

EVIDENCE-BASED SOCIAL COHESION INTERVENTIONS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Gerrit van der Waldt ^{*}, David J. Fourie ^{**}

^{*} North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

^{**} Corresponding author, Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences, School of Public Management and Administration, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Contact details: Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences, School of Public Management and Administration, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 0001, South Africa



Abstract

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Promoting social cohesion is particularly critical in South Africa given the context of widening inequality, growing unemployment, and persistent racial inequalities. Without measurement, potential key contributing factors that may influence social cohesion (inequality, poverty, violence, gender conflicts, mistrust, etc.) will remain elusive, thereby complicating the formulation of effective policies and programmes in the local sphere of government towards improved social cohesion and inclusive development (Palmary, 2015; Rocha, Kunc, & Audretsch, 2020). Following a mixed method design, inclusive of a literature review, desktop survey, case study analyses and semi-structured interviews with three cohorts (n = 32), the purpose of this article was to outline the framework dimensions of an evidence-based measurement instrument (i.e., Municipal Social Cohesion Barometer) to gauge the extent to which municipalities succeed in promoting social cohesion. The findings revealed dimensions and indicators for such an instrument and concluded that without a measurement instrument, potential key determinants that influence social cohesion in local communities remain largely hidden, making it difficult to design initiatives aimed at enhancing social cohesion through a more inclusive approach to local development. The relevance of the findings is centred on the utilisation of an instrument for measuring social cohesion that enables policymakers to target key domains that currently limit national unity.

Keywords: Social Cohesion, Local Government, Evidence-Based Dimensions, Measurement Indicators, Barometer, Interventions

Authors' individual contribution: Conceptualization — G.v.d.W.; Methodology — G.v.d.W.; Resources — D.J.F.; Data Curation — G.v.d.W.; Writing — Original Draft — G.v.d.W.; Writing — Review & Editing — D.J.F.; Project Administration — D.J.F.; Funding Acquisition — D.J.F.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social cohesion is a significant construct in diverse and heterogeneous societies like South Africa where the realities of socio-economic inequality are profound. South Africa's Gini coefficient of 63 is the highest in the world and the eradication of all forms of social inequality, therefore, remains high on the political agenda of the government. This agenda reflects the imperative of building a democratic nation characterised by limited fragmentation along the lines of income, race, class, gender, and ethnicity (Tait & McKinley, 2022). Social cohesion is furthermore increasingly being regarded as a critical prerequisite to realise the government's objectives of becoming a developmental state. A developmental state generally requires a social compact to unite sectors of society around a common national developmental vision.

Although there is widespread agreement that social cohesion contributes to socio-economic development and that nurturing a more cohesive society is an important ingredient of nation building, there appears to be a widening gap between policy aspirations towards social cohesion and the actual state of solidarity and nation building in the country (Human Sciences Research Council [HSRC], 2017). There also appears to be a lack of a comprehensive coordinated effort to measure and track the progress of this national imperative (Hino, Leibbrandt, Machema, Shifa, & Soudien, 2019; South African Local Government Association [SALGA], 2021). A literature review reveals that one of the most severe gaps in this regard is the lack of a coordinated evidence-based social cohesion-building effort in especially the local sphere of government where there is close interaction between communities.

The research aims to uncover dimensions and indicators that could be used in the design of an evidence-based measurement instrument (i.e., Municipal Social Cohesion Barometer) to gauge the extent to which local governments succeed in promoting social cohesion in communities. Following a qualitative research design, a literature and desktop survey, case study analysis, and semi-structured interviews for data collection were utilised to obtain a balanced perspective regarding evidence-based social cohesion dimensions. These dimensions were then triangulated to propose a framework for the design of a Municipal Social Cohesion Barometer. The conceptual framework is informed by notions of human rights and social justice, equality, unity and inclusivity, social solidarity, civic responsibility, and national consciousness (Burns, Lefko-Everett, & Njozela, 2018; Burchi, Loewe, Malerba, & Leininger, 2022). Social cohesion theory serves as an overarching theoretical framework. The relevance of the study is centred around the recognition that without a measurement instrument, potential key determinants that influence social cohesion in local communities such as inequality, poverty, violence, gender imbalances, and mistrust, remain largely hidden, making it difficult to design initiatives aimed at enhancing social cohesion and a more inclusive approach to local development (Lefko-Everett, Burns, Nontshokweni, & Njozela, 2018; Pervaiz, Chaudhary, & van Staveren, 2013; Rocha et al., 2020).

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on social cohesion and the role of local government in promoting nation building. Section 3 outlines the methodology that has been used to conduct the empirical survey. Section 4 reflects the results and Section 5 discusses the main findings. Section 6 concludes the paper.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Tracing the origins of social cohesion shows its roots in the seminal work titled *"The Division of Labour in Society"* (Durkheim, 1893). Durkheim (1893) characterised social cohesion as "quality of life" in all societies. Since this contribution, scholarly inquiry into social cohesion has led to a significant corpus of knowledge regarding the dynamic intricacies associated with group interaction in society (Burns et al., 2018). The design of a conceptual framework to demarcate the field is imperative in the search for dimensions that could be used to gauge the level and quality of social cohesion.

In the context of human interaction, cohesion can be regarded as the unity, solidarity, and integration of members of a group (Berkman & Kawachi, 2000, p. 175; Cuellar, 2009, p. 3; Dhéret, 2015, p. 3). However, society typically comprises multiple and diverse groups and a potential for conflict arises when there is limited cohesion among these groups (Beauvais & Jenson, 2002). Social cohesion therefore can be regarded as the level of congruence and unity among divergent groups in society (Easterly, Ritzan, & Woolcock, 2009, p. 10). Such cohesion is typically expressed in terms of the sense of belonging felt by members of society. Advancing social cohesion as a government imperative implies inclusive and transparent democratic practices to promote social justice, prosperity, and a strong sense of national identity. It also denotes addressing social inequality, disparity, and fracture among groups in a state (Pervaiz et al., 2013; Hino et al., 2019).

The scope of social cohesion theory has expanded to include entire societies, generally defined within the boundaries of nation-states. Dragolov, Ignácz, Lorenz, Delhey, and Boehnke (2013) refer to it as the "manifestation of an intact society, marked by solidarity and helpfulness, and by a kind of team spirit. It is a desirable quality that makes a society liveable and sustainable" (p. 8). Berkman and Kawachi (2000, p. 175) characterise this broader perspective of social cohesion as the absence of "latent social conflict" (e.g., socio-economic inequality, racial or ethnic tensions, and limited political participation and social exclusion) as well as the "presence of strong social bonds". Social bonds typically refer to the levels of trust in government and societal groups, opportunities to bridge social divisions, and the presence of institutions to address group conflict. These dimensions of social cohesion are evident in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2012) definition of social cohesion:

"A cohesive society works towards the well-being of all of its members, minimising disparities and avoiding marginalisation. It entails three major dimensions: fostering cohesion by building networks

of relationships, trust, and identity between diverse groups; fighting discrimination, exclusion, and excessive inequalities; and enabling upward social mobility” (p. 52).

As far as the multidimensional nature of social cohesion is concerned, Rocha et al. (2020) categorise four approaches to social cohesion, namely:

- “socio-economic, which emphasizes prosperity, growth, solidarity, and social inclusion;
- cultural, which emphasizes common values and identity;
- ecological, which stresses sustainability and ecological justice; and
- political, with its emphasis on citizenship and participation” (p. 1100).

These four categories serve as a valuable foundation upon which further scholarly engagement with the construct and its application as a social phenomenon can be built. Forrest and Kearns (2001), for example, focus on the social capital dimensions of social cohesion emphasising the fact that factors such as the levels of education, tolerance, sensitivity, and open-mindedness of members of a society can significantly influence the quality of social cohesion. Nieminen et al. (2010) add to this the psychological well-being dimension of social capital emphasising issues such as trust, participation, and network interaction to move beyond intrinsic individual needs to more altruistic benefits that support the common good of society. This dimension is absorbed in the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP, 2015) exposition of social cohesion, namely that it involves tolerance of, and respect for diversity (in terms of religion, ethnicity, economic situation, political preferences, sexuality, gender, and age) to reduce societal risks such as increased social tension, violent crime, targeting of minorities, human rights violations, and, ultimately, violent conflict. Social capital is thus regarded as a positive outcome of increased social cohesion leading to mutual support, a sense of belonging, and empowerment in society (Jennings & Bamkole, 2019; Jewett, Mah, Howell, & Larson, 2021, p. 327).

Apart from the positive outcomes associated with social cohesion, Burns et al. (2018) caution that highly cohesive societies can become exclusive, implying that they may become antagonistic towards “other” groups such as minority groups and migrants. Palmary (2015) also warns that a negative consequence of social cohesion is that some groups may actively work together and thereby exclude others. In this regard, Bidandi and Roman (2020) lament the fact that the absence of social cohesion detrimentally affects families as basic constructs of the social fabric of communities.

The policy and practice of social cohesion reveal that it is generally treated as synonymous with nation building in South Africa (SALGA, 2021). The Constitution of South Africa of 1996 established the foundations of social cohesion and nation building. The Preamble of the Constitution (South Africa Government, 1996) declares that “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity” (p. 1). This implies the national embracement of every inhabitant of the country, inclusive of non-citizens. Building on this premise, the first major policy study on social cohesion was commissioned by the Social Cluster of Cabinet and

conducted by the HSRC (2004). The study, entitled “*Social Cohesion and Social Justice in South Africa*”, integrated notions of social cohesion, social capital, and social justice to analyse the “social health of the nation”. The health of the nation was generally defined as the extent to which there is evidence of a coherent, united, and functional environment in which citizens can prosper. This conceptualisation is echoed by the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC), which hold that social cohesion refers to the “degree of social integration and inclusion in communities and society at large, and the extent to which mutual solidarity finds expression itself among individuals and communities” (Department of Arts and Culture [DAC], 2012, para. 12.1). According to DAC’s “*A National Strategy for Developing an Inclusive and Cohesive South African Society*” (DAC, 2012, para. 7), the following principles underpin the country’s social cohesion policy drive:

- Constitutional democracy;
- Human rights and equality;
- Non-racialism, non-tribalism, and non-sexism;
- Unity in diversity;
- Inclusivity and social justice;
- Redress and transformation;
- Intergroup and community co-operation;
- Social solidarity;
- Active and participatory citizenship;
- Civic responsibility;
- National consciousness.

These principles should be converted into evidence-based indicators to eventually gauge the extent to which the government, and more particularly the local government, succeeds in promoting social cohesion. The principles also provide for normative dimensions to address social inequality and create a unified and cohesive nation. Unfortunately, despite various formal and informal interventions aimed at improving social cohesion, the South African local government arena continues to be plagued by service delivery protests, some accompanied by violence. The high levels of dissatisfaction in communities easily escalate from peaceful protests to incidences of criminality and the destruction of property (Ngcamu & Mantzaris, 2021). Protests are usually directed at the municipal property since poor-performing municipal councils are regarded as the reason behind poor service delivery, irresponsiveness, and deteriorating living conditions. Municipalities, as the local institutions of government, thus have a moral and legal obligation to promote social cohesion in local communities.

Municipal performance is formally assessed by oversight institutions such as the Department for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, the Department of Cooperative Governance, the Auditor-General, and Statistics South Africa. These institutions use official performance reports emanating from data extracted from the integrated development plans, service delivery and budget implementation plans, and performance management systems of municipalities. These instruments make it possible to gauge the efficiency of municipal functioning and the successful implementation of municipal imperatives. However, evidence-based performance indicators specifically aimed at assessing the extent to which municipal councils succeed in promoting social cohesion are largely absent. It is essential that such indicators address the multidimensional nature of

social cohesion and that it becomes imbedded in existing performance monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and instruments.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Following a qualitative research design, three methods for data collection were utilised to obtain a balanced perspective regarding evidence-based

social cohesion dimensions. These dimensions were then triangulated to propose a framework for the design of a Municipal Social Cohesion Barometer. Such a Barometer can be used to measure the extent to which municipalities comply with their mandate to promote social cohesion. The three data collection methods and their respective purposes are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Data collection methods and purpose

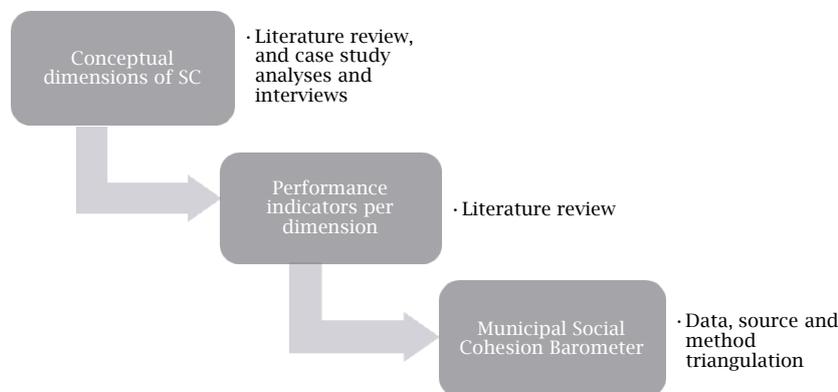
<i>Data collection method</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
Literature and desktop survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to design a conceptual framework for social cohesion (i.e., theoretical dimensions of social cohesion); • to analyse the nature, content, and scope of social cohesion dimensions through coding and thematic analysis of content.
Case study analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to analyse national and international evidence-based social cohesion initiatives to extract social cohesion dimensions.
Semi-structured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to obtain the views from three cohorts, namely 1) representatives from the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), 2) municipal officials from sampled municipalities, and 3) social cohesion activists (n = 49). These views were used to build on the data obtained through the other data collection methods.

Alternative data collection methods to conduct similar research may include questionnaires, focus group interviews or the use of expert Delphi.

Based on the literature and desktop survey it is evident that social cohesion should become infused and imbedded in existing municipal key performance areas (KPA's). The dimensions of social cohesion are significant since it singles out particular aspects of the larger construct. Performance indicators should then be designed for

each dimension. These indicators should be measurable items designed to assess and improve the effectiveness of social cohesion interventions in local communities. The dimensions and indicators should then be combined and integrated into a Municipal Social Cohesion Barometer. As far as the rationale for the methods supporting the design of a Municipal Social Cohesion Barometer is concerned, Figure 1 illustrates the process followed.

Figure 1. Integration of research methods



Source: Authors' elaboration.

By utilising the principles of source, method, and data triangulation, the three "data sets" were used to extract evidence-based social cohesion dimensions. Each of the three data sets is outlined below.

3.1. Data collection method 1: Literature and desktop survey

As alluded to in the section above, the exposition of the literature revealed a number of dimensions associated with social cohesion. A summary of these extracted dimensions entails the following:

- Nation-state versus individual dimensions (broad vs. narrow perspectives to social cohesion);

- Normative dimensions (common values for a unified and cohesive nation, principles, ethics);
- Social dimensions (social capital, group and cultural identity, sense of belonging, social bonds, tolerance, respect, and sensitivity, psychological well-being, network interaction, and upward social mobility);
- Economic dimensions (wealth equality, growth, prosperity, and general well-being);
- Political dimension (political participation, citizenship, social exclusion);
- Conflict dimension (absence of latent social conflict, racial or ethnic tensions, violent crime, targeting of minorities, human rights violations, violent conflict);

- Governance dimensions (establishment of a conducive policy and institutional environment with mechanisms to address societal conflict and efforts towards nation building);

- Environmental dimensions (making a society liveable and sustainable ecological justice, community-driven development).

3.2. Data collection method 2: International, national and municipal-based case study analyses

International cases sampled for purposes of this article are Australia, Canada, Cyprus, the European Union, and Kenya. The selection of these cases is based on the availability of web-based social cohesion information (i.e., convenience sampling), the developing contexts of these countries, and their geographical location.

3.2.1. Australia

The Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI) was jointly developed by the Scanlon Foundation, the Australian Multicultural Foundation, and Monash University, recognising the long-term migration patterns into the country and the importance of upholding social policies protecting multiculturalism and diversity (Burns et al., 2018).

The SMI is based on a national public opinion survey conducted annually since 2009, which measures social cohesion according to five main dimensions, namely:

- Belonging, referring to shared values, a sense of belonging, and identification with the country's culture and way of life;

- Social justice and equity, measured mainly through approval of national policies related to income inequality and economic opportunities, and general trust in the government;

- Participation, including civic membership and cooperation mainly measured within the political sphere, through voting, signing petitions, contacting elected representatives, and participating in a boycott or protest;

- Acceptance/rejection and legitimacy, including experiences of discrimination, attitudes towards migrants and minorities, evaluation of government policies, and optimism/pessimism about the future;

- Worth, as measured by life satisfaction, happiness, and future expectations (Burns et al., 2018).

The above-mentioned dimensions compare favourably with those extracted from the literature and desktop survey. However, the SMI relies predominately on public opinion data which is relative subjective in nature. It does, however, introduce several potential performance indicators associated with social cohesion dimensions.

3.2.2. Canada

According to Burns et al. (2018), Canada was one of the first countries internationally to introduce social cohesion into the national policy discourse. Canada developed a comprehensive database of indicators to gauge social cohesion in Census Metropolitan Areas. These indicators serve as units of analysis and mainly centre around issues of employment and economic insecurity, cultural differences, and divisions between people of different socio-economic

groups (Jenson, 2010). The Canadian model accentuates the following dimensions of social cohesion:

- Social inclusion, as measured by indicators of access to opportunities, resources, and amenities such as education, health care, and technology;

- Cultural and ethnic homogeneity, as measured by foreign-born population, official languages, and an ethnic fractionalization index;

- Trust, as measured primarily using public opinion data; and

- Participation and solidarity, as measured by electoral participation, membership in voluntary organisations, and the extent of charitable giving (Rajulton, Ravanera, & Beaujot, 2007, p. 464).

Arguably the primary advantage of this model in terms of evidence-based indicators for social cohesion is its use of data that is readily available and easily comparable in most countries, such as data on the country's Gini coefficient, employment rates, crime statistics, life expectancy, and voter turnout.

3.2.3. Cyprus

The Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) index was first developed and implemented by the Action for Cooperation and Trust programme in Cyprus to explore relationships between the communities of Turkish and Greek Cypriots, with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (UNDP, 2015, p. 9).

The SCORE index measures both social cohesion and reconciliation, which it presents as the key conditions necessary for peace in any society. The SCORE index uses primarily open-ended survey questions administered through face-to-face interviews and the indicators used for measurement within the index are as follows:

- Perceptions of corruption;

- Trust in institutions (e.g., judicial system, parliament, police);

- Feeling represented by institutions (e.g., parliament, politicians) and included in decision-making processes;

- Human security, including safety from violence, security of income, feeling that needs are met, freedom of association, and freedom to express own views; and

- Civic life satisfaction, including satisfaction with the administration of justice, the state of the economy, and the direction of peace talks (UNDP, 2015, p. 22, pp. 32-33).

SCORE's methodological approach in using open-ended questions allows for rich and nuanced data with the potential to significantly deepen comprehension of social cohesion. However, Burns et al. (2018) caution that it has limited application value given the significant resource challenges related to the collection and analysis of data.

3.2.4. European Union

The European Values Survey commenced in 2008 to create an index showing levels of social cohesion across five different European regions: North, West, South, East, and countries from the former Soviet Union (Acket, Borsenberger, Dickes, & Sarracino, 2011).

The findings are contrasted with three countries representing three different European groups, namely Georgia (former Soviet Union), Greece (South), and France (West). Overall, the results show that the cases of the individual countries examined are inconsistent with the overall findings in the five European regions (Arenaza, Amit, & Yang, 2017). The three main dimensions utilised in this survey are:

- Economic (Gini index, employment conditions);
- Political (confidence in government, voter turnout, political activity);
- Socio-cultural (perceived threat of immigrants to society, diversity of groups, values).

The European Values Survey accentuates the fact that the measurement of social cohesion is exceptionally nuanced, with multiple factors affecting the overall status. This further demonstrates the complexities associated with the design of a generic evidence-based measurement instrument to gauge social cohesion.

3.2.5. Kenya

The Kenyan social cohesion index (SCI) was developed by the National Cohesion and Integration Commission following the outbreak of several months of post-election violence in 2007 (Burns et al., 2018). The SCI is primarily based on a national public opinion survey, which commenced in 2013. The SCI measures social cohesion according to six main dimensions:

- Prosperity, referring to population well-being, economic disparities, and marginalisation (including gross domestic product (GDP) index, life expectancy education, etc.);
- Equity, referring to equality, access, participation, and solidarity (including access to infrastructure, basic services, government jobs, and perceptions about inequality);
- Peace and peaceful coexistence (including law and order, absence of social tension or ethnic violence, lack of crime, etc.);
- Diversity and the extent of social bonds in a diverse society (including relationships across ethnic groups, inter-marriage, social protection, and pride in ethnic customs);
- Identity, referring to national identity and tolerance (including the importance of ethnic identity, national identity, and voting in elections); and
- Trust, referring to both interpersonal relations and institutions (including people of different ethnic groups and religions, and a range of institutions).

The Kenyan SCI is one of the few dedicated measures of social cohesion in Africa and as such is an important model for understanding and tracking social change, particularly in a post-conflict context. However, Burns et al. (2018) caution that the measures included are broad in nature, thus making the design of evidence-based indicators complex.

As far as national cases are concerned, the analyses included SALGA's Social Cohesion Dimensions, South African Social Cohesion Barometer, South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS), and municipal-based initiatives. These cases and the associated social cohesion dimensions extracted are outlined below.

3.2.6. South African Local Government Association's Social Cohesion Dimensions

The Community Development and Social Cohesion Working Group of the SALGA (SALGA, 2021) identified the following dimensions for social cohesion measurement in municipalities:

- Community safety;
- Access to healthcare;
- Sports and recreation facilities;
- Arts, culture, heritage, and libraries;
- Traditional leadership;
- Inclusion of vulnerable groups;
- Foreign and national migration support;
- Civic academies and popular education;
- Spatial planning

These dimensions aim to create a shared South African identity but are not yet absorbed in an official guideline document. They are, however, useful since it reflects input from the body representing municipalities in South Africa.

3.2.7. South African Social Cohesion Barometer

The South African Government has instituted several planning initiatives to imbed social cohesion into the national policy framework, including through the National Development Plan and Medium-Term Strategic Framework. As such, a Social Cohesion Barometer (SCB) was developed in 2011 by the HSRC, with support from the Presidency, using data from the South African Social Attitudes Survey (HSRC, 2017). Using public opinion and behavioural data, the SCB measures social cohesion through three domains, namely:

- Economic domain, including employment, income, education, health, access to basic services, the extent of socio-economic conflict, and perceptions about affirmative action;
- Socio-cultural domain, including social networks, personal well-being, perceptions about discrimination, tolerance, fear of crime, and extent of interracial contact; and
- Civic domain, including national identity, evaluations of regime performance, confidence in institutions, approval of elected representatives, political interest and participation, and citizenship norms.

The SCB provides an important baseline for the measure of social cohesion in South Africa, based on the SASAS which is a particularly rich data source. However, the SCB is aimed only at national and provincial spheres of government.

3.2.8. Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit's social cohesion index

The Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) of the University of Cape Town, developed a working paper on the design of a social cohesion index in 2018 (Burns et al., 2018). The five key dimensions of social cohesion proposed for the index are:

- Inclusion: access and participation;
- Belonging: shared norms and values;
- Social relationships: trust and acceptance;
- Participation: active involvement;

• Legitimacy: trust in institutions and representatives.

As far as municipal-based initiatives are concerned, the following three programmes and projects deserve attention.

3.2.9. Communities-in-Dialogue Programme

The provincial government of KwaZulu-Natal has initiated a social cohesion programme to promote unity among ethnic groupings in municipal communities. This followed the aftermath of the violence, looting, and vigilante-linked murders in the province in 2021. The Communities-in-Dialogue Programme employs the services of conflict resolution facilitators and entails workshops to promote social dialogue and the regulation of neighbourhood watch forums. The social cohesion dimensions identified for purposes of this programme include the following:

- Security of individuals, property, essential services, and business;
- Coordinated efforts in recovering the economy;
- Re-igniting township and rural economies;
- Addressing anxiety induced by the unrest by rolling out social cohesion and moral regeneration programmes;
- Secure transit of fuel and food supplies;
- Co-operation with law enforcement agencies to design strategies and mechanisms to detect and deter future unrest (“Mabuza Challenges SA to Rethink Nation Building, Social Cohesion”, 2021).

Although this programme is relatively new, it is important to note that the programme was planned in conjunction with social partners and communities.

3.2.10. Gauteng Together Project

Gauteng Together is an initiative that calls for the establishment of Community Action Networks (CANs) across Gauteng province to address the social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The concept, which was pioneered by Cape Town Together, is being adopted in Gauteng in response to growing concerns over food insecurity, hunger, and other social challenges impacting negatively on the lives of people due to the lockdown. Gauteng Together mobilises ordinary people to initiate CANs in their neighbourhoods; identify community needs; and, work towards addressing them through coordinated, sustained localised action. During the first COVID-19 wave, throughout the country, civil society and ordinary people, responded with an overwhelming sense of goodwill and “country duty” to address both the health and food crises (Mahwai, 2020, p. 9). The premise of the project is that social cohesion is imperative since government alone is not able to meet the needs of people, despite extending the social grants programme and food parcel distribution. Civil society organisations stepped in to serve the broader community and as such promoted social cohesion (Mahwai, 2020, p. 20).

3.2.11. Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading Programme

Khayelitsha is the country’s second largest township, characterised by high levels of violence and poverty. To address these challenges,

the Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU) Programme was established through a partnership between the city of Cape Town and the German Development Bank in 2005. The initiative aims to reduce violence and improve the quality of life in Khayelitsha. The VPUU is primarily an urban upgrading programme, but it links to “work streams” that support social cohesion and institutional crime prevention projects. The initiative endeavoured to create a sense of “place” and ownership of space through aesthetic and practical upgrading interventions (“City of Cape Town”, 2021). The main means through which the VPUU asserts that it builds social cohesion is community participation in the development and ownership of local initiatives.

3.3. Data collection method 4: Semi-structured interviews

The fourth data collection method for purposes of data triangulation entailed semi-structured interviews with three cohorts. The three target groups (cohorts) and responses are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Target groups and responses

Target group	Sample size	Responses
Target group 1: SALGA's representatives	9	6
Target group 2: Municipalities	30	19
Target group 3: Social cohesion activists	10	7
Total	49	32

SALGA’s representatives (target group 1) were purposively sampled based on their seniority and involvement in SALGA’s Community Development and Social Cohesion Working Group. Six of the nine participants eventually partook in the interviews, representing 66.6% of the target population. Thirty municipalities (target group 2) were purposively sampled and represented metropolitan, district, and local municipalities in all nine provinces. Nineteen of the thirty sampled municipalities eventually expressed their willingness to participate in the survey, representing 52.6% of the target population. Target group 3 comprised social cohesion activists identified per non-governmental organisation and other civil society organisations involved in social cohesion and nation-building activities. Seventy (70) percent of the sampled activists partook in the interviews. The collective overall participation rate of 65.3% of the three cohorts (sample size: 32/49) was more than adequate to obtain rich data. It was also evident that the opinions expressed by representatives of the three cohorts did not differ significantly or did not contradict each other, making the potential extension of the sample size obsolete. An interview schedule was designed and piloted (pre-tested) with a sample of the three targets groups to obtain input regarding the following three themes:

- Current means to monitor the level of social cohesion in municipalities;
- Challenges pertaining to promoting social cohesion faced by municipalities;
- Recommendations for the design of a Municipal Social Cohesion Barometer.

4. RESULTS

This section outlines the combined responses towards each of the three themes. To ensure consistency the social cohesion dimensions provided by SALGA (2021) were used as categories to probe current issues that municipalities face.

4.1. Theme 1: Current means to monitor the level of social cohesion

The participants from the three target groups identified the following as the most prevalent means (per frequency response) municipalities utilise to monitor the level of social cohesion.

Table 3. Monitoring social cohesion

<i>Means to monitor social cohesion</i>	<i>Frequency response (n = 32)</i>
Statistics and analyses of underlying reasons for community protests and incidences of violence	68.7%
Monitor integrated development planning (IDP) and implementation processes and input provided by SALGA and other stakeholders	62.5%
Official compliance, budgets, and performance reports	56.2%
Social research: surveys in communities	46.8%
National and provincial reports and political input	40.6%
Monitor the results of the annual SASAS	31.2%
Input provided during municipal strategic planning sessions	18.7%
Input from council technical committees and working groups	12.5%
Legal proceedings and court cases	9.3%

Statistics obtained from official sources such as Statistics South Africa and the South African Police Service is currently the primary means to determine the level of social cohesion. This response is rather concerning given the mandate that local government has to monitor and promote social cohesion. The fact that officials mainly perceive manifestations of protests and violence as a lack of social cohesion is also a rather distorted view of what social cohesion entails. One would have expected that internal monitoring mechanisms such as ward committees and community surveys would have obtained higher scores, at least higher than the current frequency response of only 46.8%.

The means that obtained the second highest response (62.5%) was the monitoring of the implementation of development planning efforts and input provided by SALGA and other representatives from, for example, the provincial

Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs. This aspect deserves further investigation since it is unclear how exactly municipalities accommodate social cohesion indicators in their respective IDPs. This will probably align with the response “official compliance and performance reports” that received a response rate of 56.2%. The nature and frequency of input provided by local government stakeholders regarding social cohesion are also not clear.

4.2. Theme 2: Challenges pertaining to promoting social cohesion faced by municipalities

The responses obtained by the three target groups regarding social cohesion challenges are categorised per social cohesion dimension (SALGA, 2021) below.

Table 4. Community safety

<i>Main challenges</i>	<i>Frequency (%)</i>
High incidences of crime, vandalism, and violence (culture of crime due to illegal electrical connections, dumping, and other malpractice)	62.5
Poor law enforcement	56.2
Insufficient community safety planning and programmes	31.2
Inadequate infrastructure and property protection and safeguarding	28.1
Lack of resources and funding to address underlying causes of crime	21.8
High prevalence of unemployment and poverty	9.3

High crime levels, including cases of theft and vandalism as well as other illegal activities, seriously hamper social cohesion efforts (see Table 4). This challenge was rated the highest (62.5%) and should be analysed in conjunction with the challenge that obtained the second highest frequency response (56.2%), namely “poor law enforcement”. The participants generally concurred that crime

remains to be the single most significant stumbling block that hampers efforts by municipalities to promote social cohesion.

It is acknowledged that all municipalities are currently facing significant challenges in terms of addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. It is therefore noted as an overall challenge and not included in the results below.

Table 5. Community health

<i>Main challenges</i>	<i>Frequency (%)</i>
Low municipal health capacity: limited access to health care facilities (e.g., clinics) and medicine, especially in rural areas	78.1
Environmental health concerns in terms of deteriorating air quality, lack of water treatment plants, and poor sewerage infrastructure	62.5
Lack of health-related resources for the poor (e.g., household care)	56.2
High prevalence of HIV/AIDS and other diseases	40.6
Inequality in access to accurate health-related information	21.8
Diverse cultures and religions complicate uniform healthcare services	6.2
Lack of coordination between health agencies in three spheres of government and lack of cooperation between local and district municipalities	6.2

The aspect that received the highest frequency response (78.1%) is the limited capacity of municipalities to deal with health concerns, including access to healthcare facilities and the distribution of medication (see Table 5). This capacity challenge leads to related concerns such as

environmental health issues (62.5%), resource allocation (56.2%), and limited information (21.8%). These issues are further compounded by the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS (40.6%), the heterogenous nature of the population (6.2%), and limited intergovernmental coordination (6.2%).

Table 6. Sports and recreation

<i>Main challenges</i>	<i>Frequency (%)</i>
Poor infrastructure investment: lack of facilities	62.5
Poor maintenance of facilities (leading to health and safety concerns)	59.3
Unequal access to facilities	53.1
Inadequate coordination between schools, community-based organisations, municipalities, and business	28.1
Insufficient community sports programmes	21.8
Youth issues (drug and substance abuse, vandalism, etc.)	9.3
Limited funding for recreational activities	6.2

Table 6 shows, limited investment in sports, recreational and cultural facilities was regarded as the most significant challenge (62.5%) and was closely followed by poor maintenance of existing infrastructure (59.3%) and unequal access to facilities

(53.1%). Municipalities in general do not make adequate provisions for social cohesion programmes (e.g., sport and recreation) in schools (28.1%), often leading to drug abuse and vandalism (9.3%). This aspect deserves special attention.

Table 7. Arts, culture, heritage, and libraries

<i>Main challenges</i>	<i>Frequency (%)</i>
Limited activities in especially rural areas to celebrate art, and cultural diversity and promote different heritages	65.6
Lack of facilities and maintenance of existing facilities	59.3
Accessibility in terms of location and vulnerable groups	53.1
Heritage sites need to be resuscitated	40.6
Limited funding/resources	21.8
Limited use of technology	6.2

Participants were united in their opinion that municipalities should do more to celebrate cultural diversity and promote different heritages through targeted social cohesion programmes (65.6%). Similar to sports and recreational facilities, existing infrastructure aimed at promoting the arts and

cultural heritage is not adequately maintained (59.3%). It is especially concerning to note that municipal libraries that generally serve as hubs for art and heritage exhibitions are not well maintained (see Table 7).

Table 8. Traditional leadership

<i>Main challenges</i>	<i>Frequency (%)</i>
Limited cooperation between municipal councillors and traditional leaders	87.5
Lack of engagement between traditional leaders and the municipal community	53.1
Power dynamics in traditional leadership	21.8
The decline of recognition of traditions, customs, and culture	6.2
Discrimination against women and minority groups by tribal authorities	3.1

Limited engagement between traditional leadership and political leaders of the municipality was singled out as the most significant challenge (87.5%). An interesting point raised by one social cohesion activist is that businesses and other

investors are highly reluctant to invest in municipal areas if the land is contested or owned by traditional groups. Spatial planning and prevailing land tenure issues, therefore, deserve special attention (see Table 8).

Table 9. Vulnerable groups

<i>Main challenges</i>	<i>Frequency (%)</i>
Inclusivity of social groups: no proper engagement	59.3
Prevalence of social issues: drugs and substance abuse, domestic violence, unemployment, poverty	53.1
Limited municipal resources and capacity	40.6
Limited recognition of basic human rights	21.8
Lack of support programmes and limited participation in municipal programmes	9.3
Limited and poorly structured policies to accommodate vulnerable groups	6.2
Limited access to municipal facilities	6.2
Lack of social/community data (biographic and demographic)	6.2

An analysis of the responses obtained regarding vulnerable groups is complicated by the diversity of issues raised (see Table 9). It is, however, evident that municipalities in general do not succeed in establishing an inclusive platform for civil society engagement, especially with marginalised

and vulnerable groups (59.3%). This challenge is intensified by issues such as insufficient resources (40.6%), limited support programmes (9.3%), and facilities (6.2%), as well as the unavailability of community data (6.2%).

Table 10. Foreign and domestic migration

<i>Main challenges</i>	<i>Frequency (%)</i>
Migration to urban areas, leading to overcrowding and unplanned, informal sprawl	78.1
Diversity of community, leading to cases of xenophobia	68.7
Negative economic impact (impact on available resources, unemployment, and poverty, perception that immigrants take the jobs of locals)	53.1
Increased crime and violence: law enforcement issues	40.6
Limited awareness programmes	21.8
Corruption (e.g., illegal selling of municipal or private land)	9.3
Lack of data on migration trends and patterns	6.2

Responses obtained regarding migration trends and unplanned informal sprawl should be analysed in conjunction with matters related to spatial planning (see Table 10). The high response rate of 78.1% validates the high prevalence of unintended settlements that also exacerbate social welfare concerns such as domestic violence and alcohol and drug abuse. Informal settlements also mean that municipal services such as sanitation, clean water,

and electricity cannot adequately be provided, leading to health and safety challenges. Also, the spate of recent xenophobic attacks on foreigners in the country makes social cohesion programmes aimed at promoting tolerance, understanding, and nation building even more imperative. The response rate of 68.7% confirms the seriousness of this matter.

Table 11. Civic academies and popular education

<i>Main challenges</i>	<i>Frequency (%)</i>
Lack of understanding regarding the role of municipalities in educational matters	62.5
Limited partnerships with higher education institutions	59.3
Poor public participation in educational programmes	40.6
Lack of educational facilities, especially in rural areas	37.5
Low literacy levels	21.8
Lack of funding	6.2
No effective programmes and unsuitable curricula of existing programmes	3.1

The results from this domain (Table 11) should be seen in light of the limited social cohesion programmes (e.g., sport, cultural, heritage, and educational) in schools and the broader educational sector. Awareness regarding civic responsibilities, good citizenship, and the role of municipalities

should be promoted in support of social cohesion programmes. This aspect is confirmed by 62.5% of participants, while 59.3% indicated that municipalities should partner with institutions of higher learning to address the literacy and awareness deficit.

Table 12. Spatial planning

<i>Main challenges</i>	<i>Frequency (%)</i>
Limited integration of economic and social development (usually done along racial/ethnic lines)	62.5
Availability of land for human settlement and development	59.3
Land remains to be a highly contentious political issue, limiting social cohesion	59.3
Environmental concerns (e.g., limited environmental impact assessments)	53.1
Lack of engagement between government spheres	37.5
Lack of public participation in spatial planning issues (perception that no progress has been made on the land issue)	21.8
Lack of spatial planning capacity and skills in municipalities	6.2
Limited access to accurate, reliable, and recent spatial data	6.2

Table 12 shows that social cohesion efforts are hampered by broader segregation of communities on racial, ethnic, economic (i.e., income), and political grounds (62.5%). This response should be

seen within the context of historically segregated spatial planning and human settlement patterns in the country. Much still needs to be done to promote the spatial integration of society.

4.3. Theme 3: Recommendations for the design of a Municipal Social Cohesion Barometer

When requesting their views on possible social cohesion indicators for inclusion in a Municipal Social Cohesion Barometer, the participants from the three target groups provided the following list (presented below in no particular order):

- Access to municipal amenities and services;
- Alignment with national and provincial imperatives;
- Budget allocated and spent (cost-benefit ratio);
- Compliance with climate justice principles;
- Level of community involvement;
- Extend of community protests;
- Promotion of local businesses;
- Crime statistics;
- Image of the municipality;
- Facilities built and renovated;
- Funding for municipalities;
- Number and size of informal dwellings;
- Monitoring the achievement of municipal objectives and goals;
- Effectiveness of municipal procedures and processes;
- Partnerships with businesses and civil society;
- Quality of life (prosperity and well-being of communities);
- Spatial transformation;
- Unemployment statistics.

Without measurement and evaluation, key determinants that influence social cohesion (e.g., inequality, poverty, violence, infrastructure, policies, land use, etc.) remain hidden, making it difficult to formulate municipal policies aimed at promoting social cohesion and achieving inclusive socio-economic development. It is thus imperative that the indicators proposed by participants, in conjunction with those exposed by the literature review and case studies, be incorporated into a comprehensive Municipal Social Cohesion Barometer.

5. DISCUSSION

The measurement of social cohesion is highly nuanced, with multiple factors affecting the overall status thereof. The particular geographical area, the traditions, and culture of local communities, the dominant political ideology, and the current level of socio-economic development can all greatly influence social cohesion. The research results revealed that communities generally comprehend notions of social cohesion along the lines of assimilation of different racial and ethnic groupings, integration of human settlement (i.e., spatial justice), a sense of belonging, and national identity within society. Municipal initiatives aimed at improving the level of social cohesion should thus be based on collaborative and participative processes to address issues that lead to or maintain social and economic inequality, disparities, and fractures. From the responses obtained from participants, it is evident that the most pressing issues are regarded as safety and security (inclusive of service delivery protests, boycotts, and vandalism), spatial planning, economic prosperity (inclusive of job creation and poverty alleviation), and equitable access to municipal amenities and services. Of vital

importance are the instruments to be used by municipalities to promote cohesion, whilst still making room for pluralism in a highly heterogeneous society. Forced integration and socialisation may actually escalate the potential for intergroup conflict and thus further constrain social cohesion.

It is evident that South African legislation place aspects on social cohesion within the ambit of national departments, of which the Department and Sports, Arts and Culture is regarded as the main driver. Provinces have been tasked to assist in executing such planning in their areas of responsibility. The literature review and case study analysis revealed, however, that social cohesion initiatives are highly relevant to municipalities as the sphere of government closest to diverse communities. Although national and provincial overarching policy and monitoring frameworks are essential, municipalities should actively promote social cohesion in their policies, spatial planning, and socio-economic programmes. This obligation is especially required due to the fact that a uniform approach is not feasible in a country characterised by highly developed metropolitan areas, underdeveloped deep rural areas, and areas under traditional leadership. A differentiated, nuanced approach to social cohesion should thus be promoted. Such a distinguished approach should also make provision for particular demographic realities such as literacy levels, dominant customs and traditions, and unemployment, as well as aspects related to municipal infrastructure and capacity. Municipal initiatives aimed at promoting social cohesion should also accommodate vulnerable and marginalised groups in the local community. This demand, however, a sound situational analysis based on accurate and reliable statistics.

It is further evident that successful social cohesion initiatives in municipalities require political will and commitment from elected officials. It also necessitates co-operation and coordination between all spheres of government and consultation with civil society organisations. This is especially necessary to share learning experiences, resources, and best practice methodologies to address social and economic imbalances in communities. Political leaders should set particular social cohesion targets and ensure that adequate resources are allocated to support initiatives. They should also monitor progress and take corrective action where and when required. Municipal leadership should also ensure that there is a clear link between integrated development planning, social conditions, community development needs, and municipalities' policy. Social cohesion obligations should thus permeate all municipal functions. To this end, a Municipal Social Cohesion Barometer can serve as an "early-warning system" to identify problem areas on which the municipality should focus to promote social cohesion.

The synthesis of the data emanating from the three data collection methods is presented in Table 13. It is suggested that the content of this table serves as a foundation or building blocks for the design of a Barometer, inclusive of a measuring instrument to enable municipalities to evaluate themselves in terms of the progress made with social cohesion targets.

Table 13. Proposed Municipal Social Cohesion Barometer: Dimensions and indicators

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Indicators</i>
Crime prevention and community safety	This domain focuses on strengthening access to rights and collective protection and on the inclusion of the most vulnerable population groups through a proper balance between preventive social action and law enforcement. Citizens should be safe and secure, including protection from crime, violence, and acts of discrimination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South African Police Service crime statistics; • Reports on a number of community protests; • State of urban safety reports; • Gender-based violence incidents.
Community health and well-being	All citizens have equal access to minimum services to ensure their physical and mental health. These include medical and psychological health services, such as local hospitals, clinics, and primary healthcare facilities, as well as mental care services. This also includes access to sports and recreation facilities and other similar services that contribute to healthy living and the preservation of life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of hospitals and clinics per person; • Number of doctors and healthcare workers per person; • HIV/AIDS statistics; • Tuberculosis statistics; • Percentage of funding allocated for the building and maintenance of public amenities, inclusive of sport and recreational facilities, municipal parks, beaches, and amusement facilities; • Number of and participation in organised events.
Spatial justice	Spatial design and development address imbalances of the past through access to decent housing, infrastructure, and basic service delivery.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of growth in informal settlements; • Number of households with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Running water; - Electricity; - Sewerage; - Pit latrines/flush toilets connected to a sewerage system.
Civic unity and participation	The sharing of norms and values, trust in public entities, and willingness of all individuals and structures to intervene to address common problems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement of traditional leadership in planning; • Coordination of municipal initiatives; • Fruitless and wasteful expenditure; • Active citizenship: community surveys; • Public participation processes and mechanisms (e.g., ward committees).
Economic prosperity	Levels of economic growth through equal access to gain an income through employment, or self-employment, including the provision of basic economic services and access to funding and business support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment levels (%); • Female-headed household (%); • Child-headed households (%); • Business licence provision efficiency.
Socio-cultural strength	Sense of local identity, social networks, and safe space; promoting features of an inclusive local cultural heritage; and encouraging cultural diversity while promoting tolerance and a willingness to accept other cultures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Museums/historic sites and buildings; - Libraries; - Theatres; - Recreational centres; • Number of attendees of organised events at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Museums/historic places; - Libraries; - Theatres/playhouses; • Hate-crime incidents; • Recipients of municipal feeding or other social aid schemes; • Accessibility of municipal infrastructure for persons with special needs; • Acts of discrimination and violence against immigrants/foreigners.
Municipal aesthetics and quality	Relates to the physical characteristics of services provided by the municipality to create a conducive and clean environment for all citizens, such as decent roads with adequate lighting, litter-free public spaces, and adequate public ablution facilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance of roads (e.g., percentage of potholes fixed); • Public perception survey ratings; • Weekly refuse removal statistics.

Source: Authors' elaboration.

6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to uncover dimensions and indicators that could be used in the design of an evidence-based measurement instrument (i.e., Municipal Social Cohesion Barometer) to gauge the extent to which municipalities succeed in promoting social cohesion in communities. Without such a self-gauging, measurement instrument, municipalities will struggle to design policies and programmes aimed at fostering social cohesion. It will also be difficult to proactively identify issues that may cause intergroup conflict and lead to violence in municipal areas.

It is evident that social cohesion contributes to socio-economic development and that a more cohesive society is essential for nation building. There is, however, a widening gap between policy aspirations towards social cohesion and the actual state of solidarity and nation building in the country. It is argued that this can be rectified by decentralising social cohesion imperatives to the local sphere of government. One of the most severe limitations currently is the absence of a coordinated evidence-based social cohesion-building effort in especially the local sphere of government where there is close interaction between communities. Municipalities should follow a nuanced,

tailor-made approach to social cohesion and be guided by policy frameworks and guidelines from the national and provincial governments. Municipal leadership should be committed to promoting social cohesion and allocate the required resources to build municipal capacity and competency in this regard.

The main contributions of the survey include an outline of the social cohesion dimensions and indicators, lessons from the international experience, and the opinions of a broad scope of role-players regarding existing social cohesion challenges. However, three main limitations of

the study, namely the selection of international cases (countries), the limited sample size, and the absence of testing, to some degree constrain the practical application of the proposed Social Cohesion Barometer framework. Future research should extend both cases and sample size to test and expand the application value of the proposed Barometer. This will allow policymakers and local government decision-makers to target key domain areas that currently limit cohesion and promote those dimensions that unite local communities.

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