

## Social Cohesion: Its Meaning and Complexities

<sup>1</sup>Itumeleng Meko and <sup>2</sup>Dauda Busari

<sup>1</sup>*Indigenous Languages Media in Africa,  
North-West University, Republic of South Africa*

<sup>2</sup>*Faculty of Humanities, North-West University, Republic of South Africa*

### Article history

Received: 20-06-2017

Revised: 10-02-2018

Accepted: 27-03-2018

### Corresponding Author:

Itumeleng Meko

Indigenous Languages and  
Media, Faculty of Humanities,  
North-West University,  
Republic of South Africa

Tel: + 27 389 2686

Fax: +27 389 2504

Email: itumeleng.mekoa@nwu.ac.za

**Abstract:** The concept Social cohesion is relative and a somewhat difficult concept to define. Many scholars have offered varying degree of definitions but the main challenge noticed in the definition, is the multiple definitions based on individual scholar's orientation or ideology. Another problem poised by these definitions of the concept is that of multi-level and multi-dimensional nature. Contemporary scholars of social cohesion have defied a way of treating the concept as a phenomenon with a multi-dimensional feature or as a kind of potentially construct concept structured around many varying indices. Academics and policy makers have unanimously arrived at a consensus that, "Social Cohesion" as a concept, is enjoying an ever-increasing popularity. In spite of this perceived ubiquity in many literatures, the concept of social cohesion is still a hugely ill-defined concept that exact meaning varies from one scholar to another. While some scholars or researchers understand the concept as being synonymous to trust, solidarity and peace; many others tend to be of the view that the concept can incorporate such terms as inclusiveness, poverty and social capital. Sociologists however have associated or aligned the concept to ideas that includes social integration and system integration. In furtherance of the search for a clear definition, sociologists have attempted to simplify the challenges embedded in its definition. They highlighted interest in developing a general theory of social cohesion that is confronted with a complex body of work that involves various definitions of social cohesion and engaged specialized literatures on particular dimensions of social cohesion (e.g., membership turnover, organizational commitment, categorical identifications, interpersonal attachments, network structures) and encourage lines of inquiry that is focused on the specific types of groups (e.g., families, schools, military units and sports teams). The apparent theoretical confusion pointed out by other scholar critically is geared towards a critical view of the concept of cohesion which could be viewed as nothing beyond a "quasi-concept" or "concept of convenience" that can be seen to be flexible enough to allow for tweaking, meanderings and also offer rooms for necessities associated with political action in its everyday activities. The goal of the article therefore is to proffer an in-depth analysis of how the concept of social cohesion has been defined and applied in the literature, taking into cognizance the two traditions used in analyzing social cohesion. The first that has its origin in the disciplines of social sciences such as Political Science, Sociology, Social Psychology etc. Coming after social science discipline is the more recent and increasingly significant approaches that were formulated by policy-makers.

**Keywords:** Social Cohesion, Theories, Meaning, Social Capital, Organisational Commitments

## Introduction

Writings on the concept of social cohesion have its primary focus on running at full stretch from the individuals to communities and nations. Social cohesion is a core concept in the discipline of sociology that is only, comparable only to other disciplines of economics and policy-making. The concept of a cohesive society is currently relishing an increasing utilisation, especially in documentary of government related institutions, nearly all over the world. Politicians as well as commentators on social issues of different ideologies have established some disparities, or perceived disparities to the definition of the concept of social cohesion that arises from an increase inequality income (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009; OECD, 1997) rising crime rate and joblessness (Jenson, 1998; OECD, 1997); diminution of the traditional family system (Fukuyama, 2004); an increase in migration around the globe (Council of Europe, 2004); a rapid increase in the challenges of the politics of identity and a rising culture of individualism as against communalism and growth in the issue self-aggrandizement by races and Nations of the world (Reich, 2010; Touraine, 2000). Many scholars have however argued that the concept of social cohesion is on a declination – a stance strongly supported, canvassed and reinforced by Putnam's (2000) study on the fading off of the concept of social capital in America, the findings equates it with a decline in social cohesion across the length and breath of the world.

The term, social cohesion has been vaguely used to usually denote the existence of or presence of social ties that unites the society together and help to foster an integrated and a stable community. It therefore implies that social cohesion constitutes or encourages a noble cause that is worthy of striving for. Social cohesion as a concept can however be described as a concept that have garnered a enormous acceptance and at the same time being seriously abused. Beauvais and Jenson (2002); Bernard (1999) are among many scholars that have explored or survey its current utilization and have come to accept this much. They have however, found more subtle terms to describe it as a 'multi-dimensional' 'quasi-construct' that, regardless of its contemptuous disregard of the scientific principles, has encouraged policy utilization and has seemingly perfect it as a 'acceptable term' (Beauvais and Jenson, 2002). However, in what ways the concept is precisely defined would invariably become different in some particular way clearly from its seemingly contextual meaning to another contextual meaning, contingent upon the issues that it is being employed to describe or explain. This is without any doubt is what happened when policy makers make use of the concept and it may thus, become inevitable to adopt it irrespective of its long tradition of a very serious theoretical underpinnings that could be subject to both Sociology and political philosophy. This

nevertheless does not eliminate the challenges inherent in usage of the term in social scientific analysis. This paper will therefore make attempt to analyze different dimensions to the definitions of social cohesion that are spelt out by various segments of policy and contemporary academic writings.

### *Definition and Meaning of Social Cohesion*

According to Green *et al.* (2009) "defining the concept of social cohesion in recent studies and by policy makers or scholars have somehow being characterized by addiction to some certain terms and concepts. Summarily the definitions have brought to fore some challenges that has thrown up a number of conceptualization or adoption of social cohesion that are believe to be contributory factors to a society that can be said to be cohesive. These generally include features that are related to individual behaviours and social attitudes, which comprises of established characteristics of communities that are known to be obligatory for a cohesive society. The societal attitudes and behaviours that are commonly invoked or throw up include: Common goals and values (that includes liberty, democracy, equality, freedom, meritocracy, etc.) It also includes such features like:

- Having a sense of belonging that translates or give semblance of common identity (these includes national identity, absence of impunity, respect for the rule of law and inclusiveness)
- Ability to tolerance and respect for individuals feelings and opinions tribes, race, culture, religions and avoidance of culture of impunity in the system.
- Presence of mutual trust and confidence in other individuals that could booster inter-personal and institutional trust
- Having a somewhat civic co-operation, provision of good governance and eradication of corruption
- An active participation in matters of national interest
- Respect for the constitution by abiding and respecting law (so as to ensure a significantly low or absence of crime in the society)

Literatures have identified some social institutions they needed for the existence of a cohesive society. The institutions often cited includes:

- Establishment of institutions or agencies for their common risk and provision of protective covering for the vulnerable in the society (especially in a welfare state/nation). Institutionalized the practice of democracy, strict adherence to the rule of laws and giving due respect to the notion of human rights
- Capacity to redistribute the commonwealth of the state/nation through an equal treatments of all individuals in the matters of levies and taxes with a view to promote equality of opportunity among everyone

- Creation of conflict resolution mechanisms geared towards promoting unity and diversity amongst the populace (Green *et al.*, 2009;8)

It should however be pointed out that it is not every definition of the concept of social cohesion that seemingly includes all emphasize the characteristics can be considered in equal measures. A delineation of policy approaches to the concept of social cohesion according to Jenson (1998), Beauvais and Jenson (2002) and Bernard (1999) have suggested various kind of typologies to distinguish the concept. Beauvais and Jenson (2002), taking a clue from Berger-Schmitt (2000), suggests that it is possible to separate distinctively definitions of social cohesion that emphasize societal truss and encourage associations (communal) activities (e.g., attributes such as social capital) and from the scholars that accentuate or encourage 'equality and solidarity'. For Bernard the distinguishing factor that separates these definitions and emphasize the basic features: (i) Equality and liberty (also known as 'inclusive democracy' – i.e., social security states; (2) solidarity and equality ('participatory democracy' – i.e., liberal democracy) and (3) solidarity and liberty ('pluralistic democracy'). These places great tension between equality, liberty etc and can be clarified only in policy discourses. Bernard's exact meaning of solidarity is however, difficult to decipher, but seems unambiguous in Jenson's (1998) version, he argued social cohesion as being used in the French 'republican' reckoning, is that social cohesion can be said to be social scientists working tools that was primarily drawn from the writings of Emile Durkheim, that evoked a sense of social mutuality of shared values, identities etc. Durkheim's major contribution to sociology as it well known, is the development of "methodical socialization" as the main mission of education and its functions in order to added values to the concept of cohesive society. The damaging effects of the first world war (fww) had a great influence in his thinking on education, as he was a witness to the event in France. Also, the French state as at that time has had an attempt to secularize knowledge so as to reduce the impact of churches on the community. Emile Durkheim's main questions: Were (i) how could the society be held together? (2) What role (s) is education likely to play in that direction? In order to proffer solutions to these questions, Durkheim, had to initially answer the question regarding the composition or constitution of the society. The solution proffered pointed to the fact that division of labour, more or less contributed to (the most celebrated or notable distinguishing factor within "organic solidarity" and "mechanical solidarity"), which simulate a joint consciousness ("conscience collective") that make up the structure of the society. According to Durkheim's argument, the second of the two mentioned is inclusive of acquisition of common beliefs, morality and ideals. Knowledge prepares youthful members of the community in the two instances. The ethical or moral

dimension to this is not however meant to make a distinction between the right and the wrong, but rather, it was meant to further encourage the ways individuals are integrated as a part of a whole (society) and simultaneously encourage individuals to act on their own volition. Socialization has been defined as a means of internalization of individuals to basic societal values and norms. However, taking a cue from the works of Kant, Emile Durkheim opined that socialization implies that the youthful members of the society have knowledge or values of discipline, get education about the group's philosophy and attach themselves to the groups and receive instructions on how things are done on their own, thus, being acquitted with a sense of independence and liberty. On the other hand, Durkheim pointed out that the society is held together because individuals in the society get education on how react to social situations in a specific or pre designed manners. Thus, in exercising this, personal responses to issues somewhat become the same and therefore can be predicted overtime. They therefore, assume the quality of being similar attitude and behaviour, for example somewhat acting alike, but not necessarily have the same line of thinking, implies that social relations is possible Durkheim, 1973. In Jenson's view, good point of departure from Durkheim's postulation he argued is by making an attempt to distinguish between the varying talks or discussions. Most conceptualizations of the term 'social cohesion' placed too much emphasis importance on individual or society's common identities, values than they do for others. Jenson gave for instance a concise explanation of the meaning of Social Cohesion by the French Commissariat Général du Plan that identified social cohesion with shared identities, values by justifiably linking them with knowledge of belonging to the society. Du Plan reported, 'social cohesion determines the social processes that assist instilling sense of belonging in individuals who are domicile in a biotic community and share a community of possession that it is recognized as parts of communal heritage' (quoted in Jenson, 1988, 4).

European Council, examined it from the perspectives of basic rights or freedom to which all human beings are entitled to and in whose exercise a society may not interfere and define a cohesive society as one where 'an agreement of mutually supportive and beneficial community of where members are able act at will and unhampered while pursuing shared goals in a democratic settings (Council of Europe, 2004; 3). For the council noted that the importance of respect and equality for every individual and argued that respect and equality will assist in fostering socially cohesive society. They however argued that a strong emphasis should be placed on common values and sense of belonging but suggested that the latter be considered at a different level. 'Social Cohesion,' as reported by their background research, 'is made up of a secured sense of happiness in a secured relationship among others in a family, a society marked by friendly companionship, same surrounding or nearby, a

workplace, a state or country...' (Heydt, 2003, 12). The Council of Europe again, carefully stressed that for greater cohesion to exist all features are not compelled to be exclusive and should connect closely a multiplication distinct personality of each of the individuals regarded as persisting entity, the major report following a concession reiterated the significance of common values, of sense of belonging and emphasized the need for 'the reconstruction of societal values, loyalty and commitment to the common society goals and aspiration' (Heydt, 2003;12).

Maxwell's (1996) conceptualization of social cohesion merged both the solidarity and egalitarian dimensions: To Maxwell, 'social cohesion revolves round social construct of common values and creation of communities that symbolically interpreted shared identities, that encourage reduction in inequalities or disparities of income and wealth and a community generally enable individuals to have the notion of engaging in a shared business, dealing with common problems and recognize the fact that they are members of the society.' (Quoted in Jenson, 1998; 3).

Summarily, a definition, which evokes equality, common values and shared identity, abounds in discourse around conceptualisation of social cohesion. The definitions, however, are not generally acceptable to everyone. For instance, an increased in social multifariousness, suggested by Jenson (1998) and Bernard (1999), call forth common identities and an unmanageable shared values difficult to accomplish or attain and may nevertheless be suitable to so the individuals in the community. Jenson further argued that paying extra attention to conformity and value could be prove to be socially unsound and can negate or create a conflict for an individual rules of liberty and regard for other individuals traditions. Jenson's (1998) description of social cohesion cleverly evades clarifying either of 'equality' or 'shared values' an essential element for a cohesive society. The concept of social cohesion, according to Jenson, 'is use to give account of the process that goes beyond a circumstances rather it is seen as an encompassing sense of dedication, obligation, allegiance and inclination to live together in peace, congruence and harmony' (Jenson, 1998; 1). The prominence placed on process and 'living as a community', as against living as an individual which is more 'demanding' and have implications for the standards of shared identities and values. This was corroborated in the British government commissioned report on 'Our Shared Future' from the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007; chaired by Darra Singh). 'Cohesion and Integration,' the report which 'is not seen as an exceptional programme or project. Different from race, faith, ethnicity, or any other identity or status. Simply, it describes how we get things done in every society we might found ourselves and our how mutually beneficial commonwealth are used for the goods of the society and individual therein. Secured and used for the benefit of all (Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007; 5) the

findings of the study however, played down the allegiance to value system or identity and a dominant culture rather it envision a diversity of groups with divergence values and identities that can shape the spirit of shared admiration, that is a pointer to harmonious communal norms of neighbourliness and chivalry. Social cohesion and intermixing of a people in a community therefore are thematically set apart but guided in an exclusively beneficial manner. 'Cohesion is to a large extent a series of activities or actions that is required to a guide series of interdependent conditions needed across every communities and amongst all groups that will foster a lasting integration and ensure individuals and groups respects and adapts mutually to the collective growth of the society by promoting healthy living amongst one another' (Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007; 36).

Some understanding or comprehension of the concept of social cohesion places huge responsibilities and encouraged a sturdy emphasis on common identities, a sense of belonging while not in absolute agreement with the principles of equality in the economic sphere which it argued can guarantee acceptable communal identity and common value. The communitarian tradition in the United States of America (Etzioni, 1993; Taylor, 2005) have set a precedence in the acceptable social responsibilities and obligatory impacts of shared communal identities and values, but failed to stress importance of equality as a condition a cohesive society. Robert Putnam a number of writers on social cohesion have also argued and sees common values and norms at the communal stage would buoy up and uplift a well grounded and lively association or relationship that can be regarded as civil, which has being regarded very crucial to a cohesive society but which is rarely mentioned in the definition of social cohesion (Putnam, 2000). Many of the discourse on social cohesion have being weaving around issues of diversity of culture and the suitable solutions to it. These factors may be understood in terms of changing policies that includes assimilation, integration, multi-culturalism and mutual adaption, or social attitudes, such as respect and tolerance of one another and cultures etc. The major challenge is however, how long cultural diversity, that happens to be a fantasy in many countries, is congruous with social cohesion that is largely dependent on a strongly shared value. Following Maxwell definition of social cohesion as "a process of building shared values and communities of interpretation, reducing disparities in wealth and income and generally enabling people to have a sense that they are engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges and that they are members of the same community" (Maxwell, 1996:13b). For Ritzen, "social cohesion is a state of affairs in which a group of people (delineated by a geographical region, like a country)

demonstrates an aptitude for collaboration that produces a climate for change that, in the longer run, benefits all”.

Some liberal nationalists scholars like Canovan (1996) Miller (1995), while contributing to the discourse have suggested that a certain degree of cultural equality devoid of religious, race, regional and ethnic prism is a required and could in fact be a necessary pre-condition for a cohesive society that will shed the garb of prolonged and prohibitive autocratic rule, embrace the system of hegemonic party operations, gain the trust of traction in terms of its mastery of collaborative issues and have the ability to ensure an emotional identification of the people with its activities through a sustained surrender of authority or a general endorsement of its legitimacy by the people. In essence a functioning democratic system that places emphasis on the integration of elected representatives, encourage the provision of salient fundamental subjects and characteristically comprehensive welfare or social security state are essential features required for the process. Democracies across the world require a certain level of value consensus, at least in core areas, they say, so as function smoothly. Therefore, if subjects or citizens will cooperate, understand, freely give up their rights and consent without being forced to perform basic civic responsibilities that includes but is not limited to prompt payment of taxes that goes into provision of basic necessities through the redistributive welfare policies. Citizens also they need to believe that there are no tax defaulters, everyone irrespective of class or status must be willing to pay taxes that will support the vulnerable who are in need of social security. Contemporary leadership has to be proactive and not reactive. The government also needs to consider citizens' participation. The language of discourse employed by the government need to be persuasive and should, as a matter of principle not be abusive and agitated. Governance should allow confident building process to take root in the citizens. Consensus must form aggregate opinion of any issue that affects everyone in the society such that it reflects the wishes of the entire populace. Government responsibilities will include gauging of the mood of the society all the time and endeavor to communicate correct messages to the populace. Government need to share in the aspirations of its people and allow all and sundry to have cause to trust the government at all time. A leadership that intends to foster a cohesive society in the citizenry will not only govern but also ensure that systems that will militate against agitation are not encouraged. Accountability on both the leaders and the leads should flow from relevant instances. According to these theorists, willingness to participate in all democratic government activities should be voluntary and the re-distributive welfare schemes should be built on trust.

The financial wellbeing or lack of it in any society has a long lasting and direct implication on social cohesion. Societal ills such as mass poverty, unemployment and

unfair labour markets, etc., are factors that commonly affect social cohesion and tend to corrode any practice of identification with the state. The resultant disenchantment and distancing from community or state activities, often witness in some instances “radicalization” of the youth in the community and the strengthening of criminal activities, formation of narcotic cartels, establishment of jihadi-terrorists, etc and an improved social cohesion that can only be achieved when consultations that will lead to confidence building and further lead to reconciliations are implemented. Social welfare programmes are understood to mean ideas that provide consumption and income transmissions to the community poor's and assist in protecting the vulnerable against possible livelihood risks and improve social status of the marginalized in the society, with the overall objective being the reduction in vulnerability of the poor, abridged inequality in the society etc.

The concept of social protection has however been more recently deployed as a device and component of social cohesion, with nations ensuring the provision of welfare packages for the vulnerable, which in turn reassures them to be productive contributors to society and by so doing encouraging mutually cohesive society.

Therefore, in the understanding of these realities and the emerging societal threats to a cohesive society, governments around the world have generally embraced a multi-prong method that syndicates conventional security and intelligence systems, with a healthy dose of social protection programmes. Social protection approach may be preventive, protective, transformative or promotive. The protective approach provides social succor or welfare through food and cash transfers, waivers of fees for some social services, school fees subsidies, school feeding programmes, etc. The preventive approach on the other hand help to galvanized social insurance through provision of health insurance schemes, subsidized risk pooling mechanisms premium waivers, etc. The promotive method is assist in the provision of productive transfers, subsidies etc. The transformative approach is to provide social equity measures through equal rights and social justice legislations, affirmative action policies, equal protection, etc.

Putnam arguing from an entirely non-relational angle suggested that, cohesion is based on liberal approach and with efforts more on communities rather than the national state, Putnam argues that increasing diversity is a problem for social capital, which he defines here as “social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness”. He suggested that rising level of inequality between the rich and the poor can undermine cohesion and hinders the growth of an inclusive economic process. He is of the opinion that this will weaken democratic life and can be a threat to social cohesion. The increasing gap between the poor and the

rich will undermine a healthy society and make the attainment of citizens' aspiration and well being somewhat difficult (Putnam, 2007; 137). Putnam deploying data for a expansive sample of neighbourhoods in the United State on what he thinks are the key indicators of social capital, he came up with the findings that suggested that internal forces that may include poor social welfare policy implementation and external factors that could include globalization may have a combine efforts to aggressively increase inequality in the communities. For him, government commitment to financial growth of the citizens may be accomplished with the provision of skill biased technical job opportunities that can lead to an increase in wage inequality by scaling up wages and premiums of skilled labour are the factors he believed would foster inter-racial and intra-racial loyalty, Putnam argued that ethnic and racial diversity is inversely connected to degrees of social capital.

Putnam is however not alone amongst quantitative sociologists who argued that ethnic diversity erodes trust, or other key aspects of social cohesion. Other researches find the same inverse relationship (Alesina and Ferrara, 2002) and there are several other cross-national researches which also purport to show a negative relation between diversity and key measures of social cohesion, such as trust (Delhey and Newton, 2005; Knack and Keefer, 1997), although in the case of the Delhey and Newton studies the ethnic fractionalization variable loses much of its strength in models which include good governance. Letki (2006) who deploys area data from an earlier 2001 citizenship survey in Britain and also discovers that no correlation between diversity and cohesion at the neighbourhood level when other factors, including socio-economic status, are taken into account. Johnson and Soroka (1999) analyze the effect of ethnic diversity on social capital in different regions in Canada and find association. There are also several cross-national analyses that find no association between cohesion and diversity. Green *et al.* (2006) used a measure of ethno-linguistic diversity for a large sample of countries, also found no association across countries between diversity and various aggregate measures of social cohesion. Thus reduction in the widening gap in income inequality between the rich and the poor suggests that nations need to take steps in the direction of achieving inclusive growth. A strategy to achieve inclusive growth is to disproportionately change the patterns of economic growth to favour low-income households.

However, deep-rooted corruption and an entrenched interest social cohesion, the challenge therefore is the possibility of judicious and sincere implementation of programmes. Another strategy that can be used to achieve an inclusive cohesive society is to magnify opportunities for low-income households and disadvantaged groups to have access to employment and encourage them the opportunity for income generating

possibilities. Policies that can remove obstacles prevent certain groups and disadvantaged populations from gaining employment and income-generating activities should be part of an all inclusive growth strategy. Dismantling inequality requires administrative transformations to rescind and address inequitable practices. Legislations that grant equal access to land ownerships are relevant. Creating a social welfare policy framework is important.

Social cohesion as a sociological concept is notions that gain momentum towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> (twentieth) century. The concept attempts to proffer solutions on how the society is held together despite a great differentiation and complexity occasioned by religious, race, ethnic, etc divisions. In social sciences, several studies have been done and as could be expected, in analytical levels and an array of themes. A common challenge for researcher however is to find an all-encompassing and agreed upon definition of the concept of social cohesion. This is not to underestimate the scientific research done; on the contrary, to point is that social cohesion is a highly abstract concept, referring to numerous, as well as diverse, social processes that operate perhaps simultaneously in order to produce the balance and relative stability perceived in a society. In general, the term social cohesion denotes that though modern societies are complex and highly differentiated, the whole, i.e., the collectivity has acquired a balance and continues to do so generation to generation in a more or less stable manner. This phenomenon, named "social cohesion", is ascribed to the existence of social ties that, according to theorists, bind or hold people together. The purpose of institutions and social structures is to sustain social ties and the bonding between individuals. The existence of networks is viewed as sustaining individuals so that they may avoid exclusion from society. Dewey, a philosopher and a pedagogue, argued, using a mechanical metaphor, that school functions "as a cement in the social structure", as he himself admits the effect education has on society (Dewey, 1923; 514). Other scholars define social cohesion as "the forces" that keep people together, or the "total field of forces" that act on people to stay in, for instance, groups. Some scholars like Friedkin are irritated by these kinds of definitions, because, according to them, scientific inquiry ought to identify the "forces" and explore how these operate (Friedkin, 2003; 409). The concept of social cohesion, has also in the meantime acquired a "feeling good favour" that, according to some authors, actually covers up the lack of a "precise meaning" (Brennan and Naidoo, 2008). In terms of studying cohesion, studies in social sciences focused in general on three levels of analysis: Individual, group and structural, or the macro level as they are customarily called. It is not within the scope of this review to review extensively the literature in various disciplines, suffice it is to mention the following main

points: At an individual level it is viewed that when people enter in relations with one another (within associations, for instance) they sustain the collectivity of which they are an integral part. At a group level, the literature considers the factors that facilitate group membership; for instance the notion of "relational cohesion" was employed in order to explain the conditions under which a group continues to exist even if some of its members leave it. At a structural or macro level, it is argued that democracy; equity, tolerance, trust and social justice all contribute to societal cohesion as well as institutions (such as education) that are working according to these principles.

### *Unpacking the Meaning of Social Cohesion*

From the above definitions of social cohesion it may be deduced that social cohesion is multi dimensions. The definitions relatively are dependent on the problems or challenges being discussed by an individual, the society, organizations and nations/states. For some scholars, the concept of social cohesion invokes primarily the capacity to construct a collective identity, a sense of belonging. At other times or in some circumstances, discussions zero in on a society's commitment and capacity to assure equality of opportunity by including all its citizens and reducing marginality. Social cohesion also appears in debates about democracy, including patterns of participation and about the need to maintain the legitimacy of representative institutions such as advocacy groups, political parties, unions and governments and finally, in modern plural, liberal democratic societies, where value conflicts are inherent and social choices are open, social cohesion is a concept sometimes employed in conjunction with the society's capacity to mediate conflict over access to power and resources, to accept controversy over fundamental issues without trying to shut it down. One will therefore discern the following observation:

- For some, social cohesion means primarily the ability to construct a collective identity, a sense of belonging
- For others, the focus of social cohesion is the society's commitment and ability to guarantee equality of opportunities by including every citizens in governance and by reducing perceived marginality
- Social cohesion has also been explained in relation to basic democratic practices, that patterns of participatory and the legitimacy of other representative institutions that includes political parties, advocacy/pressure groups, trade unions and other arms of governments
- In the modern plural and liberal democratic worlds, where value conflicts are inherent and social choices are open, social cohesion is could a times be interpreted in terms of society's ability to resolve

conflict over access to power and resources, to accept controversy without trying to shut it down

Duhaime *et al.* (2004) have suggested six (6) sets of indices that could be use to measure or gauge Social cohesion. The six identified indices are: (1) Availability of social capital: This will include presence of trust and confidence in civic administration and institutions and participation in volunteer organisations and other related activities; (2) Presence of demographic stability: This refers to the capacity to mobilize people, population growth rate of community as well as subjective reasons for moving/staying in the community; (3) Presence of an exclusive social inclusion: It refers to access to the informal networks of social, emotional and material support; (4) An overwhelming economic inclusion: This refers to employment activities and income generation at all cadre of the society; Community quality of life: This includes personal and satisfactory feeling of safety in the community; and (6) An improvement in the individual quality of life. According to Jenson's (1998) social cohesion is often invoked "among those who sense an absence of some sort" and "when a set of problems are evoked" (Jenson, 1998: 3, 5). Because of this, social cohesion can be equated to an idea that includes inclusive participation in the affairs of the state, reduction of poverty, etc. The demarcation between content and condition are often ignored.

In addition there is a pluralistic approach to understanding the concept of social cohesion.

In the presence of this theoretical debacle, a group of scholars have arrived at decision to weigh on the pluralistic approach to the discourse. The pluralistic approach argued that it is only the social challenges of the day that help to shape the concept of "social cohesion". Having appraised the official or quasi-official documents on social cohesion from France, Canada, the OECD and the Club of Rome, Jenson (1998) argued that there really exist many varieties of forms in which social cohesion can be explained and understood. Jenson concludes that: "[a] lesson to take from this very limited overview of... social cohesion is that there is no single way of even defining it. Meanings depend on the problem being ad dressed and who is speaking" (Jenson, 1998: 17). However, instead of providing a single definition of concept, Jenson has "unpacked" social cohesion as it is commonly conceptualized in literature into five different dimensions (Jenson, 1998: 15-17):

- Isolation versus Belonging. It refers to the presence or none of sense of belonging and a sense of shared values and a sense of identity (Jenson, 1998: 15)
- Exclusion versus inclusion. This dimension refers to the equality of opportunities among citizens in the economic realm, that is, the market (Jenson, 1998: 15)

- Non-involvement versus participation. The focuses on people's political participation at both the central and the local levels of government (Jenson, 1998: 16)
- Recognition v. rejection. This dimension concerns the respect for difference or tolerance for diversity in society (Jenson, 1998: 16)
- Illegitimacy versus legitimacy v. This points to the maintenance of legality of major political and social institutions - the state in particular - as mediators among individuals of different interests (Jenson, 1998: 16-17). This

This pluralistic approach has illustrated, again in a recent review by Beauvais and Jenson (2002), examined five different possible conceptions of social cohesion:

- Social cohesion can be seen as a civic culture and common values
- Social cohesion can be viewed as social control and social order
- Social cohesion can server as a form social solidarity and help in reduction of wealth disparities
- Social cohesion can be considered as a form of social capital and social network
- Social cohesion as a place identity and attachment. In a sense, these five conceptions are even broader in

The five conceptions have being considered broader in scope than Jenson's (1998) own postulations. The authors have not clearly attempted in their exercise to identify any conception that is deemed more appropriate than the others since they have all incorporated ideas such as social control and social order. In its plave, the authors have explicitly stated that it is not their intention to resolve the definitional crisis, as "behind all of these definitional choices are important and often long running, theoretical debates about what generates well-being, innovation and so on" (Beauvais and Jenson, 2002: 4). In other word, the definition given to social cohesion is largely dependent to a large extent on the substantial definitional challenges (s) the researcher or policymaker is focusing on.

The multidimensional nature of social cohesion has been considered by some of the earliest authors (Back, 1951) has proposed that social cohesion composed of three factors: (1) The attraction to the group (analogous to interpersonal attraction or social cohesion), that is essentially a liking for the group or the group members, (2) a commitment to the task (analogous to task commitment or task cohesion), which is the extent to which individual member goals are shared with or enabled by the group and (3) a group pride, that is the extent to which group members experience positive affect from being associated with what the group represents or the status of the group (Beal *et al.*, 2003; Carless and De Paola, 2000).

## Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to provide an analysis of the ways social cohesion has been conceptualized in the literature. The analysis looked at both the scholarly analysis from both social sciences and policymakers. It has also become clear that there are many dimensions of social cohesion. For some scholars, the concept of social cohesion invokes primarily the capacity to construct a collective identity and a sense of belonging. While for other scholars in some circumstances, discussions zero in on a society's commitment and capacity to assure equality of opportunity by including all its citizens and reducing marginality. The article also notes that there are many interests in social cohesion ranging from individuals, societies, organisations and states. Contemporary analyses of social cohesion treat it either as a multidimensional phenomenon or as a latent construct with multiple indicators (Bollen and Hoyle, 1990; Drescher *et al.*, 1985; Evans and Jarvis, 1980; Piper *et al.*, 1983).

## Author's Contributions

**Itumeleng Meko:** Author made considerable contributions to conception of the paper.

**Dauda Busari:** Author contributed to drafting the article and reviewing it critically for significant intellectual content.

## Ethics

This article is original and contains unpublished material. The corresponding author confirms that all of the other authors have read and approved the manuscript and there are no ethical issues involved.

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