## A SHARED FUTURE: APPROACHES TO NATIONAL COHESION AND INTEGRATION

### 1.0 Introduction

Recent experience of social violence in Kenya and many parts of Africa have called to question the nation-state and the nation building project. Historically, nation-building is both a cause and a consequence of a homogenising culture within the state's borders, providing an economic environment that enables the citizens to share some commonality of interests as well as the ability to develop the fundamental elements of national unity. In the immediate postcolonial period, there were many processes at work that tended to produce this homogenising culture, and this was despite the internal divisions and differences that characterised the postcolonial state in Africa. Contemporary economic and social crises in Africa are eroding the cultural, economic and political glues that have been acting to integrate the different elements of the nation-state.

A number of these crises are traceable to the early 1980's marked by the inability of the state to deliver public goods and services, and exacerbated by the ruinous structural adjustment programmes to which many countries were subjected. The collapse of the cold war enabled suppressed voices and identities to reclaim their public spaces. Given the nature of governance that Africa had witnessed in the postcolonial period, marked by the brutal suppression of dissenting groups and voices, the manipulation of state institutions for regime security, the marginalization and exclusion of opposed groups from national development, and the erosion and abrogation of the democratic space, the post-cold war era has been marked by an increasing resilience of religious identities across the continent, often mixed with competing ethnicities, in the political processes of most countries. The dramatic collapse of Liberia, Somalia, Sierra Leone, the genocide in Rwanda, ongoing crisis and violence in Zaire, Burundi, Nigeria, among many others, testify to a sense of profound disorder that has gripped the continent, and which continues to define the challenges facing the nation-state.[1]

# Inside

In the re-establishment of the nation-state project, many countries have followed different approaches. Some of the approaches have focused on redefining the nature of the social understanding that enabled disparate forces to come together to pursue political independence for their countries. In countries such as Benin, national conferences marked a re-establishment of this "social contract" as the basis for a new national understanding on the nature of governance, and how power is contested and used. In others, political engineering through constitutional processes sought to re-define the relationship between the state and individuals, and the state and its constituent parts. Many of these processes are accompanied by deliberate efforts to create a new national identity, and to actively promote and canvass the bonds that hold people together. In this context, many countries either established national cohesion and integration institutions or explicitly embedded these concepts in their development processes.

## 2.0 Conceptual Issues

Cohesion and integration do not necessarily mean the same thing. While cohesion is the process that must happen to ensure that different groups are able to get on well together, integration is the process that ensures that new or existing residents, settlers and communities are able to adapt to one another. Social cohesion is often used interchangeably with national cohesion, and social integration is also often used interchangeably with social inclusion and national integration. They are not necessarily the same though they are complementary. Social cohesion and social integration would refer to socio-economic measures and approaches that seek to ensure inclusion and protection of excluded or marginal groups in national development, while national cohesion or national integration focus on the political aspects of ensuring inclusion. In development planning by many governments, use of the terms social cohesion or social integration is usually assumed to include national cohesion or national integration as well.

## 3.0 Social Cohesion

The term social cohesion is often used to denote social capital. They are connected but social capital is almost always used as an indicator of social cohesion. Even the World Bank uses both terms interchangeably to mean the same thing. The term 'capital' is confusing because many of the characteristics of physical capital do not apply (for example, divisibility, non-negativity, the possibility for establishment of ownership and for market transactions). Social capital means the advantages and opportunities accruing to people through membership in certain communities. It could also be seen as the features of social organisations such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit. Broadly speaking however, high levels of social capital are features of cohesive societies.

Social cohesion may differ in conception in various countries and regions but it is no less important in every society. The interpretation of social cohesion between OECD and less developed countries differ in terms of the themes and approaches given priority. Among OECD countries, discussions about social cohesion are driven by a concern to maintain an inclusive society able to withstand external shocks and the harsh effects of a global economy. In the developing world, social cohesion is discussed more in terms of reconstructing and developing a sense of shared identity. Encouraging effective rule-of-law (especially in post-conflict societies), and developing a new set of formal institutions for managing exchange that complements existing informal institutions, is a high priority. Social cohesion in transitional countries is driven by three general concerns. First, to maintain a measure of equality and inclusiveness as free(er) markets reward the skills of some more than others. Second, to forge a sense of trust, confidence, and cooperation where previously there was suspicion, paranoia, and deceit (secret police, etc.). Third is to construct transparent, accountable, and flexible public institutions for managing new forms of risk and reward.

As a sociological concept, "social cohesion" has existed for a long time. Durkheim had used it to describe the interdependencies within the various elements that comprise a society. In reviewing how societies could maintain their integrity and cohesion despite their multiple ethnic and religious backgrounds, Durkheim came to appreciate shared loyalties and solidarities, which he described as key factors of social cohesion. He identified two types of solidarity: mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity. "Mechanical solidarity is based on the traditional uniformity of collective values and beliefs of a particular society. Organic solidarity is the result of modern relationships between individuals who are able to work together while developing an autonomous and even critical personality with respect to tradition.[2]

In recent time, given the focus on good governance promoted by bilateral and multilateral agencies, it has been used as a framework for examining, promoting and managing the quality and sustainability of societies. In analysing social cohesion, reference is often made to a perceived deterioration in social equality, social justice or social order. There is no unanimity among scholars as to the meaning of the terms. An often quoted definition is that of the Canadian Social research Network (CSRN), which is a research committee of the federal government of Canada that "social cohesion is the ongoing process of developing a community of shared values, shared challenges and equal opportunity

based on a sense of hope, trust and reciprocity among all."[3] The Commissariat general du Plan of the French government defines it as "a set of social processes that help instil in individuals the sense of belonging to the same community and the feeling that they are recognised as members of that community.[4]

An understanding of social cohesion could be based on community bonds, "the promotion of stable, cooperative and sustainable communities"; on shared values and a senses of belonging, "belonging to a community of values" and on ability to work together, "a state of affairs in which a group of people (delineated by a geographical region, like a country) demonstrate an aptitude for collaboration that produces a climate of change". [5] Whatever the definition, it is commonly accepted that social cohesion is present in societies that are coherent, united, functional, and provide an environment within which its citizens can flourish. In this connection, social cohesion could be said to be what holds societies together.

Maxwell argues that social cohesion refers to the processes 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. [6]

Many definitions of social cohesion focus on the community level. It is important to incorporate a macro-political component to the definition. This is important because the quality of government — at the local, state, and national level — has a major bearing on the capacity of societies to negotiate solutions to their problems, and to advance collective interests. Whether those problems or opportunities stem from domestic or international sources, the broader legal and institutional environments in which they occur shape and constrain the range of possible actions, and the extent to which any of them can be successfully implemented. For our purposes, social cohesion could be defined as 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.

There are many approaches to social cohesion. The positive approach seeks to measure those factors that visibly contribute to the quality of life of a society. It focuses on all the processes that establish and reproduce the bonds that bind the societies and thus represents what is acceptable and desirable.[7] These may include living conditions (employment, health, income etc) or factors that are not so visible such as social bonds, values and others. The negative approach focuses on negative features which are responsible for inadequate social cohesion. These features are early warning indicators of the state of health of a society. They include issues of unemployment, lack of income, inadequate housing, lack of access to water, lack of freedom, human rights violations, increase in violence, conflicts, intolerance, racism among others. They contribute in making society dysfunctional.[8]

The territorial cohesion approach covers issues around a territory. It looks at social cohesion from the perspective of ensuring a reduction in differentials or through the development of cooperative activities. It therefore enables the making of comparisons according to regions using variable such as per capita income (in relation to the average) and population density.

For example, there could be stark differences between the urban and rural areas that could impact on social cohesion. The social capital approach includes factors that facilitate the coordination and cooperation of the members of the society which makes them function more efficiently towards the attainment of common goals. It refers to the web of social networks that people establish in order to resolve common problems; obtain collective benefits and exercise a certain amount of control over their environment.

The quality of life approach was introduced by the European Foundation for Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, which was set up in response to the Amsterdam Declaration on Social Equality in June 1997. This approach measures the quality of life of a people in terms of four social characteristics; the degree of economic security, social inclusion, social cohesion, autonomy or empowerment. This approach draws attention to the plight of the poor and marginalised members of the society to ensure that they are not economically or social excluded. The access to rights approach was adopted by the Council of Europe. The aim is to analyse the level of public awareness of the needs of society in terms of: respect for basic human rights; the appropriateness of legal provisions; the facilities and resources for the promotion of access to all rights by everyone, and development in conditions of access, obstacles etc. This approach emphasises the ability of a government to ensure that everyone enjoys human rights equally. It places the responsibility to protect citizens against human rights violations and abuse firmly on public authorities.

It should be noted that social cohesion cannot be a catch-all phrase that solves all problems. Some political partisans with a narrow — even sectarian — agenda have had an unfortunate history of invoking "social cohesion"-type arguments as the basis for their actions. The desire to cultivate a sense of national unity and "purity" brought the holocaust and ethnic cleansing. Social cohesion does not therefore equal cultural homogeneity or intolerance of diversity. Social cohesion is the barometer to measure the extent to which those affected will work together when crisis strikes or opportunity knocks — whether the entity concerned is a community, a corporation, or a country.

To better understand social cohesion, one could perhaps look at social exclusion and its four main causes. In its economic dimension, exclusion is first and foremost linked to poverty. Although in some instances it may be the cause, in general it is understood to be largely the result of poverty. The unemployed are typically excluded from mainstream economic activity and are, therefore, denied access to property and credit. In most of the developing world, long-term unemployment has rendered many people unemployable. The second dimension is social: unemployment does more than deprive one of an income. In most societies unemployment greatly reduces one's status in society. Exclusion takes on a political character when certain categories of the population (women, ethnic, racial and religious groups, especially minorities) are deprived of access to their rights. A fourth dimension is identified as "non-sustainable modes of development". This is development that compromises the survival of future generations, and which excludes them from the benefits of feasible, durable development.

There is a very short leap, conceptually, between social exclusion and social cohesion. Indeed, they can be understood as two sides of a coin. However, addressing exclusion and developing more cohesive societies is a task complicated by

lack of coherence in the understanding of what makes a country or a community cohesive, and when the prevailing orthodoxy equates society with economy. The notion of exclusion raises the point that there are often pockets of disaffected and/or marginalized groups within society — which can cause rupture and stand in the way of development or integration. For instance, whereas cohesive communities are able to identify problems, prepare objectives, develop strategies to meet those objectives and put them into action, distinct pockets of cohesion may fracture and divide the community or broader society and undermine the trust that is essential to collective action. Listening to the concerns of isolated groups, and incorporating them into the broader vision of society is therefore an important task for development planners.

In the context of globalization, social cohesion enables the recognition of the continuous process whereby individuals and groups are included or excluded from participation within wider society. It can also refer to the measure of shared values, or to a willingness, refusal or indifference to face common challenges in a society. These are influenced, in turn, by any combination of a variety of factors such as, for example, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, education, class, physical disability and associations of choice.

## 4.0 Integration

The term social integration was established during the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen 1995) as both a goal and a dynamic process of social development.[9] According to the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, social integration is intricately linked to poverty eradication and creation of productive employment so as to foster inclusive societies that are stable, safe, and tolerant, and respect diversity, equality of opportunity, and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons.[10] In this connection, the failure of social integration would lead to "social fragmentation, and polarization, widening disparities and inequalities, and strains on individuals, families, communities and institutions as a result of the rapid pace of social change, economic transformation, migration and major dislocations of populations, particularly in areas of armed conflict".[11]

The Millennium Declaration (2000) adopted during the Millennium Summit in September 2000 further embodied the principles of social inclusion and other objectives that were adopted during the Copenhagen Summit and subsumed social integration within the cluster of peace, security, development and human rights. Goal 1 of the Millennium Development Goals identified poverty eradication as a major vehicle for advancing development. The 2005 World Summit on Sustainable Development adopted the goal of achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all as a new target under the MDG Goal 1. However, promoting social integration was not fully integrated with the other goals despite their inter-relatedness. Creating a "society for all" remains a mirage as many individuals and social groups remain invisible, voiceless and excluded from decision-making processes. Vulnerable groups such as the socially excluded, youth, women, persons with disabilities, older persons, indigenous people, ethnic and religious minorities, migrant workers and other marginalized groups remain forgotten in policy planning and implementation processes.

Social integration is used interchangeably with national integration. Abdul Majid wonders why national integration is ignored in development planning in Africa. He offers three arguments for this state of affairs. The first is that African

leaders have yet to take direct control over the direction and shape of their countries national development. Relying extensively on technical advice and support from international development actors, such governments focus on large infrastructural projects, economic growth, balance of payments and macro-economic stability as indicators of development.[12] Yet, increased economic growth does not necessarily translate to poverty eradication, and could contribute to widening existing cleavages and divisions within society.

Second is that national integration is inherently complex. Like national development, it encompasses a broad array of interrelated cognitive, attitudinal and behavioural activities. These activities are usually classified with the same labels associated with development. Hence, national integration also contains socio-cultural, economic and political dimensions. Therefore when development agents address the socio-cultural, economic and political dimensions of development, they erroneously believe that they are addressing the dimensions of national integration.[13]

Recent studies on the subject have sought to show that though national development and national integration are symbiotically related, their objectives are different. The goal of national development is "to achieve an increase in a social system's capacity to fulfil its own perceived needs at progressively higher levels of material and cultural well being"[14]. The goal of national integration is to provide cohesiveness to permit constructive and development-oriented societal change to take place. National integration is therefore a subset of national development. Its existence in a social system depends upon the balanced synergism of historical-political, socio-cultural, transactional and economic forces.[15]

The third factor is that national integration operates at an emotive state of human behaviour and this makes it difficult to evolve strategies or projects. The decision to maintain one's affinity with one's social system and others in it is an emotional decision made at the individual level. Its success or failure therefore cannot be measured by post-project evaluations. The success of a country's economic development therefore depends to a considerable extent on the strength of its integrative, cohesive bonds, so that the almost inevitable uneven spatial impact of development does not unduly exacerbate regional differences and tensions and lead to disintegration.[16] Drake therefore concludes that "cohesive factors are vital both to ensure the continued existence of the [social system] as one political entity and to give political stability... For without some measure of integration, both human and material resources that are needed to raise living standards must be diverted instead toward coping with the centrifugal forces of regional disaffection and rebellion".[17]

National integration is the development of identification with the national community that supersedes in certain situations more parochial loyalties. It could also be said to be the progressive lessening of ethnic, cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities in the process of creating a homogenous political community. A community could therefore be said to be integrated when it has:

1. an effective control over the means of violence

2. a centre of decision-making that significantly affects the allocation of resources and rewards, and

3. a dominant focus of political identification for a large majority of national citizens who are politically aware.[18]

National integration occurs when a significant number of citizens develop identification with the nation that supersedes identification with ethnic, cultural or religious groups, acquire political awareness, share common norms and values and develop attitudes favourable to the display of integrative behaviour among people of different groups. In recognition of this, when people believe they belong to a terminal community, whose values and institutions they consider worth preserving, they become less likely to permit conflicts that could threaten the existence of the community. National integration is therefore a dynamic process[19] rooted in the constant interaction of people and is essential to continued interactions[20].

The UK Commission on Integration and Cohesion describes an integrated and cohesive community as one where the following elements exist: first, there is a clearly defined and widely shared sense of the contribution of different individuals and different communities to a future vision for a neighbourhood, city, region or country. Second, there is a strong sense of an individual's rights and responsibilities when living in a particular place and people know what everyone expects of them and what they can expect in turn. Third, those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities, access to services and treatment. Fourth, three is a strong sense of trust in institutions locally to act fairly in arbitrating between people with different interests and for their role and justifications to be subject to public scrutiny. Fifth, there is a strong recognition of the contribution of those who have newly arrived and those who already have deep attachments to a particular place with a focus on what they have in common, and finally, there are strong positive relationships between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and other institutions within the neighbourhood.[21]

Dimensions of integration and cohesion

Mazrui has identified five interrelated aspects of national integration:

1. the fusion of norms and cultures (including the sharing of values, mode of expression, lifestyles and a common language); to create a super culture approximate to a super-ordinate identity;
2. the promotion of economic interdependence;
3. the narrowing of the gap between the elites and the masses, the urban and the rural areas, rich and poor etc.
4. the resolution of emergent conflicts;
5. the sharing of mutual experiences so that people can discover that they have undergone some important experiences together.[22]

On the basis of these five aspects, Paden[23] identifies four main dimensions of national integration: values, identities, linkages and structures. Values are the positive or negative perceptual and attitudinal realities or belief system that yields behaviour of one kind or another. Paden argues that the critical value element in national integration is integrative tendency or integrative behaviour. Integrative tendency is the process whereby individuals and groups interlock their communication habits, share meaning, learn to predict each other's behaviour and coordinate each other's action.[24] A society where integrative behaviour has been developed is marked by the readiness of individuals to work in an organised way for common purposes, and to behave so as to achieve those purposes. Integrative tendency is therefore necessary to generate and sustain patriotism and collective allegiance to a country.

According to Paden, identities are the in-groups and out-groups ascriptions of labels or names to aggregations of people which may have social, political or economic relevance. Identities are therefore points of reference either at national or sub-national levels. A reference to national identification implies a willingness to see oneself as a member of the national community or a sense of belonging in that national constituency. This can occur at three levels: the verbal, the symbolic (for example in reference to the national flag, national leaders, national icons etc.) and the affective (or emotional attachment to the country and its leaders).

Linkages would refer to the tools, mechanisms and processes used to bridge spatial differences between disparate communities. Linkages facilitate interactions between groups as well as national identification and integrative tendencies. They are the links that facilitate movement and communication across regions, including land, sea and air transportation networks; all kinds of electronic communication, migration and trade. Such facilities bring people from different geographic areas together thereby preventing ethnic isolation which undermines integration.

Structures are the historical, political, social and economic contexts that enable the planning and implementation of all other phases of integration.[25] Common structural experiences are important for promoting a sense of unity and identity among people in different areas of the country and of different ethnic, socio-cultural and economic backgrounds. The struggle for independence in Africa provided a powerful historical and political context for building intra-national unity and cohesion. Unfortunately this process was undermined by the nature of the postcolonial state that followed and the gains derived from the common objectives and purposes in fighting colonialism were ultimately lost in many countries.

The Leeds City Council identifies seven dimensions of cohesion and integration:[26]

1. Promoting and celebrating equality and diversity
2. Mapping communities, changing demographics, migration and new communities
3. Preventing the problems of tomorrow through conflict resolution and planning for responding in a crisis, through community intelligence monitoring, preventing violent extremism
4. Strong communications strategy, countering myths, working with media
5. Meaningful integration and "bridging" activities using schools; sport, culture and leisure; work; housing and shared spaces
6. Intergenerational and interfaith opportunities, and
7. Strong leadership, developing a vision for the area, community empowerment and engagement.

Principles that should underpin cohesion and integration

The UK Commission on Integration and Cohesion established four principles that it suggests should underpin a new understanding of integration and cohesion. The first is the sense of shared futures with an emphasis on articulating what binds communities together rather than what differences divide them, and prioritising a shared future over divided legacies. Second, an emphasis on a new model of rights and responsibilities that makes clear both a sense of citizenship at national and local level, and the obligations that go along with membership of a community, both

for individuals and groups. Third, an ethics of hospitality, a new emphasis on mutual respect and civility that recognises alongside the need to strengthen social bonds within groups, the pace of change across the country that reconfigures local communities rapidly, meaning that mutual respect is fundamental to issues of integration and cohesion. Finally, a commitment to equality that sits alongside the need to deliver visible social justice, to prioritise transparency and fairness and build trust in the institutions that arbitrate between groups.

These principles go to the root of the problems of social cohesion and integration in Africa. They provide a vision for society that should underpin all interaction, policies and programmes. These principles are not markedly different from the fundamental elements of the constitutions of most African states, which if substantially applied would contribute to cohesive, strong and dynamic communities and states with strong democratic traditions.

## 4.1 Measuring social cohesion and integration

There is a lot of debate whether social cohesion can be measured or qualitatively assessed. Some scholars have argued that social cohesion as an aptitude has to be proven by showing that it is working, that it does render social change of the type which benefits long-term development. It may be difficult to measure any one thing which can be recognised as defining social cohesion. However there are indicators that can be identified which point to the presence or absence of social cohesion.

There are different measures in the literature, both direct and indirect. Among the direct measures are: measures on membership rates of organizations and participation in organizations; measures on social relations and trust, and performance measures of public and private institutions. They also include the ways in which people view themselves in terms of race, nationality or other markers of identity; the extent to which there is common purpose or a shared set of values; and the extent to which people in society engage in and are part of a recognizable social dialogue. Indirect measures are related to structural factors such as class, ethnicity, and gender inequalities, which may undermine the capacity of different groups to work together, like income distribution measures; ethnic heterogeneity ('ethno-linguistic fractionalization'); measures of gender discrimination in education, income, and health. Those institutions that primarily concern themselves with social solidarity and distribution typically develop indicators measuring rates of inclusion-exclusion, income distribution, poverty and so on. Others who focus more on social capital have developed different sets of indicators. There is much existing data that can be analysed such as surveys, questionnaires and statistics that would constitute such a body of information. Such information could be augmented by qualitative assessments such as interviews and engagement with social actors to determine what their perceptions of social cohesion is.

Social cohesion will be perceived to be present by the extent to which participants and observers of society find the lived experience of citizens to be relatively peaceful, gainfully employed, harmonious and free from deprivation, whether in terms of basic needs such as food, water, shelter, in terms of basic human rights such as freedom, democracy and governance or in terms of culture, language and intellectual stimulation.[27]

## 5.0 Conclusion

There are various types of national policies that are conducive to promote social integration, cohesion and inclusion. Some policies target specific social groups, such as youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, women, people living with HIV/AIDS, migrant workers, etc. Others are more general, but aim to ensure universal coverage, for example, education and public health for all. Other policies and programmes target people with specific conditions, for example, pro-poor policies, social protection, and conditional cash transfer programmes, which aim to protect and/or empower those with temporary or long term disadvantage(s). In addition there are anti-discrimination policies, policies towards more equitable distribution and policies that promote civic education. More recently, rights-based approaches are often used to identify the root causes of systematic exclusion and to eliminate existing barriers to inclusion within various contexts, so that people can enjoy equal rights and opportunities to participate in economic, social, cultural and political life on an equal footing with others. It is important to examine how these various types of policies are interlinked and to create a better synergy between them in order to consolidate national efforts and resources.

The existence of policies pertinent to social groups and more general "inclusive policies" alone, however, do not automatically produce expected impacts on the ground. To achieve the goal of social integration and inclusion, genuine, broad-based participation, and engagement of diverse populations in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, and programmes in all social, economic, political, and cultural areas is necessary. Appropriate mechanisms must be in place to promote and ensure this practice. Such mechanisms may be institutional, such a better coordination, creating focal points or working units responsible for social integration, or approaches to transforming existing policy/planning processes to be more inclusive and participatory.

## 6.0 NOTES

(Endnotes)

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