

UNDERSTANDING YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the relationship between youth unemployment and social cohesion by attempting to answer two questions: Firstly, why is it important for South Africa to take into consideration youth unemployment as a hindrance to social cohesion? And, secondly, do such considerations necessitate more holistic and context-specific policies or strategies in synchronising social cohesion initiatives with youth development policies? The paper's preliminary hypothesis is that there is a strong correlation between high levels of youth unemployment and low levels of social cohesion in South Africa and that improvements in the level of cohesiveness require high levels of inclusiveness within the socio-economic structures of a country, notably in the economy. The secondary hypothesis is that for South Africa to achieve sustained social inclusion, it is imperative that holistic and context-specific strategies are implemented. It is through context-specific youth development policies that accelerated socio-economic inclusion can be achieved.

Keywords: Social cohesion; youth unemployment; marginalisation; socio-economic conditions

INTRODUCTION

Youth unemployment is a pressing socio-economic challenge in South Africa. In order for South Africa to be more inclusive, it is necessary for a broader spectrum of South Africans to participate in the economic activities of the country. It is imperative

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Africanus Journal of Development Studies
Volume 46 | Number 2 | 2016 | pp. 1–28
<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/Africanus/index>

<https://doi.org/10.25159/0304-615X/1502>
ISSN 0304-615X (Print)
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for the youth to become involved in the economic activities of the country so that they can play a positive role in building a more stable and prosperous country.

Employment in general, and particularly for the youth, is critical to ensuring participation in the growth and development of the economy. The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) (2010, 4) expands on the importance of employment:

Employment represents a crucial channel through which income derived from growth can be widely shared. If people have adequately remunerated jobs, they can lift themselves out of poverty, participate in social insurance schemes that enhance their well-being, and improve their educational and health status.

Conversely, youth unemployment has devastating results. As Woolley (1998, 3) concludes, youth unemployment 'creates social exclusion because the unemployed are excluded from the labour market and also face loss of income'. The National Development Plan's overview of South Africa's demographic trends (NPC 2012, 31) finds that although South Africa has a large youth population, the country has not been effective in converting this trend into a demographic dividend. The National Development Plan outlines the dire situation of South Africa's youth unemployed describing the life chances of a typical young person in the country. Thandi, one of the examples in the NDP, is an 18-year-old black woman who completed matric in the year 2010. There is a 13% chance that Thandi will pass matric with exemption and quality for university. *But* she is a black woman so, for Thandi, the chance of getting a university pass is actually 4%. If Thandi passes matric but does not have resources to enter university, or gets less than the marks required for university access, her life chances are likely to follow a pattern as experienced by the majority of the youth in similar circumstances:

- Her chances of getting a job in the first year are 13%;
- Her chances of getting a job in the first five years out of school are 25%;
- Her chances of earning above the median income (about R4 000 a month) are 2%;
- The most likely scenario is that Thandi will not get a job in the first five years after school and for the rest of her life she will receive periodic work for a few months here and there; and
- If this is the case, Thandi will remain below the poverty line of R418 a month for her entire life until she finally gets a pension.

Thus, the National Development Plan warns that if the country fails to employ its large proportion of working-age population including its large youth cohort, this could pose a threat to social, political and economic stability in the country.

Unemployment is a major contributor to poverty – accounting for as much as 39.8 % in 2011 (up from 32.9% in 2001) of poor households. The plight of young black people is of particular concern, with this group accounting for almost two-thirds (65%) of the unemployed under the age of 35. It is understood that if young people struggle to secure employment by age 24, their chances diminish significantly (see National Development Plan 2012).

Although this is not the whole picture, some of the issues that drive employment statistics include: increased capital intensity in many sectors of the economy, a skills mismatch, labour market rigidities and regulatory aspects, and wage cost increases that are higher than productivity growth (IDC 2013).

Strategies and policies such as the National Skills Development Strategy of 2005 and the National Youth Development Policy Framework, which were based on the Reconstruction and Development Programme, went beyond the emphasis on education to explore other concrete mechanisms to promote skills development and job creation and the integration of youth development into the mainstream of policy making (Ngcaweni and Moleke 2008). These frameworks have been applied through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) and the Community Works Programme (CWP). The advantage of these programmes is that youth receive a stipend while broadening their skills base.

These programmes were identified as one of the simplest and quickest ways to create employment for young people; it was argued that with the fast-tracking of the EPWP and ensuring the employment of youth, government could create more than 2.5 million employment opportunities in a period of 18 months (South African Catholic Bishops' Conference 2012).

Further, institutions such as the National Youth Commission and the Umsobomvu Youth Fund were tasked with facilitating the development, implementation and monitoring of responsive policies and programmes as well as the promotion of economic participation for the unemployed (Ngcaweni 2006). Over a decade later, despite all the interventions made in policy and the labour market, young people continue to be at the core of the unemployment challenge.

Unemployment tends to bring with it a number of social problems, including: crime, drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, poor health and the loss of self-esteem and confidence needed to participate in broader society. Unemployed youth struggle to participate meaningfully in the economy and require assistance in dealing with the wide range of concerns and problems they experience in finding employment (Ngcaweni and Moleke 2008).

Recently, there has been much concern about young people who fall outside the mainstream. That is, those who are neither in employment, education or training (NEET). The 2013 First Quarter Labour Force Survey estimates that 33.5% of the 10.4 million young people aged 15–24 years were part of the NEET category (StatsSA 2013). This category of people is vulnerable since they are not occupied with work

or education and the longer they remain in this category, the more disengaged they will become from the formal economy.

Exiting school prematurely is a possible cause of the social, cultural and economic situation in which young people exist (Ngcaweni and Moleke 2008). The social costs of youth unemployment in South Africa have been crime, drug use, promiscuity, deskilling, political uncertainty and reduction in self-confidence (Rankin, Roberts and Schöer 2012).

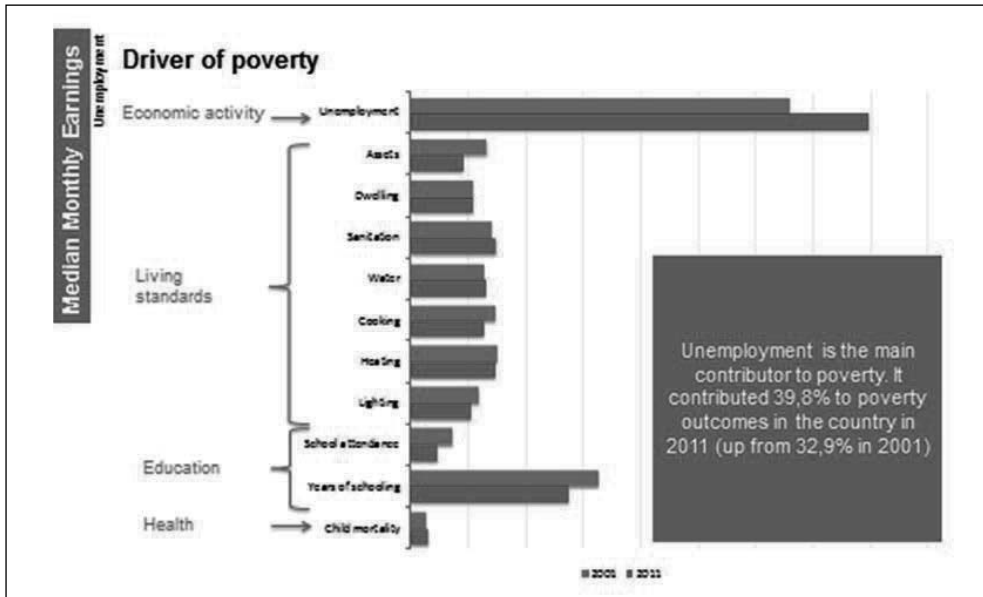


Figure 1: Drivers of poverty
 Source: StatsSA (2012)

As shown in figure 1, for both the 2001 and 2011 Census years, unemployment was by far the biggest driver of poverty. Education comes second, followed by living standards and health (Presidency 2014).

We argue that for greater levels of inclusion to be forged in South Africa, there should be significant improvements in the socio-economic conditions of young people. This leads to two questions: Firstly, why is it important for South Africa to take into consideration youth unemployment as a hindrance to social cohesion? Secondly, do such considerations necessitate more holistic and context-specific policies or strategies in synchronising social cohesion initiatives with youth development policies?

We contend that there is a strong correlation between high levels of youth unemployment and low levels of social cohesion in South Africa. The level of cohesiveness requires high levels of inclusiveness within the socio-economic

structures of a country. This includes the economy. Further, if a country is divided along racial, ethnic and class lines, it is highly likely that such divisions will impede attempts to bring about socio-economic reforms in the country. In other words, the inclusiveness of South Africa's communities can significantly assist in building social cohesion.

We further argue that for South Africa to reduce inequality and exclusion, it is imperative that holistic and context specific interventions be implemented. It is through targeted youth development programmes that the socio-economic fortunes of young people would improve.

This article begins with a conceptual framework which premises the foundation for the analysis of the role of socio-economic inclusion in promoting greater levels of social cohesion. Thereafter, it takes a deeper look at the relationship between social exclusion and youth marginality. The next section focuses on the correlation between marginality and education, before the article delves into the aspects of social inclusion and unemployment. The final section concludes the article by providing a brief commentary that links the various aspects of the paper.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The following section identifies a theoretical and conceptual framework pertaining to social cohesion and youth unemployment in South Africa. It is imperative for the two concepts to be clarified. A clear conceptualisation will enable a better understanding of the implication of youth unemployment on building stronger levels of social cohesion in South Africa. This is by no way a conclusive account.

Correlating Unemployment and Social Cohesion

Let us state an obvious but often overlooked dialectic: the eroding effects of joblessness in the nation's social fabric.

The relationship between youth unemployment and social cohesion is not a direct one. In other words, any youth who is unemployed can follow any one of many paths, as described in the diagram below – and this path is not deterministic. Nürnberger (1999) provides a useful framework, albeit in a different context, as illustrated in the diagram below.

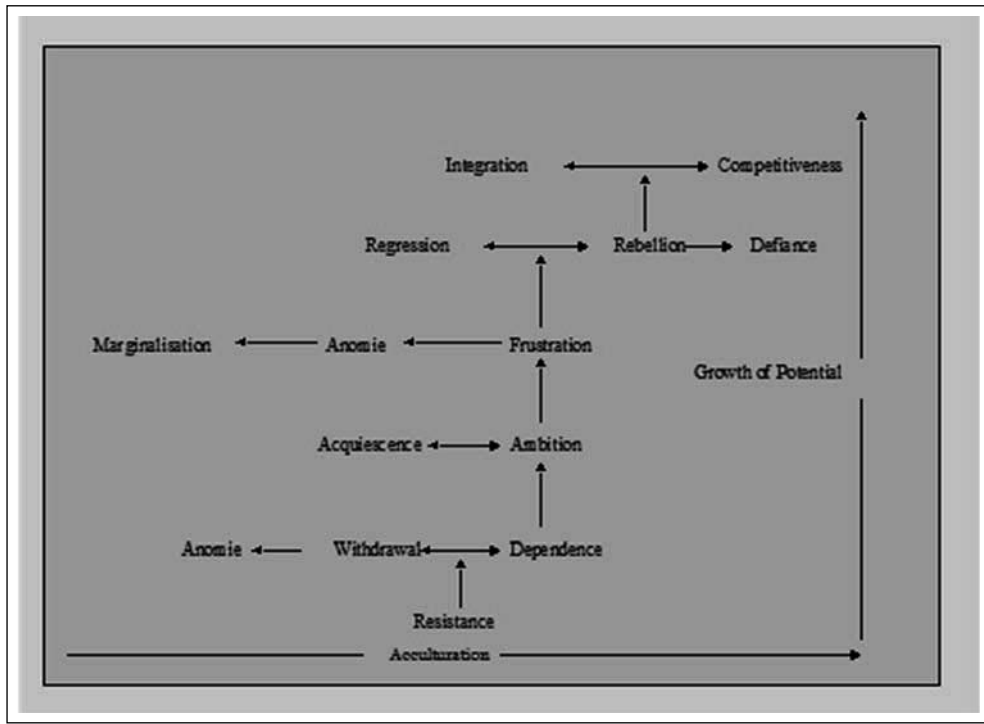


Figure 2: Possible trajectories resulting from youth unemployment
 Source: Nürnberger (1999)

From the illustration above (adapted from Nürnberger 1999), we can infer that one of the possible reactions by young people to conditions of poverty and unemployment may include a greater degree of resistance and defiance. From resistance, there is the potential for further reactions in various forms which may result in violence and civil strife.

It is only when the youth start to display more disconcerting behaviours such as rebellion or defiance that social cohesion is impacted upon. Given the high levels of unemployment among the youth (Gumede 2016), the likelihood of such behaviours becomes real and poses a huge risk to social cohesion.

Unpacking Social Cohesion

The term ‘social cohesion’ is widely used by both academics and policymakers. However, even with its popularity in academic discourse, the concept remains vague (Chan, To and Chan 2006, 274; Jenson 1998). The concept of ‘social cohesion’ was popularised by the French sociologist Émile Durkheim who appropriated the original idea from Ibn Khaldun of Tunis. Khaldun, the 14th century historiographer,

originated the idea of 'asabiyya' variously as brotherhood, social solidarity or social cohesion. Influenced by Khaldun, Durkheim regarded social cohesion as an important characteristic of a society where there is interconnectedness between the members of society, collective values and loyalties, and solidarity (Jenson 1998; McCracken 1998).

Chan et al. (2006, 289) provide a simple definition of social cohesion, which is derived from the *Collins English Dictionary*. They continue to argue that social cohesion involves the ability of members of society to come together and form a united whole. Berger-Schmitt (2000, 28) argues that social cohesion represents a concept which focuses on social qualities such as the extent of inequality or the strength of social relations and ties in a society.

Friedkin (2004, 421) explains that groups are most cohesive 'when group-level conditions are producing positive membership attitudes and behaviours and when group members' interpersonal interactions are operating to maintain these group-level conditions'.

From this perspective, the theoretical foundation that guides the concept of social cohesion is embedded in scrutinising the social processes that tie micro- and macro-level occurrences and influence individuals' membership perceptions and behaviours (Chan et al. 2006, 289; Friedkin 2004, 422). Scholars such as Luce and Perry (1949), Alba (1973) and French (1956) contend that 'social cohesion', defined as strong networks or interpersonal relations, is restrictive, and have proposed broadening the definition to embrace the differences of individuals within a group or society (Friedkin 2004, 417).

Chan et al. (2006) and Jeannotte (2000) argue that social cohesion not only includes socio-economic issues, but also pertains to the benefits (or lack thereof) of economic prosperity. The level of cohesiveness in a country can determine the flexibility of policymakers in developing institutional and structural frameworks, suitable for the social factors that will enhance economic performance and development (Chan et al. 2006, 278; Ritzen, Easterly and Woolcock 2000). Easterly, Ritzen and Woolcock (2006) concur with Chan et al. (2006) and Friedkin's (2004) postulations on social cohesion. The authors define social cohesion as 'the nature and extent of social and economic divisions within society. These divisions – whether by income, ethnicity, political party, caste, language, or other demographic variables – represent vectors around which politically salient societal cleavages can develop' (Easterly et al 2006, 105). Moreover, social cohesion entails the extent to which people unite in times of crisis or when an opportunity presents itself which could potentially shape economic performance within the country.

It is in this context that Easterly et al. (2006 110) contend that the more cohesive a society becomes, the faster the rate of economic growth is. In turn, less cohesive societies tend to grow at a slower economic rate. Furthermore, social cohesion is not synonymous with cultural homogeneity or intolerance of diverse cultures. Rather,

it embraces diversity and appreciates the roles that different communities play in social transformation and economic growth and development.

The aforementioned conceptual and theoretical considerations are crucial in unpacking the role of youth unemployment as a barrier to social cohesion in South Africa.

Youth Unemployment in South Africa: An Overview

In simple terms, youth unemployment refers to a cohort of young members of society who are willing but unable to find employment (Okafor 2011) due to a variety of political economy or structural factors. Internationally ‘youth’ refers to young people aged 15 to 24. However, this varies from country to country (Awogbenle and Iwuamadi 2010, 831; O’Higgins 1997), depending on histories and other local conditions for which the definition influences public policy responses. South Africa defines the youth as people aged 15 to 35 years.

High unemployment rates are indicative of an economy’s failure to create work opportunities for those who are available to work (ILO 2013). South Africa is a case in point.

The incidence of youth unemployment in the country is higher than that of adults (Frame, De Lannoy and Leibbrandt 2016). Young people are also more likely to be discouraged or less active job seekers (Freeman and Wise 1982; Rankin et al. 2012).

This challenge is compounded by strong racial, gender and spatial inequalities. In South Africa, unemployment for white youth stands at 18% while it is 41% for black youth (Ardington 2013). Rates also tend to be higher for young females without formal education and training (Rankin et al. 2012). Furthermore, youth unemployment tends to be higher in rural areas than in urban areas (Ardington 2013).

For his part, Gumede (2016, 43) argues that:

The African youth in South Africa carry the biggest brunt of poverty, unemployment, and a lack of social security. The labour of youth is readily casualised, informalised, and externalised by the ‘invisible hand’ of South Africa’s labour market...In countries emerging from colonial disharmony and conflict, access to employment for youth has proven integral to reconstruction and development processes.

Using the Youth Multidimensional Poverty Index (Youth MPI) derived from the 2011 Census data, Frame et al. (2016, 4) compare the spatial distribution of poverty among the youth aged 15–24 across relatively small geographical regions. Results show an unequal spatial distribution of youth multidimensional poverty across regions of the country and between local municipalities. The highest levels of youth poverty are found in the former homeland areas.

Frame et al (2016, 18) generated the map below (Figure 2) to highlight levels of deprivation that characterising the former homelands, especially among the youth. The municipalities with the highest Youth MPI values (shaded dark grey on the

map) correspond very closely with the areas that had previously been designated as Bantustans.

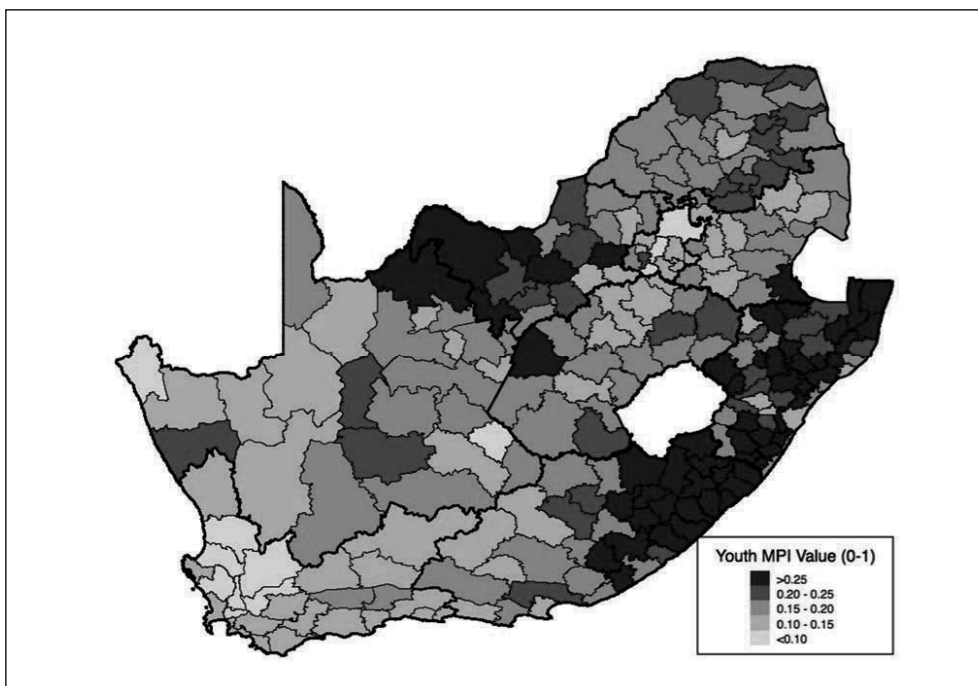


Figure 3: Multidimensional Youth Poverty Index, by municipality, 2011

Source: Frame et al. (2016, 18)

Beyond these socio-economic challenges, long-term unemployment negatively impacts an individual's ability to re-join the labour market even for those who have been to school (Freedman and Wise 1982; Rankin et al. 2012). Based on the evidence above, the situation is worse for those in the former homeland areas, where economic prospects continue to deteriorate.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND YOUTH MARGINALITY

We have already established the South African economy is characterised by structural unemployment, with young people at the epicentre. In that connection, job creation has been identified as a priority by 96% of South African millennials (Foundation for European Progressive Studies 2016). However, for many young people, this is not a straightforward transition.

Commenting on data gathered during the 2014 census, statistician general Pali Lehohla was quoted by News24 saying the future looks bleak for black youth in

South Africa. Data indicate that more coloured and African youth in South Africa are unemployed, involved in crime, and uneducated, than those of other race groups.

Table 1: Unemployment rate among youth and adults by population group, 2008–2015

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Youth 15–34 years (per cent)								
Black	36.3	37.5	39.9	39.5	39.4	39.6	39.4	40.3
Coloured	28.3	27.5	30.4	32.9	33.1	33.7	35.3	32.1
Indian/Asian		17.2	12.5	19.7	13.3	16.5	15.7	22.6
White	9.3	9.7	10.8	11.6	10.4	12.5	9.6	11.2
Total	32.7	33.7	35.7	36.1	35.8	36.2	36.1	36.9
Adults 35–64 years (per cent)								
Black	16.8	15.3	18.0	17.3	17.7	17.4	18.1	19.5
Coloured	9.2	10.7	13.3	14.1	16.0	14.6	13.5	15.7
Indian/Asian	5.4	6.6	6.0	3.8	6.0	8.4	9.8	10.1
White	3.1	1.9	4.0	3.4	4.0	4.7	5.1	5.1
Total	13.4	12.4	14.9	14.4	15.1	15.0	15.6	17.0
All ages 15–64 years (per cent)								
Black	27.3	27.0	29.3	28.7	28.7	28.3	28.5	29.7
Coloured	19.2	19.2	21.7	23.0	24.1	23.6	23.5	23.3
Indian/Asian	11.7	11.9	9.1	11.3	9.3	12.1	12.4	15.7
White	5.2	4.4	6.2	6.0	6.1	7.3	6.6	7.2
Total	23.2	23.0	25.1	24.8	25.0	25.0	25.2	26.4

Source: StatsSA (2015)

Table 1 illustrates the racial profile of youth joblessness. Peri-urban and rural youth are mostly affected this crisis. The most commonly recognised vulnerability factor appears to be poor location and scarcity of natural resources (Hurni, Wiesmann and Pascal 2004). ‘Youth who are disengaged from the labour market and education are considered especially vulnerable to chronic unemployment, poverty and social exclusion’, write Frame et al. (2016, 13).

It is widely recognised worldwide that social exclusion and marginalisation produce deep and long-term damage to the living conditions, social and emotional life, and health status of young people (World Economic Forum 2014). In turn,

insecurity in living standards, political and social isolation, feelings of estrangement, and unhealthy lifestyles aggravate pre-existing condition of social exclusion (Paolina 2014; Woolley 1998).

Social exclusion is multidimensional and can encompass a lack of access to employment, legal redress and markets; a lack of political voice; and poor social relationships. The British Department for International Development (DFID) defines social exclusion as ‘a process by which certain groups are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, caste, descent, gender, age, disability, HIV status, migrant status or where they live’ (Betts, Watson and Gaynor 2010, 6).

‘Marginality’ is generally used to describe and analyse socio-cultural, political and economic spheres, where disadvantaged people struggle to gain access (societal and spatial) to resources, and full participation in social life. Marginality can be defined as ‘the temporary state of having been put aside, of living in relative isolation, at the edge of a system (cultural, social, political or economic)...when one excludes certain domains or phenomena from one’s thinking because they do not correspond to the mainstream philosophy’ (IGU 2003, cited in Omede 2013, 63).

MARGINALITY AND EDUCATION

Education is a basic human right and, for that reason, Goal 2 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is to achieve universal primary education (see the United Nations’ *Education for all: Overview*). In South Africa, the 2011 Census (StatsSA 2012) reports that only 40.7% of the population aged 20 years and older had completed at least secondary schooling, which is very low for a country that prides itself on education being a key priority.

It is commonly agreed that education is a major tool in the fight to alleviate poverty globally and in South Africa, and this is the reason for the ever-expanding budget assigned to education. However, a number of constraints have been identified in the structures or systems in education. Critical to note is the school dropout rate of youth aged 15–18. This is of great concern as learners who drop out of school reduce their chances of secure employment in an increasingly technologically intensifying economy. As a result they remain in the confines of structural unemployment, which in turn forces them to be reliant on their relatives for sustenance.

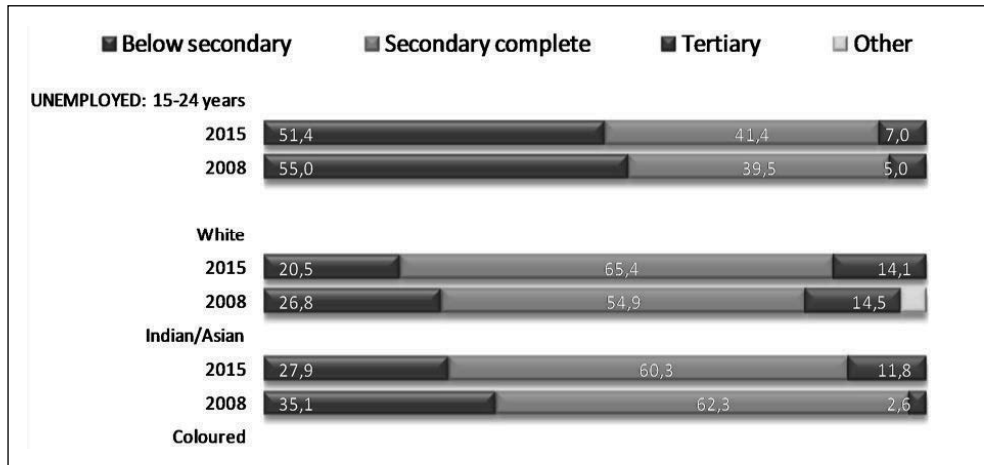


Figure 4: Level of education of unemployed youth aged 15–24 by population group, 2008–2015

Source: StatsSA (2015)

This reality is of great concern as the majority of vulnerable youth (black 57.1% and coloured 70.1%), especially in the ages 24–34 (see Graph 3 below), have not completed matric, which is a basic requirement for tertiary admission and also increases chances of employment. The longer young people stay without employment, the more their chances of ever finding a job are diminished (Posel 2013). Failure to access post-school opportunities like tertiary education and employment can drive young people to deviant behaviour such as engaging in criminal activities.

Research shows that young people constitute the majority of both victims and perpetrators of crime (Muncie 2009). Alarming statistics have shown that the majority of the youth aged 16–24 (54.4% in 2011; 53.4% in 2014) have experienced assault crimes, which is a significantly higher percentage than that of other age groups. To date, this trend is an on-going concern as indicated by 92% of South African youth participants who expressed concern that crime will affect their future in the millennial dialogue sessions (Foundation for European Progressive Studies 2016).

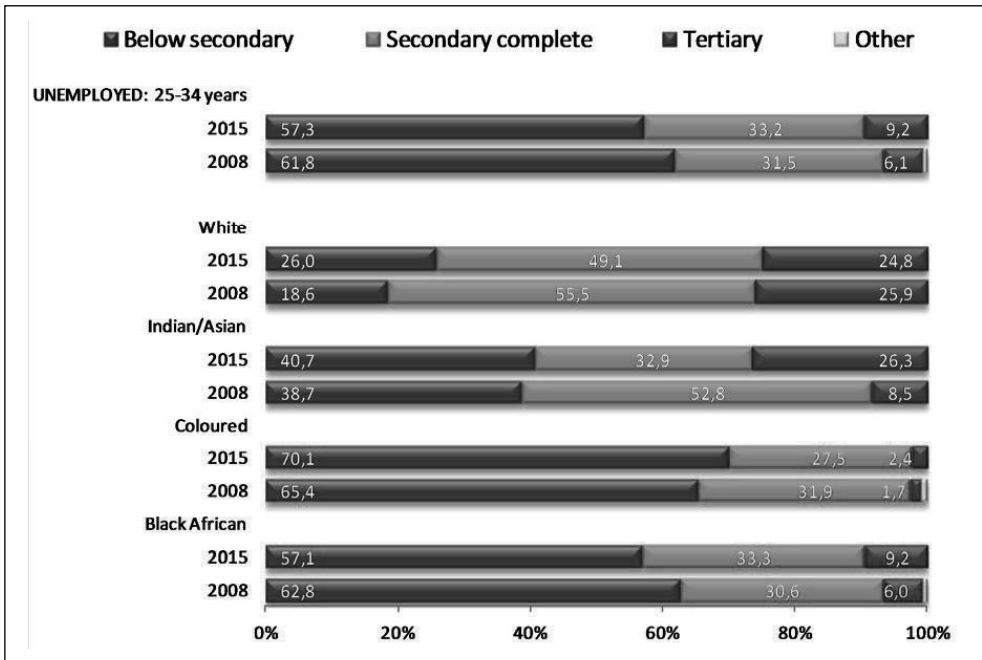


Figure 5: Level of education of unemployed youth aged 25–34 by population group, 2008–2015

Source: StatsSA (2015)

Across the globe, marginality occurs spatially and socio-economically at different intensities and typologies (UGU 2003 as cited in Gurung and Kollmair 2005), creating various forms of vulnerabilities for marginal regions and people. The three dimensions of marginality are societal, spatial and overlapping factors.

Societal marginality reflects the underlying societal conditions of people represented by poor livelihood options (lack of resources, skills and opportunities), reduced or restricted participation in public decision making, less use of public space, lower sense of community, and low self-esteem (Brodwin 2001; Larsen 2002).

Spatial marginality is usually linked to the geographical remoteness of an area from major economic centres (location), and refers to areas that are difficult to reach (access) in the absence of appropriate infrastructure and are therefore isolated from mainstream development (Brodwin 2001; Müller-Böker, Geiger and Geiser 2004). The weight of this marginality is felt more by those who reside in the periphery; these are remote areas that are poverty stricken and settlements that are situated on the urban outskirts, which are far from economic opportunities and quality public services. The following table suggests the possible indicators for marginality.

Table 2: Suggested indicators for marginality

Subject	Indicators
Societal	Child labour; gender inequalities; social exclusion; human rights violations
Infrastructure	Access to clean water; distance to transportation, bank, and communication facilities; energy supply
Health	Life expectancy; infant mortality; under-and malnutrition
Education	Literacy rate, gross enrolment ratio
Political	Participation in elections; corrupt index; security status (violence, crime)
Economical	GDP per capita; unemployment rate
Environmental	Environmental pollution; conditions of natural resources
Development Index	Human Development Index (HDI); Gender Related Development Index (GDI); Human Poverty Index (HPI)

Source: Gurung and Kollmair (2005)

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND UNEMPLOYMENT: AN APPRAISAL

For the purpose of this article, five indicators of social cohesion have been identified for exploration. The section below discusses the implications of youth unemployment on social cohesion in South Africa. We further look at various social cohesion efforts and youth development initiatives that South Africa has undertaken in order to answer the subsidiary research question: do such considerations necessitate holistic and context-specific policies and strategies to promote social inclusion.

Indicators of Inclusion

It is well understood that developing the youth means investing in the future. Oliver Tambo opined that the progressive trajectory of society is best measured by how it invests in the development of its youth. As such, Ngcaweni, Matemba and Lentsoane (2014, 11) defined youth development as:

Youth development is all about assisting young people to attain their full potential to enable them to assume their role in society now in their present status and later in life as adults. It is in this line of logic of reasoning that the role of the young people in social cohesion is often conceptualised.

Youth development has a direct and positive impact on social cohesion. In addition, benefits of social cohesion are best described by Kearns and Forrest (2000), Chan et al. (2006, 286) and Easterly et al. (2006), who propose five domains for the purposes

of conceptualising, understanding, measuring, monitoring and reporting on social cohesion, as follows:

- **Common values and a civic culture** – the promotion of common aims and objectives; common moral principles and codes of behaviour; support for political institutions and participation in politics (Kearns and Forrest 2000; Chan et al. 2006, 286; Easterly et al. 2006, 106);
- **Social order and social control** – the promotion of the absence of general conflict; absence of incivility; effective informal social control; tolerance; respect for difference, and inter-group cooperation (Kearns and Forrest 2000; Chan et al. 2006, 286; Easterly et al. 2006, 108);
- **Social solidarity and reductions in wealth disparities** – the promotion of harmonious economic and social development; redistribution of public finances and of opportunities; equal access to services and welfare benefits; and ready acknowledgement of social obligations and willingness to assist others (Kearns and Forrest 2000; Chan et al. 2006, 286; Easterly et al. 2006, 107);
- **Social networks and social capital** – the promotion of a high degree of social interaction within communities and families; civic engagement and associational activity; and easy resolution of collective action problems (Kearns and Forrest 2000); and
- **Place attachment and identity** – the promotion of strong attachment to place, i.e. sense of pride and belonging; and inter-twining of personal and place identity (Kearns and Forrest 2000).

The five domains advocated by Kearns and Forrest, Chan et al. (2006) and Easterly et al. (2006) on how to report on social cohesion should serve as basic indicators for measuring the extent to which employment results in greater levels of inclusion, particularly in South Africa.

Does Unemployment Lead to Social Exclusion?

It is imperative that one takes the implications of youth unemployment into consideration in attempts to forge greater social cohesion in the country. Beyond the tangible rewards of being employed, such as having a source of income and attaining skills, it is the intangible benefits of employment that play a significant role in establishing lasting social cohesion in South Africa. That is, people must have a sense of independence, achievement and freedom in order to fully embrace diversity, have a sense of belonging and a high level of political and social participation in building and unifying South Africa into a country of prosperity and development.

In order for this to happen, all South Africans, including the youth, must be included in this process. It is therefore important that people have the opportunity

to work and make a meaningful contribution to the productivity of the economy and society, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity or level of education. Most importantly, priority must be given to the youth and the less skilled (National Treasury 2011).

South Africa has achieved only one out of the five identified indicators identified for assessing social cohesion. The achieved indicator relates to common values or a strong sense of national identity. That is, young South Africans exhibit high levels of national identity. The majority of the youth are proud to be South African. Also, they believe that having a South African identity forms part of how they perceive and see themselves. Furthermore, they wish to extend this self-awareness to future generations (Presidency 2015).

On the other hand, there are three indicators that South Africa needs to prioritise in order for the country to be more inclusive – without necessarily watering down others. The three indicators are: social order and social control; social solidarity and reduction in wealth disparities; and social networks and social capital. Most of these indicators are directly or indirectly connected to the youth unemployment rate in the country. Youth unemployment is exacerbated by very low participation rates within the labour market. Only 24.4% of the youth are active participants in the labour market. If South Africa were to improve the participation rate to levels comparable to other emerging economies, a significant number of people would be integrated into the labour force, thus directly improving the levels of social cohesion in the country.

Moreover, reliance on social assistance does not contribute to enhancing social cohesion in the country. That is, social grants do not have any positive and lasting impact on income inequality, and thus do not improve the level of inclusion in the same way that employment does. As a consequence, social grants do not offer people the ability to become active agents in economic growth and development (National Treasury 2011).

Consequently, most of South Africa's youth have decided not to participate in political processes such as elections as they are dissatisfied with the current initiatives by government. In fact, of the approximately 73% of the South African population which is under the age of 39 years (Tracey 2013), 37% of South African millennial research participants were reported not to have registered for the 2016 municipal elections (Foundation for European Progressive Studies 2016).

Moreover, in recent years little has changed regarding the youth's perception of politics and political involvement. For instance, during the 2014 elections, only 59% of those aged between 18 and 29 were registered to vote (Schulz-Herzenberg 2014). This seems to indicate that the youth feel they cannot influence or engage in the democratic processes of the country. As such, young people have chosen to exclude themselves from political activities (Tracey 2013). Hence, what we are witnessing

is that the youngest South Africans eligible to vote (18–25 years) are less likely to participate in conventional forms of politics, such as voting (Presidency 2014).

That is, young people tend to be less interested in politics, reading the newspaper or attending local community meetings related to elections and activism (Mattes and Richmond 2014).

In addition to the levels of voter registration, the voter turnout among the youth has also decreased. In 2011, the turnout of young people aged 20–29 and 30–39 years was around 9–10%, but lower than the estimated national average of 58%. In light of the aforementioned statistics, young voters are less likely to participate in elections than other age groups (Scott, Vawda and Swartz 2012, 21).

To compound the challenge even further, the occurrence of alcohol and drug abuse increased by 5% among the youth between 1998 and 2003 (Presidency 2014). By 2008, there seemed to be no improvement. More specifically, there appears to have been an increase in binge drinking, especially among young women (Presidency 2014). Mortality related to alcohol consumption escalated from 50% in 2002 to 54% in 2008 (Presidency 2014). The use of illicit drugs among the youth, challenges of data verification notwithstanding, has serious health consequences. While drug abuse is not as prevalent as alcohol and tobacco consumption, drug abuse is often accompanied by more intricate challenges to address regarding addiction and broader institutional and societal responses to the challenge (NYDA 2009; Presidency 2014).

The combination of alcohol and drug abuse among the youth often leads to criminal and violent behaviour. Alarming, violence among the youth has become the leading cause of unnatural deaths, particularly among men. Drug and alcohol abuse has contributed significantly to gang violence. This is made worse by the proliferation of firearms, which fuels violence social crime (Presidency, 2014).

In 2008, approximately 19% of school learners were part of a gang and 21.2% had been approached to participate in gang activities (Presidency 2014). Demombynes and Ozler (2005) found a positive correlation between unemployment rate and armed robbery and murder. Leoschut and Bonora (2007, 93–95) interviewed young offenders and found that unemployment and poverty were often the primary motivations behind criminal offences.

Furthermore, as a consequence of the high unemployment rate, young people have become active participants in service delivery protests around the country. Such activities illuminate key areas in which greater inclusion could be achieved. In 2013, 24%, compared to 12% in 2003, of the population identified service delivery as a matter of concern (Presidency 2015). Additionally, a large percentage of the youth are unhappy with the level of service delivery. The current municipal demonstrations illuminate that the youth, particularly the unemployed youth, have participated with great dynamism in these protest actions (HSRC 2005). Correspondingly, the Afrobarometer (2016) recorded high rates of self-reported participation in protests among the youth.

The concerns of young people should be addressed with great care since they are the future custodians of South Africa's hard-earned democracy (HSRC 2005; Presidency 2015).

Violent service delivery protests often originate from frustrations felt by previously disadvantaged communities (see Banjo and Jili 2013; Langa and Kiguwa 2013). Interestingly, reports often cite that such demonstrations are instigated by young unemployed individuals, facing challenges of scarce employment opportunities. In 2012, 35.1 % of the youth felt that it was better to bypass the law and legal solutions in order to have immediate solutions to problems, and a further 24.3% believed that they were not obligated to follow the laws of a government they did not elect to be in a position of authority. Furthermore, between the 2004 and 2009, there was an increase in occurrences of crowd management or protests from 2.1 daily to 2.9 daily respectively (IJR 2012).

The main reason for protests appears to be discontent with the provision of basic public services such as clean running water, sanitation, electricity and health services, predominantly in informal settlements (Alexander 2010, 31; Tamukamoyo 2013). In addition, poor infrastructure, unemployment and poverty do not make the pressures of life any easier (Burger 2009; Langa and Kiguwa 2013, 21). Moreover, the causes of such violence can also be attributed to marginalisation, lack of community representation and the lack of economic and social inclusion (Tamukamoyo 2013). Although violent protests by young people also occurred during the apartheid era, the role of the unemployed youth in the current protests, in post-apartheid South Africa, remains a crucial factor in building social cohesion. These factors serve as a reminder that:

The socio-economic health of a country has a bearing on the quality of citizenship...those whose socioeconomic circumstances are unsatisfactory feel that their status as citizen is less and less relevant to the realities of their lives... In so far as people believe that the state – in effect the institutional embodiment of the nation – has a duty of care towards them, the thinning of the state's efficacy undermines the meaning of citizenship (Chabal 2009, 101).

Overview of Social cohesion efforts in South Africa

South Africa has implemented a range of interventions aimed at promoting inclusion. In August 2014, the Gauteng government convened a social cohesion summit, in its latest efforts to boost social cohesion in South Africa and the populous province of Gauteng in particular (Gauteng Provincial Government (2014). This was, however, not the only initiative that South Africa attempted to implement. The timeline below illuminates some of the initiatives:

- In 1997, then President, Nelson Mandela, in his political address to the African National Congress held in Mafikeng, raised concerns around issues of moral

decay and social cohesion. This resulted in a series of broad consultative processes with several stakeholders working together under the leadership of national government. The Moral Regeneration Movement was later born. Subsequent calls were made for a Charter of Positive Values and a Bill of Responsibilities. Social security was also extended (after the resolutions of the Stellenbosch Conference) as a way of bridging the income and poverty gaps.

- In 2006, the *Nation in the Making* report was released discussing macro-social trends. Popularly known as the Macro Social Report, the document cited improvements in many aspects of socio-economic transformation but also warned of growing inequality and called for the intensification of social cohesion and nation-building interventions.
- In 2007, the Cabinet Lekgotla approved a macro-social strategic framework on the implementation of programmes and campaigns in order to address weak or negative indicators of social cohesion and social justice, such as poverty, unemployment, intolerance and all forms of discrimination. Significantly, once again, employment promotion was identified as the most important driver of social cohesion.
- A colloquium on social cohesion was held in 2009. Among its resolutions was a proposal for government to work with all sectors of society to strengthen social cohesion and nation-building.
- The national social cohesion summit was held at Kliptown in 2012, adopting a national social cohesion strategy for implementation by all social partners and sectors of society.

Most significantly, the majority of these initiatives recognise that greater levels of social cohesion require collaborative efforts across sectors of society: government, business, organised labour and civil society. However, for the above-identified initiatives, resolving the issues of unemployment remains a priority but it does not explicitly stipulate how youth unemployment will be tackled, let alone identify youth unemployment as a core focus.

Selected youth development initiatives

In South Africa the National Youth Policy (NYP) 2009–2014 was intended to guide the country's approach on youth development. The policy specifically targets the private sector in mobilising resources to support initiatives that seek to develop the youth (Ngcaweni 2006; Presidency 2009). The Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator stands out as one of the flagship private sector-led interventions. This intervention sustains the concept started in 2006 through the Youth Development Forum (Presidency 2009).

In this connection, Mayer (2011) calls for greater innovation to seek new ways of creating and placing young people in employment programmes such as targeting specific youth cohorts and improving programme performance. Many countries have adopted similar approaches to boosting youth economic participation through a range of measures like public employment programmes, work readiness programmes etc. For a discussion on this and various ways of measuring economic participation, see Hussmanns, Mehran and Verma (1990).

Within social investment and supplier (enterprise) development programmes, initiatives have been developed, such as Shanduka Black Umbrellas and the South African Breweries' Kickstart. There are, however, many more interventions that are gaining momentum. For instance, the Expanded Public Works Programme, the Community Works Programme, learnerships (implemented within the private sector), internships, the Jobs Fund (implemented within the private sector), the National Youth Development Agency programmes as well as the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) are all part of government intervention. NSFAS is probably the most visible and the biggest post-apartheid youth development intervention, given the impact it has had in providing post-school learning opportunities for the previously disadvantaged (Ngcaweni 2006). More recently, South Africa saw the introduction of the Youth Employment Accord which was signed on 18 April 2013 by all Nedlac social partners. The Accord is one in a series of social pacts intended to mobilise all social actors to rally around ideals and to fast-track the implementation of the New Growth Path and ultimately the National Development Plan (Economic Development Department 2013).

The Youth Employment Accord has six pillars which serve as key driving forces of youth socio-economic inclusion (Economic Development Department 2013):

- Commitment 1: Education and training
- Commitment 2: Work exposure
- Commitment 3: Public sector measures
- Commitment 4: Youth target set-asides
- Commitment 5: Youth entrepreneurship and youth cooperatives
- Commitment 6: Private sector measures

It is evident from these pillars that all social partners have a role to play, more so now that the state has also introduced the employment incentive scheme aimed at incentivising employers to give opportunities to young work seekers.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued for greater levels of social cohesion to be forged in South Africa, and for the necessity of fast-tracked improvements in the socio-economic conditions of young people. That is, mechanisms and frameworks are needed in order for the youth to access and participate in labour market opportunities. The indicators of social cohesion we have discussed provide the guidelines against which social inclusion can be assessed. Based on the five guidelines, this article found that the youth have a strong sense of identity. That is, they value being South African and want to pass this sense of identity and belonging on to future generations.

However, it is in the area of politico-economic activity that most young people are excluded. Consequently, the youth do not actively participate in elections. Although participation in elections does not determine the extent to which one participates in political and civil engagements, elections can be a proxy for political participation. As such, the lack of political engagement does indicate, to a certain extent, that the youth are excluded in the decision-making processes within the realm of politics.

Furthermore, the youth's increased participation in service delivery protests is a cause for concern. Also, although there are not conclusive statistical indications regarding the rise of the youth as instigators in these violent protests, convincing research has been done on the involvement of the youth in these protests. This also indicates that the youth are showing signs of frustration and discontent around socio-economic issues affecting them. As a result of this frustration, the youth are prone to feel excluded. Furthermore, the high rates of criminal activities and drug and alcohol abuse are also problematic in trying to mitigate the gap in social cohesion among the youth.

It is in light of these circumstances that focused intervention should be considered. The South African government needs to take the intangible benefits of employment seriously. These intangible rewards include a sense of achievement, independence and freedom. It is these intangible benefits that form part of the building blocks for inclusion, igniting a sense of purpose among the youth. Such benefits also stimulate innovation or creativity in revitalising the economy in such a way that it can accommodate the growing labour force.

South Africa's economy needs to transform and adapt to ever-changing international standards, practices and innovation. Indeed, it is through equipping the youth with the required skills and knowledge that such transformation could materialise. The youth are the ideal age group for instilling change and building stronger foundations for sustained inclusiveness. It is therefore important to decrease the level of unemployment so that they can be absorbed into a progressive and developing society. It is in light of the aforementioned conclusions that the primary assumption is verified.

This article's secondary hypothesis is also validated. Indeed, in order for South Africa to achieve sustained social cohesion, it is imperative that holistic

and context specific frameworks and strategies are formulated, implemented and evaluated. It is through context-specific youth development policies that accelerated socio-economic adjustments will be achieved. This assumption reiterates the idea that youth development and empowerment are crucial intervention strategies for building the necessary human capital conducive to poverty alleviation and ensuring a dignified and more fulfilled life. More importantly, the human capital acquired by the youth is important for innovation, research and development for sustainable economic growth and development (Awogbenle and Iwuamadi 2010).

Although the South African government has taken some steps in forging greater social cohesion and introducing youth development strategies, the solutions to social cohesion and youth unemployment are currently dealt with as two separate issues. There are no specific policies that explicitly take the two issue areas (social cohesion and youth unemployment) as interconnected challenges to South Africa's progress and prosperity. The current policies separate the two issues and one can only interpret or assume that in dealing with one problem area, the other problem is also attended to.

It is therefore important to reconsider how policies are devised, interpreted, implemented and evaluated. It is also important to be explicit in realising that social cohesion and youth unemployment share an intertwined relationship. Furthermore, it is important that solutions are context-specific and deal with the racial and spatial inequalities that characterise South Africa.

As government implements a gamut of economic reforms, it should think carefully about how interventions like the mooted national minimum wage would facilitate youth access to the labour market. If economic reforms fail to prioritise youth economic inclusion, the efficacy of other social investments would most likely be inconsequential.

Finally, although not explored in detail in this article, programmes like the employment incentives scheme (otherwise known as the youth wage subsidy) should move beyond piloting and be implemented nationally without necessarily creating duality in the labour market that undermines quality jobs. It is already established in evidence that young people have agency which can be harnessed when opportunities are provided through quality education, training, health, civic participation and employment programmes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Technical inputs from Lerato Lentsoane from the Presidency and Nozipho Shabalala of Statistics South Africa and substantive guidance from my supervisor, Professor Mary Galvin, are acknowledged and greatly appreciated.

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