

Social Capital Formation as a Strategy to Promote Social Cohesion- examples from Post apartheid South Africa.

Glenda Wildschut

Director: Leadership support and Development Centre

The transition from authoritarian rule to a democratic state in South Africa is widely considered to be one of the most remarkable examples of conflict resolution in the post cold war period. Compared to similar cases, South Africa was relatively successful in transforming fundamental political conflicts and in facilitating the advent of a new democracy in 1994. Having achieved political transformation in the country, the emphasis is now on dealing with the legacies of apartheid particularly social cohesion, nation building and reconciliation between people who have been divided in the past. The task of promoting social cohesion and fostering social capital is a central aspect of nation building and participative democracy. Both civil society and government are engaged in developing strategic programmes to promote social cohesion. This paper will briefly outline two examples of programmes to foster social cohesion- a civil society led initiative and government- led social capital programme.

The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation.

The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) was established to promote reconciliation, transitional justice and democratic nation-building in Africa by means of research, analysis and selective intervention. It seeks to understand the causes of conflict and promote understanding in the resolution of conflict. It provides situational analysis, builds capacity, and produces resources for social transformation and development. The Institute has three main programmes namely Political Analysis programme, the Reconciliation and Social Reconstruction programme and the Transitional Justice Programme in Africa. The Political Analysis and Reconciliation and Social Reconstruction programme will be described.

The *Political Analysis* Programme tracks reconciliation, transformation and development in South Africa and through which factors critical to the success or the failure of the South African progressive transition are identified and examined. The *Reconciliation and Social Reconstruction* programme seeks to promote processes of reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa.

A major output of the Political Analysis programme is the South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB). As its name suggests, the SARB Survey

places particular emphasis on national reconciliation, one of the minimum requirements for the strengthening of social cohesion in post-apartheid South Africa. While the birth of the democratic state in 1994 signalled the end of legislated separation and discrimination that had ravaged the country's social fibre, it did not automatically translate into mended relations between black (used here in the generic sense that included black Africans, Coloureds and Indians) and white South Africans. The most notable and pervasive legacy of centuries of injustice has been a highly unequal society, characterised by extreme poverty in one sphere of society and excessive wealth in the other. Very little lay between these two extremes. Although the country could not have wished for a more appropriate leader in the person of Nelson Mandela at this critical transitional point in its history, even the reconciliatory tone set by this international icon could not wipe the effects of this legacy from the memories of the majority of South Africans. This point needs to be made in order to understand that the roots of division in present day South Africa lie much deeper than on a racial level alone. A project, such as the SARB, therefore has to cast its net of investigation broader than solely the level of inter-personal relationships between South Africans of different races when researching reconciliation.

In the absence of such a measurement instrument, which could give the Institute an idea in quantitative terms of the state of national reconciliation in South Africa four years ago, it embarked on this survey-based project with the input and assistance of a number of leading social researchers, both from South Africa and abroad. Today, four years later, Fanie Du Toit, of the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation, admits that there is still much to be discovered about the finer, less-obvious dynamics of transformation. Yet, IJR has moved beyond the foundational level of investigation. Since the first round of the SA Reconciliation Barometer (SARB) Survey, consistent modifications to this measurement instrument have been made in order to sharpen its focus. Today the survey still contains the original survey items that now serve as a baseline for longitudinal investigation, but new items have been added in successive surveys to obtain the nuance that is often lost in generalised measurements.

The wealth of data that has been amassed since 2003 has made a major impact on the ability of IJR's political analysis unit to read and interpret the events that shape daily life in South Africa. Together with the unit's other flagship project, the *SA Economic Transformation Audit*, which tracks transformation in the economic sphere, it briefs other programmes in the Institute about the socio-political context within which their projects are being implemented. As such, it allows the Institute to diagnose, but also anticipate events that impact on its areas of activity.

But from the outset the intention had been to make it a publicly accessible initiative that allows researchers and the public alike to interact with its results. Through the years a concerted effort has been made to disseminate the research

findings into the public domain through media interventions, public discussion forums, and cooperation with other leading researchers.

IJR does not view the Barometer Project solely as an internal tool of the Institute to guide its work. It also recognises that in the absence of similar data sources that deal directly with this subject area, it is important to avail this information to the broader South African public. This includes a large number of institutions both inside and outside of government that works towards the creation of a normalised non-racial society. Given the intensification of debate around social cohesion and the shared values that ought to underpin our nation over the past two years, it has become increasingly important to put such data in a readily accessible format in the public domain. All survey results are therefore documented in an annual *SA Reconciliation Barometer Survey Report*. IJR's approach to the Report is to state the survey's major findings and to provide comment to clarify context, survey assumptions, and methodology where necessary, without imposing specific interpretations on the reader. While the Institute may have its own views on the interpretation of results in the report, the document's primary purpose is to serve as a catalyst for public debate.

In the Fifth Round Survey Report that was released in November 2005, an interesting pattern was noted (note that at this stage we refrain from the word "trend") that appeared to be developing in regard to responses to key measurement instruments. Analysis of this round's results suggested a growing convergence in public opinion and sentiment amongst the different racial groups regarding these measurements. Given the large demographic majority of black Africans, the national averages in responses to survey rounds leading up to the fifth round, have largely been influenced by the opinions of this section of the population. While this still remained the case in responses to various statements and questions posed in the fifth round of the survey, it has become noticeable how this has been changing in regard of the measurement of certain indicators. In some cases responses by the black African majority have moved closer to that of minority groups, but in most instances where a narrowing in opinion between groups occurred, the converse was the case. This was particularly evident in responses from white citizens, while movement within other minority groups was of a more gradual nature.

This phenomenon was also evident in this, the 6th round of the survey. While white respondents, by a large margin, still remained the most sceptical on most reconciliation indicators, the growth in their optimism and acknowledgement of historical injustice has remained consistent. Their support for an inclusive united nation has, for example, increased by 10% over the past four years; their positive expectations for the livelihood of their families over the next 12 months, increased by almost 15% since the first measurement two years ago; and positive expectations for the future of their children improved by 20% since the first measurement also two years ago. Similar levels of optimism have been detected regarding perceptions around physical and economic security. This is a

significant development, which if sustained in years to come, can only be beneficial for the prospects of greater social cohesion in this country.

Based on these insights, the Institute has developed a range of interventions into society through its *Reconciliation and Social Reconstruction* programme. The Reconciliation and Reconstruction Programme draws inspiration from reconciliation initiatives that enabled South Africa to make the transition from apartheid to democracy in 1994. It addresses legacies specific to apartheid's institutional racism in particular contexts in order to promote democracy, a culture of human rights and social cohesion.

In applying lessons in political transition to areas of social reconstruction, this programme understands reconciliation in a fourfold way: acknowledgement and memory, deepening of understanding, forging partnerships and the empowerment of individuals and communities. It is at the convergence of these objectives, that reconciliation is able to impact on society at large.

To this end, projects are organised according to three areas of focus: education, memory, art and culture and public dialogue.

- *Education for Reconciliation* develops tools and resources to teach history and life skills in ways that promote reconciliation, human rights and mutual understanding.
- *Memory, Art and Healing* acknowledges the importance of memory, not least in marginalised communities. It engages memory as a springboard to build more cohesive communities and the empowerment of marginalised people.
- *Building an Inclusive Society* stimulates public dialogue amongst a range of South Africans on issues of national transformation.

Education for Reconciliation

During the past year the Institute developed educational materials in the areas of history as well as truth and reconciliation.

Critical engagement with history remains vital to the formation of a new generation of South African democrats. To this end, in 2004 the Institute published a seven-volume set of history textbooks entitled *Turning Points in History* for senior secondary schools. A senior curriculum advisor suggests this series is viewed as the premier text on South African history for that age group. It owes its unique standing to its representative authorship, the quality of the material and design, the span of history covered and the range of interactive teaching tools and training workshops developed in tandem with the books. The tools and workshops have enabled effective implementation in schools across race and class barriers.

Memory, Arts and Healing

The *Memory, Arts and Healing* focus gave rise to three projects: the Memory, Art and Culture Project, the Oral History Project and the Community Healing Project.

Memory, Arts and Culture project

This project focuses on grassroots communities, many of whom remain marginalised. It enables such communities to tell their stories, express their culture and engage their memories through the arts.

The Schools Oral History Project

The Schools Oral History Project seeks to develop oral history awareness, methodologies, insights and resources for learners in South Africa. Over the past three years, it has produced a series of outstanding classroom resources on particular communities of historical significance.

In 2006, the focus has been on producing teaching resources based on the experiences of different communities in the Northern Cape. Storytellers were encouraged to share a variety of stories, some of which had been passed down for generations and were relatively well known across the region; others were specific to smaller areas. Narratives included family histories, accounts of the relationship between missionaries and local people, experiences during the Anglo-Boer war, stories about notorious fugitives from the law, as well as myths, fables and folk tales with a regional flavour.

Community Healing

The Community Healing project establishes a platform for communities to come together across racial and other divides.

Key focus areas of this project have been the building of relations between two historically disadvantaged but divided communities, Bonteheuwel and Langa. The inclusion in the Langa/Bonteheuwel reconciliation process of the historically white Pinelands community resulted in the transferring of useful skills to participants and the development of a set of indicators or benchmarks for community healing.

Building an Inclusive Society

In its focus on *Building an Inclusive Society*, the Institute is committed to working with communities, policy-makers and political groupings so as to enable former adversaries and many who simply do not know one another to live in peaceful co-existence and democratic practice.

All these activities developed by the Institute are examples of a civil society initiative to promote social integration and social cohesion.

A government initiative to promote social cohesion.

The Western Cape Government in a document “ Framework for the development of the Western Cape Government” captures the vision **A home for All** as “ A World Class province which cares for all its people, underpinned by a vibrant, growing and sustainable economy’. The stated mission of the provincial government is to work together with all stakeholders to serve the province’s people through building social capital and enhanced economic growth. It developed eight developmental priorities to achieve the mission of building social capital. The notion of social cohesion was put forward in the national government’s discussion document “Towards a Ten Year Review” and also expresses President Mbeki’s desire to address the challenge of ‘the two economies’. (First and third world economies)

Social capital is usually raised when discussing characteristics of the broader society. The Western Cape government has, in addition, coined the term ‘internal social capital’ to describe its vision of a government whose parts work together in an integrated way rather than in development silos. This integrated government must then find ways of working with civil society that build and benefit the latter’s strength’s.

In large part what the terms social cohesion, social compact or social integration are referring to the well known South African concept of ‘ubuntu’. This concept refers to the notion that the concern of well-being of others, and a realisation that one’s own humanity and well being is inextricably linked to that of the other. Therefore, if one’s own well being is threatened or harmed, then other’s is threatened too. In other words; well being of individuals is a communal concern. Thus the understanding of social cohesion is essentially about institutions, relationships and norms that shape the quality of relationships within society. As described before, the inter group relationships in South Africa have been scarred and eroded due to the legacy of Apartheid. Repairing these relationships required concerted interventions both from government and civil society. While it is understood that social capital is not the cure all it is an important development priority.

Different forms of social cohesion in the Western Cape

Social cohesion can be both positive and negative. The Western Cape is home to a thriving negative form of social capital in the form of gangs. There is a strong cohesion and trust within these gangs and there is economic benefit for members

in being part of these 'clubs'. However the outcome for the rest of society is negative rather than positive. There are also examples of community initiatives that start out as well intentioned attempts to address real problems within the community, such as crime, drugs, but over time begin to adopt some of the negative characteristics of those they claim to oppose. A third example is when supposed self defense activities turn to vigilante-ism.

Gangs and many other forms of networking illustrate another potentially negative aspect of social capital, namely that of creating a network which simultaneously creates 'outsiders' and 'insiders'. Another example is the proliferation of 'stokvels'. These are rotating savings clubs where poor people come together to save money as collectives. While this is seen as an excellent example of poor coming together to help themselves, those with intermittent income are usually excluded from these clubs because others fear that they will not be able to contribute regularly. The province's vision of a 'Home for All' requires that the social capital networks within the province embrace all its people.

To help think about social capital and whether and how to promote it, it is useful to distinguish between different types of, namely, bonding, bridging and linking social capital. Bonding (or exclusive capital) refers to networking that happens within relatively homogeneous groups. Bridging (or inclusive capital) brings together people across different social divides. Even here there might be similarities between members of the network that encourage them to join, however there is more diversity among the members than with bonding capital. Both bonding and bridging capital generally involve horizontal links between members of society. The third type, linking capital, refers to vertical alliances such as between government and civil society, or between organised labour and organised business. The Western Cape's interest is in strengthening bridging and linking capital. In terms of the internal social capital formation, this means building communication and networks that go beyond the traditional departmental 'silos' and cut across employment categories.

Another useful distinction between the three components is: *social networks* (who knows who); *social norms* (the informal and formal rules that guide how networks operate: and *sanctions* (the processes that ensure that the network members keep to the rules) Any strategy that seeks to strengthen social cohesion needs to consider each of these. Creating inclusive neighbourhoods rather than racially divided living spaces of apartheid would promote widening of social networks.

Focus of the Province's Social Capital Programme

The province's strategy focuses on achieving the following outcomes in its objective to strengthen social cohesion:

- **Improved accessibility** to government services and information. This includes extended working hours for service delivery departments, improved language accessibility, establishing client call centre and helpdesks, increasing the number of service points and types of service, preferential procurement policies, employee assistance programmes for staff and improves dissemination of information in communities. In addition to geographical proximity and hours of opening, accessibility is also about the way in which services are presented and delivered- about whether the approach is firmly based in the principle of *Batho Pele* (people first) this outcome is based on the understanding that one cannot expect people in communities to contribute to government's actions if they feel that government does not care for their well-being. Improved accessibility should foster trust between communities and government – a pre-requisite for social cohesion.
- **Safer Communities.** This includes strategies to address gangsterism, substance abuse, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence and truancy. It includes too initiatives to assist youth to obtain decent work through assisting with the acquisition of job- related skills, youth learner ships and internships.
- Citizens with a strong sense of **well-being.** The various departments involved with health, social services housing and local government is involved in helping to achieve this objective. The department of sport and culture is a key player in this arena. The focus on sport arises out of the belief that a 'child in sport is a child out of court'. Health initiatives promote positive sexual lifestyles in the face of the HIV/Aids pandemic, and healthier lifestyles more generally. The province promotes the development of human settlements that provide the necessary public spaces and community hubs that allow for healthy interaction and recreation. Housing options that cater for those with special needs, including single parents, people with disabilities, and older persons are being developed.
- Citizens are **civic minded.** Civic-minded citizens with a sense of national pride and patriotism contribute to social cohesion and social inclusion. Initiatives in this area start at a young age through early childhood development programmes, and continue through to formal schooling and school recreational programmes. The establishment of community police forums provide an important link between communities and government.

These programmes aim to spark a sense of civic mindedness in communities. The provincial government has also initiated an interesting and innovative programme to bridge intergenerational gaps between youth and their elders.

- **Strong Families** present a firm foundation for 'ubuntu' at community and wider level. The provincial government works together with other actors in attempting to strengthen family life. These initiatives are based on the notion of bridging capital in which 'Your Child is my Child' rather than a bonding capital notion where people care only about their own family. Initiatives to achieve this outcome include those around child trafficking, victims of family violence, and parenting skills. Fathers living apart from their children are encouraged to be more involved in the well-being of their children. Community based programmes for older persons and people with disabilities will allow them to contribute their wisdom and skills as well as preventing their marginalisation. Partnerships between government and relevant NGO's have been formed to minimise the risk of violence in the home through support of initiatives that aim to curb the presence of guns in the in communities.

In attempting to achieve these objectives the provincial government draws on existing social capital in the different communities. The Western Cape Province works from a strong base as there are approximately 2 000 non- governmental organisations available to take forward the social capital formation strategy together with government in ensuring that development takes place. As described above the provincial government has formed a partnership with the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) particularly in its community healing programme.

Conclusion

Increasingly evidence shows that social cohesion and social capital is critical for poverty alleviation and sustainable human and economic development. High crime, high poverty rates, early school leaving , slow delivery of appropriate housing and community building projects and the after-effects of the pre-1994 cultural , political and economic divide, all point to the necessity of building social capital in communities. Such interventions should aim to strengthen social ties and integration

In the attempt to achieve the goal to foster social cohesion and integration, all actors need to be involved- both government and civil society. Civil society has been active in ensuring that the task of nation building and dealing with the legacies of apartheid. While we are encouraged by the initiatives both by government and civil society it is clear that there are many challenges in achieving these objectives. The reconciliation barometer survey conducted by

IJR shows that while in a few communities reconciliation –thus social integration- is improving, there are many communities deeply divided by socio- economic and other ‘legacy’ constraints. While it is the express desire of the government to work together with all stakeholders, the linkages are still weak. This is borne out by research conducted by the University of the Western Cape and the Department of Social Development. Poor communities increasingly rely on intermediaries to interface with formal institutions and when these linkages are weak, these intermediaries may not adequately represent the voices of the poor who may lack the resources and capacity to interact with government.

While the social formation strategy is a national project emanating from the State of the Nation address of President Mbeki, the Western Cape Government was the first province to launch its programme. It thus is in a position to evaluate the programme thus far and provide valuable lessons.

References:

- Briefing notes on the programmes in the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation
- Briefing notes on the Western Cape Social Capital Formation Strategy.