THE MANDELA INITIATIVE
Dialogue and action to overcome poverty and inequality

Social Cohesion in the Karoo
Mandela Initiative report on the action dialogue
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A. Introduction

This workshop was aimed at exploring patterns of social cohesion (and social fragmentation) in small and medium-size towns. Due to the location of the workshop (near Victoria West, in the Northern Cape Karoo), most of the delegates hailed from towns within the arid central region of South Africa.

B. The dialogue: Intended themes

The workshop agenda posed five key issues:

1. A brief theoretical introduction on the concept of "social cohesion" (by Doreen Atkinson), posing the question: *Why are small towns important/useful as laboratories of social cohesion?*

2. "The future of race" in small towns: What is happening?

3. Assisting the poor and vulnerable: How can their social capital be strengthened?

4. Social innovators and local bridge-builders

5. Next steps: What have we learnt, and what are possible next steps in promoting social cohesion? Insights for policy?

In the discussions, these themes were repeatedly addressed, in different ways by different speakers.

C. Introduction: The concept of social cohesion, based on the work of Robert Putnam

Doreen provided an overview of important issues on the question of social cohesion, in the United States. These notes were drawn largely from: Putnam, RD (2000), *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon and Schuster, New York).

The notion of "social capital" refers to connections among individuals, social networks and norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness. This is often linked with the idea of "civic virtue". The notion of "social capital" was originally used by L.I. Hanifan in 1916: Social capital refers to "those tangible substances that count for most in the daily lives of people: namely goodwill, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit … The community as a whole will benefit by the co-operation of all its parts …" (cited in Putnam 2000:19)

Social capital is simultaneously a "private good" (it helps individuals), and a "public good" (it helps societies). It facilitates problem-solving, it reduces transaction costs, and it promotes tolerance. It promotes education and child development, and underpins the notion that "It takes a village to raise a child". It also teaches children skills. It makes neighbourhoods safe; it reduces self-destructive behaviours and gang formation. It promotes economic networking, employment, trusting employers and employees. It promotes social caring, reduces stress, and even promotes physical health. "Civic connections rival marriage and affluence as predictors of life happiness". It promotes democratic participation, deliberation, development efforts. It reduces the need for heavy-handed policing. It reduces free-riding and opportunism (Putnam 2000: 299-351).

Social connections create rules of conduct, mutual obligations, trustworthiness, norms of reciprocity.

Significantly, social capital and networks can also be destructive (e.g. the Mafia, urban gangs, exclusion of the poor from wealthy suburbs), and reinforce power elites.

It is helpful to distinguish between *bridging* (inclusive) and *bonding* (exclusive) social capital. *Bonding* social capital refers to organisations which bring together people of a single ethnic group or persuasion; this could include ethnic fraternal organisations or church-based groups. This *may* create strong out-group antagonism. In contrast, *bridging* social capital helps to build new forms of social networks and overcomes cleavages; examples are the civil rights movement, youth service groups, and interfaith organisations. Very often, bridging social capital is more important, in a fragmented society.

Social capital has positive impacts on investment and livelihoods. Trusting communities have a significant economic advantage, because "transaction costs" are reduced, and people experience less stress and more productivity. Generalised reciprocity is bolstered by dense networks of social exchange. It helps to distinguish between "*thin trust*" (trust in new acquaintances) and "*thick trust*" (trust in strong existing personal relations). "Thin trust" is more useful, as it expands the radius of trust beyond the people we know personally (Putnam 2000:135-6).

"The touchstone of social capital is the principle of *generalized reciprocity*: "I'll do this for you now, without expecting anything immediately in return and perhaps without knowing you, confident that down the road, you or someone else will return the favour" (Putnam 2000:134). This is a combination of *short-term altruism* and *long-term self-interest.*

Typically, the values of honesty, civic engagement, reciprocity and social trust are mutually reinforcing – we are more likely to trust others, or be honest, if we think others are likely to do the same (Putnam 2000:137).

People differ fundamentally in their approach to social networks. **"Machers"** are people who make things happen in the community (i.e. innovators and champions). They are often better educated and have higher incomes. **"Schmoozers"** are people who spend many hours in informal conversation and communication with family and friends. Schmoozers are

typically less organised and their networks are less purposefully structured. Schmoozers are often active at dinner parties, or they hang out with friends. "Schmoozing" is found in all strata of society. Putnam observed that these "informal connections are very important in sustaining social networks" (Putnam 2000:95).

There are also differences in people's approach to social connections at different stages of life: Formal organisational involvement (machers) tends to be relatively modest early in life, peaks in late middle age, and then declines with retirement. Schmoozing peaks among young adults, then declines (family obligations), then rises against with retirement and widowhood. *Schmoozing* tends to be more frequent among women, regardless of job and marital status. "Women are more avid 'social capitalists' than men" (Putnam 2000:95).

Virtually all forms of social capital (in the USA) are stronger in small towns than large cities (Putnam 2000:138).

Putnam poses an important question: Are patterns of social cohesion changing fundamentally in the modern world? It helps to distinguish between "inter-generational" shifts (from one generation to another) and "intra-generational" shifts (which take place as people age). A great deal of Putnam's book shows that there have been significant inter-generational shifts.

In the USA, "social capital" has been declining since 1960. There has been a major shift from "baby boomers" (born 1945-1964) and subsequent generations (Generation X born 1965-1980) and Generation Y (born after 1980). "Generation X'ers have never made the connection to politics, so they emphasize the personal and private over the public and collective" (Putnam 2000:259). "Kids today just aren't joiners", says Putnam. The USA has seen long-term declines in voting, community organisations, and involvement in public affairs" (Putnam 2000:44). Informal socialising with family and friends has declined (Putnam 2000:59). Church attendance has declined, particularly in mainstream churches, with declines in philanthropy and volunteering. Trade union membership is declining (Putnam 2000:85). Work is increasingly dominant in our lives, with increasing hours at work, and social networks often based on the workplace. Yet, at the same time, people experience greater job insecurity, lower job tenure, and tend to become part-timers – which precisely discourage social connections.

Furthermore, says Putnam, "schmoozing" is declining! People prefer staying at home. "Informal outings, like picnics, seem to be on the path to extinction" (Putnam 2000:100). Places like the neighbourhood bar, "where everybody knows your name" are becoming a thing of the past. There is a decline in card-playing, bowling alleys, and a rise in internet games, with very little socialisation taking place, and often proceeding behind a veil of anonymity. There is a striking shift in the way we allocate our time, "toward ourselves and our immediate family and away from the wider community" (Putnam 2000:107). There has been a decline in participation in sports activities with the rise of private gyms and home workout equipment. There has been a steady decline in charitable giving (Putnam 2000:126). "Americans have become steadily more tight-fisted, precisely when we have also disengaged from the social life of our communities". The main growth in volunteering is

among people aged 60+ (Putnam 2000:129) – due to better health and longer post-retirement life (Putnam 2000:131). There has been a rise in volunteering among the young – but one often gets the impression that this is done mainly to promote their CVs. Younger generations have much less trust in others (Putnam 2000:140).

Many people are now only exercising their citizenship "by proxy" (Putnam 2000:160), when people who belong to organisations typically only receive letters or e-mails, leaving the work of the organisation to be done by paid employees, whose professional careers are defined in terms of social movement participation.

Social protest is becoming *less* common among "twenty-somethings now than it was among people that age in the sixties and seventies ... Protest marchers have steadily and rapidly grayed over the past several decades" (Putnam 2000:165). In fact, there has been a decline in civic engagement in all race groups (Putnam 2000:280).

There has been a steady trend towards the internet and social media, and virtual networks. "Could new 'virtual communities' simply be replacing the old-fashioned physical communities in which our parents lived?" (Putnam 2000:148). In fact, is "virtual social capital" a contradiction in terms? Putnam observes that there is no easy answer. Social capital is about networks, and the Net is "the network to end all networks" (Putnam 2000:171). Do virtual networks overcome class, status and racial divides? Virtual communities become very limited, and restrictive – based on communities of interest, with shared education, tastes, beliefs and skills. It reduces the necessity to deal with social diversity (Putnam 2000:178).

What is causing this decline in social networks? It may be due to frenetic busy-ness and time pressure, people sitting in traffic, spending more time on private relaxing activities, or economic hard times, or pressures on women in the paid labour force, who have to manage two-career families. But Putnam emphasised that civic engagement has diminished almost equally for men or women, employed or not working, married or single, financially stressed or financially comfortable (Putnam 2000:203).

Residential mobility may be a factor, especially urbanization, urban sprawl, "lifestyle enclaves", segregated by race, class, education, and life stage. People frequent more impersonal, large shopping malls. But then, Putnam noted that civic engagement is declining in small towns too! (Putnam 2000:208).

A major factor is television. Watching TV is a private activity; newspaper readership is declining; and there is a growing disinterest in public matters (Putnam 2000:222) "Dependence on television ... is the single most consistent predictor [of civic disengagement] that I have discovered" (Putnam 2000:231), for at least four possible reasons:
- TV competes for scarce time
- TV has psychological effects that inhibit social participation, e.g. lethargy, passivity, perhaps overweight, addictive behaviour

- Specific programme content on TV undermines civic motivation – people feel that problems are out of their control; and game shows and soap operas become alternatives for real social engagement.
- Channel surfing reduces attention span.

But does watching TV <u>cause</u> social disengagement? Or are people already disengaging, and then choosing to watch TV? If there is a causal relationship, in what direction? (Putnam 2000:235).

There are several other possible reasons for the decline of social engagement:
• Changes in the structure of the economy, e.g. rise of chain stores, fewer friendly local shop-owners as part of the community
• Disruption of marriage and family ties
• Growth of the welfare state
• Civil rights revolution
• Disillusionment with public life.

Does this give us any insight into changes in social cohesion and "social capital" in South African small towns?

D. The discussions at the workshop

The discussions at the workshop followed a very informal format. Instead of sessions with specific issues, each person in the group spoke in turn, highlighting their observations about social cohesion in their communities (or in South Africa generally), and what work they were doing to promote social cohesion. (The full list of delegates is included as Appendix A).

This section provides an overview of themes which emanated from the discussion.

1. Issues of scale

We should identify different dynamics at different social levels, including households, families, communities, and towns. Often social conflict is really stimulated by problems within families. At the town level, social cohesion can be undermined by the distribution of resources, such as land, water and schools. In large urban areas, problems take on a different dimension – for example, in the form of crime in urban areas. Very often, geographic factors reinforce social fragmentation; for example, in the ways that neighbourhoods were designed during and after *apartheid.*

Finally, at the national level, social cohesion can be promoted by means of national efforts, such as sporting events, linked to sentiments of patriotism.

There are also new forms of international social cohesion, on global issues such as environmental management and climate change.

Clearly, there is no one specific problem or dynamic with regards to social cohesion. It is played out in different ways, in different spaces and scales, and these spaces are also "nested" within one another in complex ways.

In South Africa, development programmes have tended to be very top-down, achieving specific and concrete deliverables. But very little thought has been given to bottom-up forms of change; in fact, politicians often do not encourage this, because it creates dynamics that they cannot control.

So we need to suggest practical changes that can be made in local communities, at various levels. These insights can then be brought into policy and programme design.

2. The role of the family

Several participants emphasised the role of the family, and the urgent need to strengthen this primordial social unit.

Family is the important background, and the knowledge of mothers is a crucial starting point in the fortunes of the family. Ms Leslie Osler reported on the work of the Hantam Trust, on a farm 30 km east of Colesberg.[1] The Hantam centre provides support and education, from the stage of pregnant mothers, through the entire youth education spectrum, and even after-school training in cuisine and tourism. They have found that, with an effective parenting programme, pregnant women and communities generally begin to act more responsibly, because they have more knowledge about managing their bodies, their babies, and their family members. Remarkably, the Hantam Trust has been able to break the cycle of poverty within one generation. They are also supported by their post-school alumni, who have become skilled and effective in various livelihoods, and can plough those resources back into their families.

3. Private-sector initiatives

Mr Ric Amansure provided a report-back on the rapid and extensive work done by renewable energy companies in various small towns. They need to spend 1% of their revenue on social purposes, over a twenty-year period. This is typically channelled through local trusts. It is estimated that, over the next twenty years, more than R50 billion is going to be directed into communities by wind and solar farms. Because of the rapidity and scale of this funding programme, some communities are facing new challenges. Some communities get support, and others do not, which creates conflict. Some communities are simply

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[1]   See http://hantam-trust.org.za/

battling to spend the required private sector funding, and they do not have the organisational or administrative capacity for this.

It is very important to find projects which are manageable, and can achieve rapid roll-out. Ric Amansure reported on a solar street light project in the town of Deben in the Northern Cape, which has had a remarkable impact on community dynamics. People can now visit each other, attend meetings, or children can play in the streets at night. New micro enterprises are flourishing near the street lights. It has led to racial integration, because white people from nearby towns are now willing to visit the community at night to undertake projects. Furthermore, the local company trained local people to install and maintain the street lights, so that young people have a sense of their own skill and importance.

Sometimes one can have positive and unexpected impacts. In the case of Deben, there was a transformational change. Everyone feels that these are *their* street lights, and report problems if they occur. It has also transformed their families, given them skills, and for some young people, opened the doors to securing work elsewhere. This shows the importance of bringing education and infrastructure together. There was an educational component in every step of the project.

Another important lesson from Deben is that collaboration between the public sector, the private sector and civil society is critical. The municipality assisted by doing spatial planning; and the whole project did not cost the municipality anything at all.

Moses Skisazana of the CSIR in Stellenbosch reported on the projects undertaken by their Entrepreneurship Creation and Development Division, to facilitate the processes of linking towns and projects. For example, their unit promoted a project to produce rose geranium in Onseepkans. Typically, the unit buys up land, trains, and employs local people; the CSIR's involvement is then phased out over a period of five years.

These projects have significant prospects; however, they are often confronted by a lack of local social cohesion; many councillors do not come to meetings. There is a real problem of institutional paralysis. Some municipal officials fear political retribution if they become too involved in the project. There is often an atmosphere of anxiety, which discourages officials from generating the benefits of these projects.

4. **When strangers come to town …**

Ric Amansure also reported on the massive migration impacts caused by renewable energy projects. Many people flock to these towns in search of work. Also, the project implementers were seen as "inkommers" by the local community, and they had to learn the local practices and protocols. It takes time before synergies become possible.

5. The role of churches in promoting social cohesion

Rev Suzanne van der Merwe of the NG Congregation in Carnarvon is a young *dominee*, who has done a Masters degree on the topic of social cohesion. Her experience in Pretoria with multi-denominational worship, with very diverse participants, has been a formative one. She has experienced divisions in local congregations in the Karoo, which will need to be overcome. A group of committed Christians have established the Carnarvon Reconstruction Forum, which involves the police, municipality, schools, churches, and Department of Social Development. As she commented, "Miracles happen in small steps".

The Worcester Hope and Reconciliation Process has gone further down the road of reconciliation, by starting "uncomfortable conversations". Mr Juan Cariem explained that Worcester is very racially divided. The initiative originated from the difficult history in the town after the 1996 bombing in Worcester, on Christmas eve. The bomb was planted by a right-wing religious group, and the guilty people were arrested and sentenced to imprisonment. Stefaans Coetzee was one of the bombers. While in prison, he was persuaded by Eugene de Kock to talk to the victims of his crime. Thereafter, discussions were channelled through Dr Deon Snyman of the Dutch Reformed Church in the town. In 2010, a process of reconciliation was initiated in the NG Moederkerk, involving community and religious leaders.

A group of change agents was established, to deal with five key issues: Education, employment, substance abuse, housing and social cohesion. After a five-day workshop, various strategies were identified, including early childhood education (ECD), and they secured funding to get an additional maths teacher for the secondary school. The Ministers Fraternal created local networks whereby the victims of the 1996 bomb attack could express their feelings and seek some kind of closure. In a celebrated moment, the victims of the crime went to Pretoria by train to visit Stefaans Coetzee. Coetzee has become involved in the reconciliation project, and he has helped to establish a Trust for the victims. Rev GP Kellerman commented on the basic principle of the initiative: "You are going nowhere without me and I am going nowhere without you". One approach has been "Koinonia meals", when people from different cultural groups come together to share meals. Significantly, these networks helped to calm social relations during the local government election.

The initiative has now moved through the initial symbolic easy victories. Now more difficult challenges need to be confronted: What is next? How can social cohesion be promoted? People are now starting to expect practical results. The NG church is supporting a beading project in Zwelethemba, but is this sufficient?

Over time, the initiative is assisting local communities to identify new projects for themselves. This is not always easy; some of the government departments do not collaborate with one another, and NGOs also jostle for influence. Also, many of the people who are involved in the initiative do not have financial resources, and therefore the initiative needs to carry basic costs.

6. Working through schools

Mr Sam Rametse, education officer at the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) telescope project, gave feedback on their work in Carnarvon schools. SKA has provided teacher training in maths and science, and Peter Glover of Teach SA has brought young graduates into the schools. (Teach SA does rapid training of graduates in maths, science and English teaching, and provides them with opportunities to do teaching in schools). A computer centre was created for community members in Carnarvon, and a robotics programme has been launched in the schools. Due to their work in these schools, some qualified teachers are now returning to Carnarvon, thereby reversing the brain drain.

The real difficulty, in Carnarvon, is to turn around the local culture which undervalues education. Some children cut class, and this places additional strain on the education staff.

One solution is to link schools with the Dimension Data programme of online maths teaching on Saturday mornings.[2] Another useful initiative is the Maths and Science Academy in Kimberley, run by the Northern Cape Department of Education.[3] It is important to assist remote Karoo towns to participate in these cutting-edge initiatives.

Ms Helene Smuts, of the NGO *Africa Meets Africa*, described an approach to bring interdisciplinary knowledge – on art, craft, history, geography and mathematics – to schools. Her programme creates teaching materials, which consist of books and films; teachers are then taught how to use these in the classroom.[4] The underlying philosophy in this programme is that people already have local knowledge, and we need to listen to that, and then package it in suitable materials, to enable learners to identify with the information they are grappling with.

7. Working through multi-lateral local teams

Mr Louis Kruger spoke for the Ubuntu Development Forum in Victoria West, where various socio-economic activities are being initiated. This engagement is aimed at creating "pleasant spaces" in small Karoo towns. In the Foundation's work, extensive networking takes place with local interest groups, to determine people's needs, attitudes, norms, values, hopes and fears. It is important to have a deep understanding of the local economy, the social fabric, local politics, and people's financial strengths and constraints. After widespread consultation, the group then secures general approval to continue, and this leads to a

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[2]   See   http://www.dimensiondata.com/en-ZA/Pages/Dimension-Data-Saturday-school-students-shine-in-2015-Matric-exams.aspx

[3]   See http://mainstreamrp.com/csr/sponsorship-of-the-kimberley-maths-and-science-academy/.

[4]   See www.africameetsafrica.co.za.

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"conversation phase", to rally support for action steps and to share strategy and tactics. Ultimately, the group goes over to action, identifying potential interventions and resources.

The process is anything but easy. In Victoria West, there was initially quite a lot of enthusiasm, but once the work involved was identified people started opting out. How can momentum be maintained? This is a challenge. It is also quite difficult to move past the different traditions of the racial communities, where people are locked into long-standing relationships and patterns of behaviour. How can these straitjackets be overcome? There is also a difficulty in getting effective collaboration from Ubuntu Local Municipality, and this prevents barriers from being broken down.

8. Racial healing

Dr Phia van der Watt reflected on her experiences in creating safe spaces for people to recall long-standing painful experiences in their lives. She has had considerable interaction with people about how they were raised. Very often, people's childhood experiences were characterised by frequent punishments, humiliations, and very little parental communication.

Many parents simply do not know how to talk to their children. They have little experience of mutual trust and respect. By guiding people to reflect on deeper experiences, many painful stories emerge. She asks black and coloured people about their first memories of white people; this reveals a combination of positive memories ("At Christmas they would give us sweets") with negative stories and pejorative labelling. People have over many years been conditioned into believing that they are inferior. "Ubuntu" is often a misnomer because although people might need each other they often don't like each other.

This kind of discussion is individual work, usually taking place in a one-on-one context. People tend to open up when they face a crisis; they need to be able to talk to their children, or they need to deal with AIDS. Her respondents often had an underlying sense of failure; they believed that everything they did was a mess. This basic psychological burden obstructs any effective social cohesion. There is a great deal of talking and reflection needed, often in separate groups first, before launching onto inter-group discussions ("bridging social capital").

Significantly, white people are as wounded and broken as black or coloured people. They feel lost after the transition. People need an opportunity to cry for their own history.[5]

Prof Justine Burns agreed with Phia: The real issue with social cohesion is the challenge of seeing people as human. A serious difficulty, however, is how to replicate these resource-intensive, delicate processes at scale? How can these insights be incorporated into the training of teachers, social workers, nurses, doctors, and the police?

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[5] Phia van der Watt's PhD thesis, *Engaging with the 'soil and soul' of a community: Rethinking development, healing and transformation in South Africa.* PhD thesis, University of the Free State, is available on www.aridareas.co.za.

Other speakers also reflected, in depth, on the challenges of racial healing. Mr Deon Beneke of Philippolis related people's instinctive responses in terms of racial categories. This issue is possibly the most intractable kind of social conflict, because people do not have the opportunities for individual or collective reflection and emotional support, to deal with their hurtful racial experiences and memories.

9. Working with youth at risk

Roberta Burgess reflected on a project that was undertaken with the support of Humboldt University. The project worked with young petty offenders, by spending a week with them in the mountains. It was clear that the young people were totally given over to ensuring their own survival. Many of them had never experienced any care in their families. In the project, the young people gradually had to confront their crimes, and sometimes even had to come face-to-face with the victims. Thereafter the project leaders assisted the young people to engage with their families and friends.

10. Helping municipalities to develop social cohesion

Mr Mzwandile Phatela, a municipal official of Kopanong Local Municipality in Philippolis, commented on the challenges posed by local social divisions in dealing with local infrastructural problems. Municipalities find it very difficult to roll out or manage infrastructure, if there are conflicts amongst workers, between municipalities and communities, or between social groups themselves. Consequently, innovative ways have to be found for municipalities to engage with communities.

Dr Emil Nothnagel reflected on the challenges of working with local people who are not adequately equipped to deal with Local Economic Development (LED) projects. The difficulty is that infrastructural development is seldom matched by a commensurate degree of social development. Infrastructure projects are typically driven by engineers, who have little understanding of the social dimensions of development. Consequently, infrastructure projects do not contribute to the development of social cohesion.

He has developed a negotiating tool, called a *LED Maturity Assessment Tool*. This structures discussions with senior municipal staff, councillors and the private sector. The tool poses 33 questions, and tests nine different variables. This gives an idea of where the key bottlenecks are.

One key factor is the biggest challenge: Creating leadership and governance in LED. There is often insufficient technical background, experience and leadership skills amongst municipal officials and elected politicians. Training provided by the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and the Department of Co-operative Governance (COGTA) is simply insufficient.

The assessment tool uses the information gained from the interviews to build trust between the public and the private sector. Various obstacles are identified, and this information is shared with the participants. The team leader identifies 30 stakeholders – typically the mayor, councillors, officials, and 10 of the foremost businesspeople from the formal and informal sectors – who are then trained for five days. Here a great deal of change management is grappled with. Participants are allocated to groups, and provided with tasks, to make them realise that they need to work together. Their results are presented to the rest of the class. Then, once these relationships are built, the group works on assessments of their comparative advantages.

These five-day experiences yield a massive amount of information. The group then identifies projects which it can tackle over the next few months. This becomes the sector strategy, which feeds into the Municipal Integrated Development Plan (IDP). This process makes it much easier for the LED officer to implement projects, in partnership with champions from the private sector.

Emil emphasised, however, that this assessment process is not always successful: It all depends on the leadership and dynamism of the municipal and private sector leaders. There are times when the process simply does not get enough traction to get off the ground – and this suggests that social cohesion in those locations is lacking.

Mr Deon Beneke agreed that there are innovative ways to involve municipalities in local initiatives. Philippolis, for example, secured a municipal grant of R80 000 to clean the town. This led to a full day in which many local people, as well as municipal officials, worked together to sweep streets, paint poles, and remove litter. This was an extraordinary experience of collaboration, and helped to build trust with the municipal officials and councillors. However, it has been a challenge to maintain this relationship.[6]

One example of a fruitful and multi-stakeholder municipal initiative is that of the Pixley ka Seme District Municipality's venture into renewable energy. Mr Sindisile Madyo, LED Officer of the Municipality, described their 2010 private sector conference in De Aar. The Municipality managed to galvanise private organisations such as agricultural co-operatives and farming unions, in an effort to encourage the use of renewable energy in farming operations. The Municipality's efforts have resulted in numerous cutting-edge solar projects being established within its jurisdiction; this has had far-reaching benefits for local communities, job-seekers and hospitality providers. De Aar has developed a new prominence and pride because of these renewable energy projects.

Mr Madyo noted that it is important that municipalities explore ways of setting up development agencies, which can secure a percentage of private-sector proceeds. One challenge, for example, is to deal with "boom and bust" experiences, as new projects move from their Construction Phase to the Operations Phase; municipalities need to find ways in which they can ease these economic fluctuations.

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[6]   This experience was recorded on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlJIkrjtEHw

11. The poorest of the poor

Prof Rinie Schenk discussed her research about waste pickers on municipal sites and part-time workers, who wait on street corners. They are often at the mercy of the municipalities, and receive no support from them. The waste pickers need local buy-back centres to purchase their collected waste, but the municipalities are often hostile to buy-back centres. There are exceptions: Oudtshoorn Municipality has a good relationship with its local buy-back centre.

It is remarkable how much social cohesion develops on the dumpsites. People collaborate with one another, to maximise their resources. Some shops informally provide pickers with old food. Many people come to collect food from the site. There is even a National Association of Waste Pickers!

Unfortunately, those municipalities who are supportive do not share information or lessons. Much more networking is needed to guide municipalities to make their rubbish sites more available to the poorest of the poor.

12. When good intentions cause damage

Ms Ilma Brink recently completed a Masters thesis on the impact of a land claim on the small village of Ebenaeser, on the West Coast.[7]

Government funded the drafting of a Community Development Land Acquisition Plan to manage a major land restitution process in Ebenaeser. However, the project proved to be way beyond the abilities of the community to manage. Ilma studied Ebenaeser's social resilience, and the ways in which its social cohesion has changed over time. All change is destabilising; the question is whether local residents can build effective organisations and networks to cope with challenges.

At the moment the community is overwhelmed by different departments, committees, players, forums, and meetings.

13. Survival through social cohesion

Ms Marelize Maritz, the wife of the Dutch Reformed Church *dominee* in Eastern Bloemfontein, described the influx of coloured and black people into an erstwhile white suburb. This led to increased crime and the devaluation of property, and many white people moved away. In time three white NGK congregations dwindled to just one. Accommodation was at a discount, with low rentals and dilapidated houses. The community now consists of

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[7]   This thesis is available on www.aridareas.co.za.

unemployed people, and homeless and low-income families. Some houses accommodate up to four families. Many of the properties are now owned by black people, and white people rent accommodation from them. All landlines have been stolen due to copper cable theft. Cell phone signal is very poor. People cannot farm because everything gets stolen. There are no fences or security, since everything has been stolen.

In this difficult context, the NG Church has three rules: It accepts all people unconditionally; it asks no questions about people's background; and it does all it can to build relationships. The church creates new networks and resources to help people to become resilient, because people make new friends. People exchange cell phone numbers, and the church bought a bus to transport people to the church. Almost thirty families now get a food parcel every week. The only *quid pro quo* is that people attend church, which also helps to build social cohesion.

14. Government steps up to the mark

Ms Marthie Lotz, of the Department of Social Development in Northern Cape, described how their Department has improved its ability and effort to address poverty – including the creation of a "Provincial War Room on Poverty". This includes working with vulnerable children, creating parental skills groups, working with other departments, and intervening at municipalities to promote the "war room" agenda and identifying officials who do not provide assistance. They identify families in need, and report on their efforts to assist them. Mobile Early Childhood Development units have been created, by re-fitting trucks. ECD volunteers have been trained, and parents have joined ECD initiative so that they can have play groups in homes. Where required, social workers offer therapy to parents.

15. Researching poverty, inequality and social cohesion

Prof Justine Burns reported on the Poverty and Inequality Initiative at the University of Cape Town. The unit co-ordinates research on issues related to youth and social cohesion.

This begs the question of our understanding and definition of the terms "social cohesion" and "social capital". We often use these terms as if we have a common understanding of what they mean. In fact, these terms can mean all kinds of loosely associated things, of the various dimensions of the "interpersonal stuff" or the "glue" that brings us together.

The Unit is also constructing a social cohesion index. There have been several international attempts, which have now been reduced to three main pillars: Trust, identity, and equality of opportunity (or economic empowerment). Factors such as development and governance also play a role in creating or undermining social cohesion. At heart, it refers to people's sense of belonging, often in situations of high inequality and latent conflict. The Unit examines national and provincial data-sets, and tries to correlate social cohesion factors with objective measures.

A great deal more needs to be done to understand people's lived experience in local development. The Unit would value collaboration to determine what questions may be useful in local baseline surveys.

E. Where to from here?

In closure, Prof Francis Wilson raised several critical issues for future reflection. It is important that schools become fully functional, as a space where young people can learn constructive forms of social cohesion. We need to ask: How can we use resources in new ways? Can the sports sector be used more effectively? How can we deal with young people's need for stimulation and their challenges of marginalisation? Can keynote events be more effectively used to build social cohesion?

How much do we know or understand about the role of individual innovators and champions? Consider, for example, the collaborative flower production, called Amablom near Nelspruit, which mobilised a large group of producers under a shared brand.[8]

Local newsletters help to build social cohesion; but once again, this requires motivated people to drive and sustain the initiatives.

It seems that there is a great need for a clearing-house of information on successful social initiatives, not only to share insights, but to provide actual motivation and support to people and groups.

Finally, the group shared information by means of a Dropbox link. This information will now be available on the Karoo Development Foundation's research website (www.aridareas.co.za), under the theme *Social Cohesion.*

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[8]   www.amablom.co.za.

F. The workshop participants

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