

Social cohesion is needed to end poverty, inequality

“Social cohesion” is understood as concept that involves building shared values by communities, 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.

I strongly believe that a socially cohesive society is one which works towards the wellbeing of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility.

In reality, social cohesion is a constitutional matter which is enshrined in the preamble of our well-renowned constitution. It states: "We, the people of South Africa believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity".

Fellow South Africans it is the role of all the sectors of our society, including the church, to ensure that social cohesion is attained to the benefit of all.

In John 17:21b Jesus Christ expresses his request to his father as he says, "I pray that they will all be one, just as You and I are one—as You are in me, Father, and I am in you".

Unity and oneness was the plea of our Lord Jesus.

I suppose he was aware of immediate benefits of oneness rather than discontent.

In our own terms, he was referring to social cohesion with benefits that transcends our myopic and self-centred interests.

There are factors that have a great potential to corrode social cohesion. If they are not attended to, they have a great potential to reverse the gains of our rainbow nation.

Those factors include racism, xenophobia, lawlessness, disregard of ubuntu including the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality. There are, of course, others.

These are structural societal challenges that manifest themselves in our communities through issues such as lack of social cohesion and moral decay.

These challenges are evidence of issues that are left unattended to, or where there is no intentionality to deal with them head-on by leadership and society at large.

And as a result, we paper over the cracks rather than deal with the root cause collectively.

It is so unfortunate that all people are affected one way or another if these matters are not attended to appropriately.

The key questions to which we all need to respond are:

1. Where did we go wrong as society at large?
2. What is the root cause of that which we experience?
3. How can we work together to foster social cohesion in the true sense of the concept?

One of the responsibilities of local government is to foster social cohesion. Local government leaders are expected to be in touch with their constituencies in order to help them to adapt to this ever-changing environment.

They should know, understand and care about their communities better than any other level of government. But it seems this is not the case. Political differences usually take a centre stage at the expense of social cohesion and the interests of the community as a whole.

Local government is responsible for delivering economic, environmental and social outcomes across a range of areas which affect community cohesion.

As such, local government is well placed to implement initiatives to reap the benefits of stronger, more resilient and productive communities.

All that is required is the will of the leadership and the officials to put the interests of the community first.

To sum up, social cohesion improves economic growth through preventing physical and human capital destruction, and by building social capital, cooperation and trust between individuals of a society.

The social and economic costs of an absence of social cohesion are high.

The toxic and antagonistic messages that are prevalent in the media tend to be not helpful and leave much to be desired.

We need to be unified in one voice in order to build a strong and resilient community. The church ought to be central and instrumental in building a cohesive community.

Unity and oneness ought to be the order of the day and, yes, in addressing our societal matters cordially.

In reality, a community that is united has great potential to realize the vision of a better South Africa for all.

I challenge all sectors in our respective communities to play their part in building a cohesive Nelson Mandela Metro, Eastern Cape Province and our beloved South Africa.

If it is to be, it is up to us.

Social cohesion is a very important driver of long-term prosperity and competitiveness.

Cohesive societies are politically stable and focus on economic growth and business development.

Social cohesion itself is built over years, not overnight.

We need to be intentional and work collaboratively to build our society. I

it is up to us to build a cohesive society to the benefit of all.

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