water, electricity and refuse removal

- Provide access to adequate housing, transport, clothing and food for poor households
- Improve labour market and affirmative action redress measures
- Implement socio-economic conflict programmes to address conflict between rich and poor

### 2. Socio-Cultural Perspective

The socio-cultural domain results of the social cohesion barometer highlight the need for a clear focus on improving racial tolerance and tension as well as family relations. The South African Local Government Association (SALGA) in particular must work with

the Department of Arts and Culture, because it is working directly at the community and family level where high levels of domestic violence, criminality, teenage pregnancy, decline in social values, as well as declining levels of social solidarity are threatening social cohesion. We therefore recommend that the following areas must be strengthened:

- Family relations to reduce interpersonal violence and family conflict
- Social networks to improve inter-racial contact
- Racial tolerance programmes to address discrimination, racial tension and xenophobia
- Community development programmes

### 3. Civic Perspective

Although the civic cohesion domain results were more positive than the economic and socio-cultural domain, some areas of concern were identified. To improve civic cohesion government will have to be mindful of the following:

- General lack of trust in national and

provincial government as well as parliament

- Low levels of trust in municipal performance
- Some level of dissatisfaction with the way democracy is working in the country
- Lack of electoral participation among the youth
- Increase in service delivery protest as a form of political activity and activism

### 4. Social Cohesion Barometer as an official social cohesion monitoring tool

The key findings presented in this policy brief become extremely important against a background of rising inequality, worrying racial incidents and intolerance, and increasing violent protest, particularly among the poor and youth. These economic, socio-cultural and civic concerns are increasingly threatening social cohesion and the South African rainbow society at large. As such this policy brief's final recommendation is that the South African Social

Cohesion Barometer be adopted by the Presidency to complement the existing Development Indicators (2008, 2009 and 2010), which list among the 80 measures, a set of nine items on social cohesion and a further seven items on good governance. In specific we want to recommend that the following indicators be included as part of the Developmental Indicators if the Social Cohesion Barometer is not adopted in its entirety:

- Socio-economic conflict measures such as 'conflict between rich and poor'
- Measures on the family such as 'interpersonal violence'
- Social network indicators
- Indicators on discrimination and tolerance
- Confidence in regime institutions
- Approval of incumbent office-holders
- Citizenship norms

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