

**The State of Youth in South Africa:  
SOCIAL DYNAMICS**

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## **Abbreviations**

CJCP	Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention
CS	Community Survey
DoE	Department of Education
LO	Life Orientation
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NYDA	National Youth Development Agency
SNS	Social Networking Service

## Executive summary

The issue of social cohesion is complex and multi-faceted. The paper seeks to examine some of the key aspects of the context in which the current generation finds themselves in that affect, contribute or detract from social cohesion. In the process five aspects are examined:

- *Material wellbeing*, including access to basic services, poverty and unemployment, education and health;
- *Socialisation of young people* focussing on the family, schools and the place of religion;
- Youth culture and identity; and
- *Participation of young people in society*, looking at elections and participation in community and social organisations, as well as the social networking and sport; and
- *Safety and security*: in the issue of youth and crime, both as victims and perpetrators.

A review of these areas show major changes in our society, as South Africa deracialise, urbanise and as the position of women in our society changes. Young people, within the context of rapid changes show themselves to be remarkably adaptable, embracing change such as the continued optimism that South Africa will be a united nations and their embracing of information technology. There are however areas of concern – particularly with regards the material wellbeing of young people and their safety and security.

With regards material wellbeing, the most important factors are education and employment. Despite new opportunities to many more young people, we continue to add new generations of low-skilled workers to the labour force, and we are condemning each year new generations to the ranks of the long-term unemployed. Thus, whilst South Africa has made progress in education, the system still marginalise too many young people, depriving them of second-chance opportunities because they dropped out of school or did not complete Matric. The situation with regards employment and labour market participation is another challenge, and has correctly been called by Labour Minister as a “powder keg waiting to explode.”

Another worrying and related factor is the exposure and participation of young people in violent crime. Although there has been significant decline in violent crime, the figures are still unacceptably high. The numbers of young people exposed to violence are worrying, but more importantly, we are reproducing a culture of violence in places where young people and children should be the safest – at home and in school.

Other dimensions of social cohesion – the family, religion, sport and civil society - face major challenges, but there are important signs of hope – expressed by public commitment to support families, a search for relevance amongst all religions, reaffirming the place of sports in youth development and the importance attached to the spirit of participation, caring and voluntarism.

It is testimony to the resilience and innovation of youth, that despite the above odds, they are immensely positive and are making an invaluable contribution to our society and to our identity as an emerging nation. They are indeed our most valued assets.

# The State of Youth: Social Dynamics

## 1. Introduction

(We should) “...remind youth policymakers of a simple but often ignored fact: young people today are different from any of the previous generations of youth. It is essential to ensure that youth interventions are relevant and valid for the current young generation in society and not mired in the realities of times past.” (*World Youth Report, 2005. United Nations, 2005: 2*)

Fifteen years after the end of apartheid, we are dealing with a whole new post-apartheid generation of 15-24 year olds, who not only grew up in a completely different South Africa from that experience by previous generations, but also a very different world. In a lot of ways, it is this generation that is the yardstick of whether we have made progress towards building a society with the capabilities to ensure the welfare of all its citizens young and old, that are making progress in addressing disparities and have begun to overcome the polarisation of the past.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the social dynamics confronting young people and social cohesion in the context of current youth population scenarios, focussing on a set of dimensions of social cohesion: (a) material conditions and inequality; (b) social order and safety; and; (c) political and civic participation, social capital and networks. It will look at those dimensions of social cohesion, which has the most significant impact on the social inclusion or exclusion of the post apartheid generation of young people.

The paper will discuss the issues of youth material wellbeing, socialisation, identity and culture participation and networks through a review of secondary materials, highlighting the issues and emerging trends, and hopefully in the process profiling the main obstacles to the full inclusion and contribution of young people to our society.

## 2. The youth bulge, opportunity or threat

Youth in our societies, wrote Thomson et al (2004:xiii), “tends to be seen as a problem: either as sources *of* trouble or *in* trouble.” It is thus not surprising that the bulk of early writings about the phenomena of a ‘youth bulge’ – defined as the presence of large youth cohorts in a country’s population linked to falling mortality and fertility rates - have been largely negative. For example, Gunnar Heinsohn (quoted by Caldwell, 2007) argued that “an excess in especially young adult male population predictably leads to social unrest.” The link between large youth populations and social strife – what Caldwell, 2007 calls the ‘dangerous duo of youth and war’ - is said to be explained by the fact that “ a large proportion of young adults and a rapid rate of growth in the working age population tend to exacerbate unemployment, prolong dependency on parents,

diminish self-esteem and fuel frustrations.” (Cincotta, quoted in Beehner, 2007:1).

It was not until the World Bank (2007) report titled “*Development and the next generation*” drew attention to the potential benefits of the largest youth bulge in history, that the tide started shifting. The report makes the case that the demographic transition in many developing countries has resulted (or will result) in a situation where the proportion of the population active in the labour market is large relative to those who are not – therefore household dependency ratios are low and per capita income rises. This is known as a ‘demographic dividend’, which is delivered through a number of mechanisms, with labour supply, savings and human capital as the most important (Arowolo and Kamungoma-Dada, 2007).

The debate about the potential of the ‘demographic dividend’ thus presents affected countries with two choices: either to implement targeted and mutually reinforcing policies that can help to create a ‘virtuous cycle’ of sustained growth; or conversely, fail to act and miss opportunities for economic growth or worse, risking high unemployment, increased crime rates and political instability.

This spectre of a choice between ‘doing the right thing’ or a downward spiral is one which youth policy in South Africa have been grappling with since the beginning of the end of apartheid. More recently, the HSRC *Youth Policy Initiative* in 2007, in response to the question “why youth and why now?” responded thus:

*“How prepared is South Africa to make the most of this demographic dividend? We know that the current youth cohort is the best educated ever, they are the healthiest sector of the population, and our constitution grants them agency and platforms to influence political processes and civic life. Yet two to three decades of research, as well as prior investments in youth development, leave us with many unanswered and some emerging questions.”*

HSRC, 2007

One of the unanswered and emerging questions is the impact of the current youth population scenarios on social cohesion and how this is likely to unfold into the future. With falling fertility rates, South Africa has a youth bulge, which should become more significant over the next decade (Arowolo and Kamungoma-Dada, 2007). In fact, it is argued that the country is already some way into the youth bulge, but will still experience large numbers of young people in absolute terms and as a proportion of the total population for the next few decades (Panday and Richter, 2007:17 and Makiwane and Chimere-Dan, 2009).

We thus have a very narrow window of opportunity, “to ensure appropriate levels of education, health and economic participation. If not, the opposite result may ensue – with a large population of teenagers and young people who are unemployed and alienated” (Altman, 2009 citing Bloom, et al, 2002). Panday and Richter in their overview of the *HSRC Youth Policy Initiative* hone in on the nature of this ‘opportunity: threat’ dichotomy facing post-apartheid South Africa with regards to its youth:

*“The dual reality of the South African context – with some modest strides made in youth development, but equally enormous challenges remaining – creates a conundrum. While access to schooling is expanding, how can we assist more youth people to complete their education? Given that our youth are the best educated ever, how can we draw them into the economy and benefit from their talent? With expanded access to family planning, how can we enable young people to choose when and with whom they want to have children? When institutions and opportunities exist for young people to participate meaningfully in civil society, how can we help them to get and stay involved? And what second chances can we offer the large cohort of youth who have fallen out of the mainstream?” (Panday and Richter, 2007:17)*

This dual reality, of expanding opportunities on the one hand and continued processes of exclusion, rest at the heart of the issue of social cohesion and how young people view their place in our society and how society includes or excludes youth.

### **3. The concept of social cohesion**

#### **3.1. Dimensions of social cohesion**

The concept of social cohesion as used today followed in the footsteps of the social exclusion-inclusion paradigm, which was used in the 1990’s to explain globalization’s ‘winners and losers,’ between nations, but increasingly within nations. Thus, debates about social cohesion heralded a renewed concern with issues of equality and social inclusion. The Council of Europe (2004:3) in its *Revised Strategy for Social Cohesion*, defines social cohesion as “the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding polarization.” Kawachi and Berkman (2000: 175) define social cohesion as both the “absence of latent conflict, whether in the form of income/wealth inequality, racial and ethnic tensions, disparities in political participation or other forms of polarization, and the presence of strong social bonds as measured by levels of trust and norms of reciprocity, the abundance of associations that bridge social divisions (civil society) and the presence of institution of conflict management (e.g. responsive democracy, an independent judiciary and an independent media).”

Yet other definitions of social cohesion describe it simply as ‘the glue or bonds that bring people together’ (Ngcaweni, 2006) or the processes and experiences that help build a common sense of belonging to the same community (Canadian Heritage, 1995).

The definitions encompass both material elements (welfare of all, disparities) as well as social elements (bonds, polarization, security, participation). As a rather complex concept, social cohesion can include a range of dimensions, such as material conditions and inequality; social order and safety; social networks; identities, culture and values; and social, political and civic participation and engagement. According to Vergolini (2008:1) the main indicators of social cohesion may include criminality rates, unemployment rates, levels of education,

racist attitudes, indexes of income inequality, diffusion of social benefits, voting participation, newspaper readership or number of cultural voluntary associations. (Wilkinson 1996; Berger-Schmitt 2000; Rajulton et al. 2007)

Social cohesion in South Africa is an important issue, given the country's history of social division, separation and strife, and the policies of successive colonial and apartheid administrations', which deliberately placed the welfare of the minority over that of the majority. Democratic South Africa thus inherited not only a polarised society, but a deep legacy of structural inequality and separation in virtually every aspect of life. South Africa already has high levels of youth unemployment, as well as high levels of violent crime. Whether this will result in political instability remains to be seen, though the 2008 xenophobic attacks on immigrants and the 'service delivery protests' of 2009 may be indicators of the potential for discontent to spread and become violent.

Faced with such choices, the issue of social cohesion and context becomes critical. Staveteig, (2003), for example, challenged the seeming inevitable link between the youth bulge and social conflict by earlier writers, arguing that violent conflicts with young populations only flares up under certain enabling contextual conditions. These factors may include weak institutions and weak social cohesion, high levels of inequality and of social exclusion.

Fifteen years after the end of apartheid, government's *Towards a fifteen year review* (Presidency, 2008:117) notes that "a cohesive society whose citizens are well-endowed with human capital is both a goal and a driver for development..." and for that reason "attending to the stresses in social cohesion that have become evident needs to be given priority." In this regard, the *Review* mentions the reduction in inequality, strong and legitimate public institutions and the conflict between values of solidarity and caring on the one hand and 'assertive individualism' on the other hand as amongst the social cohesion issues that require urgent attention.

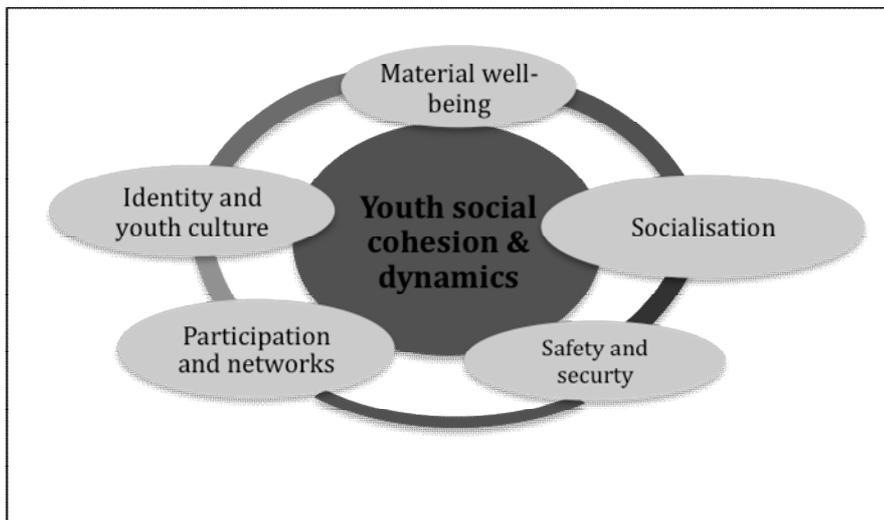
### **3.2. Young people and social cohesion**

The role of young people in society, with a focus on the 15-24 year cohort which include teenagers, adolescents and young adults, have veered between two approaches – seeing young people as 'non-adults' and therefore in need of protection and guidance (as much from themselves as other influences) on the one hand and an approach which recognises young peoples' agency. The youth development perspective combines the positive aspects of these two approaches: that young people live in a society, which have responsibility towards them in terms of their well-being, whilst they are social actors in society with both rights and responsibilities. Thus the *National Youth Policy 2009-2014* (South African Government, 2009:7) locates youth development in the context of building a democratic South Africa "in which young people and their organisations not only contribute to their full potential in the social, economic and political spheres of life, but also recognise and develop their responsibilities to build a better life for all." In this sense, society has responsibilities towards young people, and young people have responsibilities to and in society.

This society-youth-society interaction is a complex web, which can either contribute to various ‘dimensions of marginalisation’ or exclusion or contribute to inclusion and well-being. The general dimensions of social cohesion (material well-being, bonds, participation and security) are also relevant to young people and their role in society. In addition, from a life cycle perspective, the phase of youth is an important phase of socialisation and of transitions. Thus, how young people experience social cohesion and the different dimensions are also very particular, given one of the definitions of youth as a ‘transition to adulthood.’

This paper will therefore look at young people and social cohesion in South Africa today by examining (a) the socio-political and economic context in which they are living their lives today; (b) material well-being issues; (c) their socialisation; (d) youth identity and culture; (e) participation in society; and (f) their security. It will also look at the issue of inequality and social cohesion, since South Africa from a historical perspective has been defined by racial and gender inequalities, whilst the last fifteen years have also brought to the fore the question of inequalities not based on race. This examination of the manifestations of the different dimensions will also look at some of the changes over time, by drawing comparisons with the experiences of previous generations of youth.

**Figure 1: Youth – dimensions of social cohesion**



As we delve into these matters, we should remember that the reality of South Africa as ‘united in diversity’, is also relevant for its young men and women. Not only do there continue to be differences across race, gender, geography and increasingly class as we will show in later sections, but even within these social categories there are further stratifications. There is thus no single ‘youth culture’ or ‘youth experience’, but multiple cultures and multiple experiences. At the same time, though the current generation may not share all the characteristics of Mannheim’s ‘social generation’, defined both by the historical context in which they experience youth and their social agency, they do have a shared context different from previous generations of youth, and it might be argued engage in agency which sets them apart as a generation. This latter issue of today’s

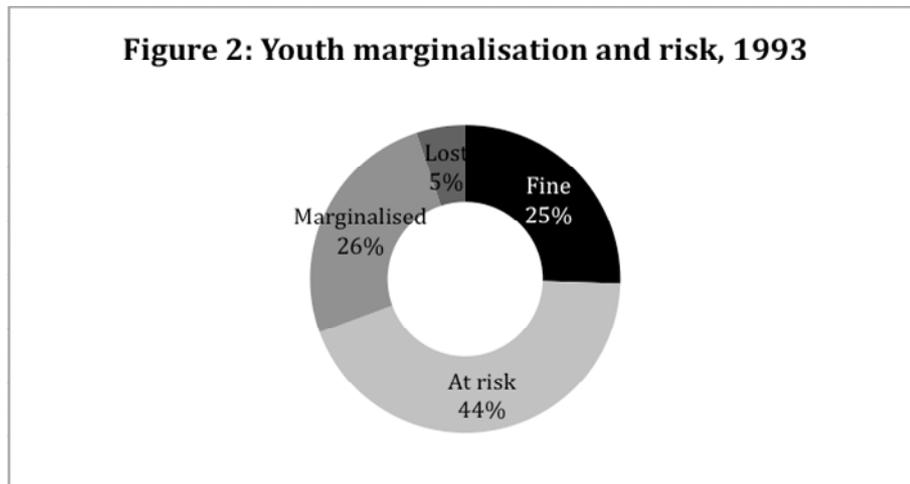
generation 'agency', their conscious and individual and collective actions as a generation), or the absence thereof, is often cited as what distinguish the post-apartheid generation from the generations of youth of the 70's and 80's.

### **3.3. Youth exclusion and marginalisation - the early 90's**

During the late 1980's, early 1990s there was much angst about whether South Africa has a 'lost generation' – referring to young people who participated in the struggle against apartheid, were exposed to and participated in violence; and dropped out of school or did not complete their schooling due to the turmoil in education. This generation, the argument went, may be 'lost' because they will be unable to make use of the opportunities presented by a post-apartheid, conflict-free South Africa.

By the time of the transition in 1994, a staggering 70% of the generation of youth were regarded as marginalised or at risk of becoming marginalised (Everatt and Orkin, 1993 – see Figure 2). The research conducted by CASE during 1992, disputed the existence of a 'lost generation', but nonetheless raised a warning about the widespread marginalisation of young people by key societal institutions and processes. They came to this conclusion based on twelve 'dimensions of exclusion', which assessed the extent to which young people had hope for the future, felt connected to their families, had access to jobs and education, were affected by violence, heard of AIDS and displayed other risk behaviour.

Although the CASE survey conclusively dispel the myth of a 'lost generation', the findings on the extent of marginalisation and risks, played into the public perceptions of youth as a problem or the problem of youth. And yet, Everatt (2000:10) recalled how in the survey responses – despite their socio-economic circumstances - when these very young people had to define themselves, more than half (53%) did so in overwhelmingly positive terms: ambitious (21%), happy (14%), caring (6%), confident (6%) and honest (6%). The first set of negative or neutral self-descriptions came down much lower: confused (4%), ordinary (3%), frustrated (3%), depressed (3%) and angry (2%). This generation was also socially engaged, with high levels of church attendance (especially young women), although youth membership of political structures in 1992 had reached a low of 12%, compared with the 1980's (Everatt and Orkin, 1993).



Source: Everatt, D and Orkin, M. (1993). *Growing up tough: A national survey of South African youth.*

The dichotomy of adverse socio-political and economic conditions and youth optimism is striking. Everatt (op cit.10-11) accordingly recognised that the concept of youth marginalisation used at the time comprised “part alienation, part externally imposed blockage, part optimism, and part uncertainty as to the depth of the effects of the decades of repression and resistance on young people.”

## 4. The post-apartheid youth generations and social cohesion

*“We are the first generation that’s really eating, enjoying, you know, and also kind of fighting with - grappling with the fruits of freedom. Being a born-free means that I experience the legacies of apartheid, you know. But it also means that I have access to opportunities. I have access to freedoms and privileges that my parents, that my grandparents, that, you know, generations of my family never, ever, ever experienced, you know.”*

*Lebo Mashile, interviewed on National Public Radio, August 2009 (Quist-Arcton, 2009)*

### 4.1. The socio-political and economic context

Lebo Mashile’s statement managed to capture both the progress (freedom, opportunities) and challenges (legacies of apartheid) of South Africa fifteen years after the end of apartheid. It represents a profound awareness of how the legacy of the past continues to impact on society today, as well as the possibilities presented by the new order. At the same time, there is general recognition that

the building of a new society will be yet another ‘long walk,’ and that given the deep-seated problems the country face, each step on this road needs reflection.

Fifteen years after the transition to democracy, the *Dinokeng Scenarios* proposed three possible roads, which South Africa might choose: *Walk Together*, *Walk Behind* or *Walk Apart*. It lists amongst the assets and achievements of South Africa in 2009 as (a) its democratic Constitution, which guarantees the human rights, participation and dignity of all, celebrates diversity and provides instruments to hold government accountable; (b) economic achievements such as sustained period of growth after decades of stagnant and negative growth, extension of basic services to millions of people and extending the social security net; and (c) progress in the social sector with regards health, education and crime. At the same time, the *Dinokeng Scenario* process highlighted the liabilities: (a) political challenges such as South Africa’s party system, weak leadership, poor state capacity and accountability and the challenges of nationhood; (b) the need to choose a development path that fosters faster and more inclusive growth; unacceptably high levels of unemployment; the pervasiveness and persistence of poverty and hunger; and the persistence of old patterns of racial inequality, and emergence of new forms of inequality.

These assets and liabilities, and the routes chosen, have an impact on the well-being of South African youth today, which will be explored in the next section.

## 4.2. Material conditions and well-being of young people

*“Social cohesion has assumed a greater focus since 2004, particularly since changes in size and structure, migration and other recent social trends have contributed towards a growing number of people in depressed areas. A key factor in what seems an erosion of social cohesion is the persistence of income inequality. The benefits of democracy have accrued unevenly to different sectors of society, weakening the sense of togetherness, which is the basis of cohesion.” (Towards a fifteen-year review, The Presidency (Presidency, 2008:29)*

### 4.2.1. Access to basic services

Young people have benefitted – as members of households, families and communities – from the extension of basic services (housing, electricity, water and sanitation and infrastructure) to millions of South Africans. The recent Community Survey of 2007 (StatsSA, 2007) shows continuing progress in reversing the apartheid backlog of basic services (see Table 1). Despite the progress, the backlogs in basic services are still high for a middle-income country: nearly 1.5 million households still live in informal settlements; 2.5 million households are without electricity; nearly 5 million without flush toilets at home; and over 3.7 million without piped water in their homes or their yards.

**Table 1: Households access to basic services: 1996, 2001 and 2007**

Households access to basic service	1996 Census	2001 Census	2007 CS
Population living in formal dwellings	64.4%	68.5%	70.5%
Population in informal dwellings	18.2%	14.8%	11.7%
Refuge removal by local authority, once a week	51.2%	55.4%	60.1%
Flush toilet at home	-	49.1%	55.1%
Electricity for lighting	57.6%	69.7%	80.0%
Piped water inside dwelling or in yard	-	61%	70%

Source: Statistics South Africa Community Survey 2007

In addition to the backlogs, there are also issues regarding the quality of services, as well as the pressures of decaying or inadequate municipal infrastructure (especially sanitation, water and electricity), given the often-precarious local tax basis of most municipalities. These issues are increasingly becoming flashpoints at local level.

Makiwane and Kwizera (2009: 226-227) based on the *Macro Social Report* (South African Government, 2006) note that the proportion of young people with access to basic services and goods is lower than the general population. They also singled out the fact that in a situation where young people have relative low ownership of household facilities, “the ownership is also unequally distributed amongst the young people of different racial groups.”

The current generation of youth have much greater access to education, with younger generations generally more educated than older generations, and there has been a dramatic increase in the number of young people among all races who get their Matric certificate and higher education enrolment have also increased. However, Makiwane and Kwizera (op cit: 228) also draw attention to the fact that despite these gains, “uneducated young people in South Africa are more likely to be Africans or Coloureds”, despite gains in increasing enrolments. Sheppard and Cloete (2009) also draw attention to the fact that just under a million young people of the 18-24 years cohort haven’t study as far as Matric, and that even for those who gain a Matric certificate, there are still limited post-secondary education opportunities.

Young people in most societies are usually the healthiest sector of the population. In South Africa, according to Makiwane and Kwizera (op cit: 234) the AIDS pandemic, substance abuse, mental ill health and crime and violence are compromising this advantage. As a result of the insecurity caused by these and other socio-economic factors, young people are more likely to be less risk-averse.

#### **4.2.2. Youth poverty and unemployment**

Whilst South Africa has made progress in introducing and expanding a ‘social wage’ and the social security net, and thus in tackling extreme poverty, the persistence of poverty poses a number of challenges. Government’s discussion paper on *An Anti-poverty strategy* released in 2008 notes that poverty in most

households are because of inadequate earned income, that poverty continues to reflect apartheid's settlement patterns, and is closely linked to the high levels of unemployment. The paper notes that unemployment is particularly high for young people and women, and "as a result, these groups suffered more from poverty and dependence" (Presidency, 2008: 24). The *State of the Youth Report 2003-2004* (Richter et al, 2005) indicated that after children, young people are the group second most affected by absolute poverty. In a situation where nearly half of the population are regarded as poor, 72% of the respondents in the SYR survey indicated that they were born under conditions of poverty. Children generally suffer higher rates of poverty than adults. The reasons for this discrepancy include that poorer families tend to have on average more children and that single parent families increases vulnerability to poverty (Prinsloo, 2007)

According to *Molo Songolo* (2005), 60% of South Africa's children lived in absolute poverty, mostly on the periphery of the cities and in the rural areas. In South Africa, children under the age of 18 accounted for approximately 41% of the population (Brookes-Gunn and Duncan: 1997:54). Approximately 55% of these children were living in the largely impoverished rural areas. Factors that contribute to youth poverty, according to Makiwane and Kwizera (2009: 232) include early childbearing, young people's residential patterns, length of time to complete school, lack of jobs and low wages for entry-level jobs. Furthermore, "it is also common for young people in South Africa to be expected to send regular remittances to their ageing parents or finance the education of younger siblings."

A focus on poverty amongst the younger generations (both children and youth) is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, they, especially children, are at a crucial stage of their development, "one that offers a critical opportunity to influence the intellectual, physical and emotional development of human beings" (UNICEF, 2003:2). Poverty can have debilitating effects on the development of the child and it is important to tackle it at the initial stages of a child's development.

The second reason for the focus is that children and young people are often the most vulnerable members of society, as they are largely dependent on adults. Children are not likely to be able to alter their economic situation. Although this applies more to the children, the same can be said increasingly for the youth (aged 15-24). This is because with unacceptably high levels of youth unemployment - almost twice that of the adult unemployment rate - young people remain dependent on parents and older household members for long periods of their young adulthood, finding their first job often only in their late twenties (CDE, 2008). Only 21.1% of young people in the ages 18-24 years were able to support themselves and just over 58% of the 25 to 35 year cohort, according to Makiwane and Kwizera (2008: 234).

The third reason for the focus on children and young adults is the need to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. If a child grows into a poor adult; this increases the likelihood that they will raise poor children and the same applies for young people who grow up to be poor adults (UNICEF, 2001:2).

Focussing on youth poverty is critical to ensuring comprehensive strategies and approaches. South Africa has undertaken to halve poverty and unemployment by 2014, and certainly tackling youth poverty will have to be part of a strategy to achieve these goals. Thus, argued Curtain:

*“Poverty in developing countries affects most residents in terms of diminished life chances. However, in working out where best to direct resources, it is important to understand who suffers more from the effects of poverty. National poverty reduction strategies, to be comprehensive, require reliable information about the prevalence of poverty among groups, such as young women or rural youth, who have been excluded from benefiting from economic growth in the past.” (Curtain, 2004:1)*

Central to the national challenge of halving poverty by 2014, is the effort to address unemployment. Young people in South Africa, as is the case globally, are disproportionately affected by unemployment. Work is not only seen as a means of sustaining life, but also closely linked to identity, social connections and self-esteem. The labour market conditions of young people are adverse:- high levels of unemployment, long periods in unemployment, and when they find work it is often temporary, poorly paid and in the informal sector (Makiwane and Kwizera, 2008).

### **4.3. Socialisation**

Socialisation is seen as a lifelong process, through which children and youth learn to function in society, adapting and adopting the norms, values, behaviour and attitudes of the communities and society they live in. Socialisation usually takes place in the family, at school, through religious institutions, the media, community and peer groups. On all of these fronts of socialisation, there have been dramatic changes in South Africa, with old issues stubbornly remaining and new challenges arising.

#### **4.3.1. The changing faces of the family**

*“Throughout the world, changes in families are evident. For instance, many of the traditional livelihood and care functions of families are being performed by organs of modern society such as schools, churches, and welfare agencies such as old age homes etc. Moreover, social and demographic changes such as increasing levels of urbanization, declining birth and death rates mean that families are becoming smaller, people are living longer and families are becoming highly diverse.” (Amoateng et al, 2004:vi)*

The family is perhaps the most basic unit of society; the majority of young people in our country begin and end their lives in some intimate relationships with their kin. There are many assumptions about the role of family in social cohesion. The first and seemingly most logical assumption is that strong family bonds result in a robust society, which in turn contributes to social cohesion (Stone: 2001:01). However new studies question this belief, arguing that the idealized view of the family is a thing of the past and fails to reflect the lived experience of family life today. Fukuyama (1999), for example argues the

opposite, that in fact “weak family and community ties result in social cohesion,” in reference to Italy.

Although the exact linkage between family and its impact on social cohesion remains a matter for debate, many social scientists still maintain that a solid family structure is fundamental to social cohesion (Stone, 2001). This is based on the premise that the norms and values, rules and regulations practiced within the family, the smallest organized unit in the community, will reflect upon society. If we value, respect and tolerate another within the family, chances are we will respect, value and tolerate people beyond the scope of the family.

Thus family life is supposed to “provide the economic, psychological and spiritual/moral underpinnings required to prepare children and young people for adult life, work and the continuation of good order...” (Dimmock, 2004:192). In South African context, Amoateng et al (2004: iv) suggest that families play a supportive role and by using networks at their disposal, they are the “main source of human capital development, the development and achievement of individuals, and care for dependent and vulnerable individuals.” Thus stable and emotionally supportive families contribute to youth well-being and positive outcomes such as higher school attendance and better school performance; higher levels of self-esteem, self-confidence and future orientation among children and youth and a reduction in behaviour problems among youth, including aggression, substance use and crime (Amoateng op cit.: vii). Healthy family life is thus seen to provide a secure and stable environment for children and young people to grow up in, helping them to develop into well-rounded human beings who can cultivate their sense of self-worth, belonging and sharing. Family life is also expected to provide the space where children and young people can develop self-control, tolerance and a sense of morality; and not least cultivate feelings of affection and willingness to sacrifice for others (Stone: 2001:10).

The reverse of the coin, is that many problems of young people are thus blamed on the failures of the family (and mothers in particular), for example such assumptions that young people are truant (not in school) because they lack parental discipline and because mothers are working or that “young women are sexually permissive and irresponsible because they lack the moral guidance and protection of both parents working together to protect and monitor their daughters behaviour” (Dimmock 2004: 193)

The diversity and ever-changing nature of families are increasingly facts of contemporary life, and this is certainly a feature of South African families as well. The *Macro Social Trends Report* (Presidency, 2006: 71) and Ziehl (2001) divide household and family models in South Africa into four categories: extended families (18.5%), nuclear families (41.1%); single-person households (27%) and other families (13.4%. The latter include households consisting of non-family members living together. Between 1996 and 2001, according to the *Macro Social Trends Report*, all of the categories of families increased as percentage of the total, except the nuclear family, which declined by 5%. Nuclear families are primarily associated with Whites, whilst extended families are associated with Africans, Coloureds and especially Asians (Amoateng, et al, 2004: ix).

Young people are not only members of families, but youth is also a stage towards formation of households and families. The *State of the Youth Report 2003-2004* (Richter, et al, 2005) indicates that South Africans generally enter into marriage at much later stages (in their 30s and 40s), with much lower rates of marriage amongst Africans than other groups. Overall, just over 6.2% of youth ages 20-24 years were married in 2007 (Makiwane and Chimere-Dan, 2009).

Becoming parents is an entirely different matter. By the age of 18, one in five woman in the population (mainly African and Coloured) had given birth to a child and by age 20 years, more than 40% had become mothers. For most young mothers, childbearing takes place outside of marriage with only 3% of 15-19 year old girls married or living with a partner (Richter et al, 2005:31). Early parenthood has implications for the educational and labour market prospects of young women, with the burden of childcare disproportionately resting on young mothers. It is also one of the factors in intergenerational transmission of poverty (Makiwane and Kwizera, 2009), with pregnancy and family responsibility the second major reason for young girls dropping out of school at secondary level (Sheppard, 2009).

#### **4.3.2. Schools as agents of socialisation**

Schools, according to Durkheim's (1956), are 'agents of socialisation' because they have to teach children the norms and values of the society in which they live. This, according to the argument, is necessary for social cohesion, and includes the teaching of behaviour and attitudes, as well as the technical and other knowledge to function in society (Carbonaro, 2005). Other theorists such as Parson (1959) focused on schools as providing space for children to develop independence and social interactions outside of the family and from adult guidance, whereas Dreeben (1968) argued that schools provide children and youth with values "that facilitate their successful adaptation of their future roles in society: (1) independence (the ability to do one's own work), (2) achievement (social acceptance is conditional on performance), (3) universalism (the treatment of individuals as members of general categories), and (4) specificity (the interest in specific attributes individuals possess rather than the "whole person" (Quoted in Carbonaro, op cit :3).

In *The right to learn* (SACHED, 1985:16), a publication closely associated with the people's education struggle in South Africa during the 1980's, the roles of schools were defined as:

- Teaching certain *kinds of knowledge* which society values, e.g. history, geography, sciences.
- Teaching a set of *values*, how society expects them to behave.
- *Preparing* people *for work*, including specific technical or general skills.
- *Grading* people – either passing or failing them.
- Giving a chance to *meet other people* and be influenced by them."

Socialisation in school thus takes place through the formal curriculum (what is taught), the 'hidden curriculum' (underlying values and assumptions of knowledge and those involved in the process) and through the social interaction

(between peers, different relations with adults other than family) that the school space provides.

The process of transforming the post apartheid school curriculum is a work in progress. The *Lifelong Learning through a National Curriculum Framework* document (Department of Education, 1996) was the first major curriculum statement of a democratic South Africa and aimed at promoting a “prosperous, truly united, democratic and internationally competitive country with literate, creative and critical citizens leading productive, self-fulfilled lives in a country free of violence, discrimination and prejudice.” This was followed by the *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* (Department of Education, 2001), which sets out the key Constitutional values a school curriculum should embrace.

The *Revised National Curriculum Statement for Grades R-9 Schools* (Department of Education, 2005:7-8) set out strategies for familiarising young people with the values of the constitution: ranging from nurturing a culture of communication and participation in school, role modelling, ensuring that every South Africa is able to read, write, count and think, to dealing with HIV and sexual and social responsibility, promoting anti-racism in schools and using sports to shape social bonds and nurture nation-building. The *Revised Curriculum statement* also set out eight learning areas (subjects): (1) Languages, (2) Mathematics, (3) Natural Sciences, (4) Technology, (5) Social Sciences, (6) Arts and Culture (7) Life Orientation and (8) Economic and Management Sciences; with the integration of the principles of social justice, human rights, a healthy environment and inclusivity into all these learning areas.

South Africa has thus sought to deal in an upfront manner with both the ‘hidden curriculum’, the issues of the nature of knowledge and the school as a space for social interaction, by focussing on the values in the Constitution, teaching aptitudes (to read, count, write and think), social interaction (role of sports, role-modelling) and knowledge required for the world of work (the organisation of learning areas) and as citizenship (including history, arts and culture and life skills orientation).

Despite these lofty goals, most of the emphasis on transformation in schools has been on the basics of the school environment: creating a culture of learning and teaching, ensuring safety at schools, improving infrastructure, ensuring redress and equity, addressing socio-economic situation of learners (e.g. school feeding programme, no fees policy) and improving grades and educational outcomes. The socialisation issues that have been dealt with in depth, in addition to the curriculum reform, referred to above are those related to racism, gender issues, violence, the teaching of religion, life orientation and rights and responsibilities of learners in schools.

(a) *Racial desegregation of schools*

Much has been written about this topic, in the context of the integration of the 19 segregated departments of education and the deracialisation of schools after 1994. Hoadley (1998, quoted in Vally, 199: 74) for example noted:

*“Schooling is...delineated largely in terms of class. The dramatic changes in composition of some schools since the opening up of the school system can*

*broadly be described as follows. Middle class black and white students have moved to independent schools and privileged state schools, freeing up spaces in "boundary schools" (former Model C schools on the borders of historical group areas), which have been taken up largely by middle and lower middle class black, coloured and Indian students.*

The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) report on Racism in Public Schools in 1999 (Vally, 1999:74) further noted that “while desegregation allows learners from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds to access education, they primarily accommodate the values, needs and aspirations of learners from the racial group for which these schools were originally established. Learners from other racial groups are simply expected to assimilate into the prevailing ethos of these schools.”

Other writers such as Soudien (1998) argued that there is a substantial body of evidence showing that deracialisation of schools has largely been one-way, characterised by a movement of African students towards former Coloured and Indian schools, but not towards Afrikaans-language schools, with much less integration of teaching corps. Chisholm and Sujee (2006) further showed that the numbers of African students in former white schools have been on average no more than a quarter to a third of enrolments in these schools.

Though an important barometre of racial relations and the evolution of middle class identity, these schools do constitute a minority amongst the over 27 000 public schools across the country. The emphasis has rightly begun to shift towards issues facing learners in the majority of schools, thus the focus on violence and safety at schools.

*(b) Violence in schools*

The more media sensational reports on violence in school – murder and stabbing – and the television series *Yizqo Yizqo* focused attention of safety at the majority of public schools, and the influence this has on the culture of learning and teaching. This prompted a number of investigations, not least the *Public Hearings and Report on School-based Violence* by the South African Human Rights Commission in 2005 and 2006. The report notes

*“the emergence of trends that suggest that the environment necessary for effective teaching and learning is increasingly being undermined by a growing culture of school-based violence... Children often spend more time in the care of educators in educational settings than with any other role-player outside of their homes. Schools are therefore an important place where children need protection from violence.”* (South African Human Rights Commission, 2006)

The Report emphasised that acts of violence reported have been reported by only 25% of schools, but raised concerns about the culture of violence and threat of violence, which affect the majority of schools and learners. These include a range of acts such as bullying, sexual harassment and sexual violence, accidental violence, violence and discrimination, psychological violence, violence of learners against educators, and violence of educators against learners. The SAHRC report and other studies have spawned recommendations to make schools safer and to also address the contextual issues around violence in schools.

(c) *Life orientation and Arts and culture and languages*

In addition to the more knowledge base subjects (e.g. history, sciences, etc), the new national curriculum at school also includes two more specifically socialising subjects or learning areas, namely Life Orientation and Arts and Culture.

Ferguson (2006: 28) likens the Life Orientation Learning area to a *bobotie*, consisting of a 'little bit of this and a little bit of that.' It's overall aim, however, according to the *Revised National Curriculum Statement* (Department of Education, 2005) is to guide and prepare learners for meaningful and successful living in a rapidly changing and transforming society. It seeks to do this by developing skills, knowledge, values and attitudes that empower learners to make informed decisions and take appropriate actions with regards (a) promoting health; (b) social development; (c) personal development; (d) physical development and movement; and (e) orientation and the world of work.

Life orientation, according to Prinsloo (2007:155-156) is an attempt by the Department of Education to address children and youth at risk "including those in biological families, reconstituted families, foster-homes, safe-houses, and street children", where there are deficiencies with regards socialisation and "thus they are not adequately guided towards positive self-concept formation or the realisation of their potential." Amongst the causal factors that place children and youth at risk, Prinsloo includes self-centred materialistic values, socio-economic conditions, stresses of families, and the weak authority structures. In her review of the implementation of the Life orientation in schools (Prinsloo, op cit), the following challenges were raised by school principals and Life orientation teachers: lack of proper value systems of learners, since learners come into schools with already pre-established values; educators inadequate as role models to learners; the influence of community and community values; lack of skills to teach LO in multi cultural settings; and poor parental involvement. She nonetheless concluded that Life orientation and its overall objectives are critical for learners development and dealing with risk.

The Arts and Culture Learning Area statement (DoE, 2005), on the other had seeks to cover the broad spectrum of South African arts and cultural practices, embracing the spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional aspects of human endeavour. Culture is seen as expressing itself in the arts through ways of living, behaviour patterns, heritage, knowledge and belief systems. It is not seen as static, but have histories and context, and culture change, especially when in contact with other cultures. There is has been little evaluation about the implementation and impact of this learning area.

### **4.3.3. Youth and religion**

Up to eighty percent of South Africans of all races and ages in the 2001 Census indicated their religion as Christian, a further 5% as Islam, Hinduism, Jewish and other non-Christian religions, and 15.1% indicated that they do not belong to any religion. "Religious organisation", according to the *Macro Social Trends Report* (Presidency, 2006:76), " is an important element of social capital in many respects: as a repository of social values, an important element of social networking, a formal system of social organisation, and in some instances, an instrument of socio-economic opportunity and status."

The churches are amongst the traditional forms of organisations from which the post-apartheid generation has disengaged. According to Everatt and Ross (2001), whereas in 1992, 40% of young person indicated that they belong to or attend a church, this figure in 2000 was down to 13%. The various religious youth and student organisations, such as the Young Christian Students and Workers, South African Union of Jewish Students, Catholic Students Association, Muslim Students and Youth Movements played an important role during the 1970s and 1980s, not only in the spiritual lives (and identity) of their members, but as an important part of the broader student and youth movement and of civil society in South Africa.

The decline in youth membership in churches can be attributed to the general ebb and flow of participation in civil society, as well as to the stagnating membership of conventional Christian denominations (CDE, 2008). In addition, those young people still in the church are largely attracted to the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, which in contrast have seen a growth in their membership between 1996 and 2001 of about 15% or from 4.6 million to 6.8 million members.

The churches themselves are aware of the challenge of attracting and reaching out to younger congregants. The Reverend Graeme Codrington from *Futurechurch* starts of his treatise on *Engaging the new generation* (Codrington, 2006) with the statement that “young people are different! VERY different!” He elaborates on the context, which results in different approaches to religion by young people as: (a) a post-industrial society characterised by both mass customisation and individualisation; (b) a post-literate society, in the context of the communication revolution with new ways of learning and communicating; (c) post-modern, that there is no absolute truth, everything is relative. Thus, the issue – he concludes - with teenagers and youth today is not so much that they are hostile to religion, but attitudes of ‘whateverism,’ asking not whether “is it true’, but ‘does it work for me’.

The CDE study (CDE, 2008) on Pentecostalism in South Africa seems to reflect some of these attitudes in general approaches of congregants. For example, the majority of congregants across all churches believe that their faith mainly provide emotional support, followed by morality and achievement. The HSRC Youth Policy Initiative poll results (HSRC, 2007), though far from representative is indicative of the trend of less involvement in religion (47% of those polled said they are not religious) and some ambiguity about the exact role of religion in their lives. Whilst 49% of those who responded said that religion positively contributes to their lives because it help them find direction, or provides a safe place where they feel cared about; the other halve of respondents either felt religion made no difference in their lives or was out of touch with the issues of young people today.

Having recognised the need to appeal and draw in young people into the church (and presumably for other religions as well), there is a focus on Youth Ministry in churches across the spectrum, grappling with issues such as forms of worship (the role of music for example), and being relevant to broader societal issues facing young people. The South African Churches (SACC), for example through its Joint Enrichment Project (JEP) was in the forefront in the early 1990s in advocating against the view of a ‘lost generation.’ Du Plessis (2009) in her study

of youth and charismatic churches in the Dwars River Valley in Stellenbosch draws attention to how church organisations, especially from the charismatic churches are involved in a range of projects raising awareness of the dangers of *Tik* and providing leisure, life skills and sport activities to young people, whilst the more conventional churches are often seen as not in touch with young people.

#### 4.4. Youth identity and culture

***“Think about this!***

*As young adults, this is the time when you are finding your identity. Making decisions about what you believe in, what you want to do and to be, what kind of a person you are. But it's not as if you start off with a clean slate. From the moment you were born you have been shaped by the language you speak, and the customs and beliefs of the culture around you. Now you are making choices to accept or reject parts of this identity and to try out new roles as you build your own identity.”* CSVR Booklet on *Identity and Youth* (Barkly, 2004:3)

There are two emerging approaches to the issue of youth identity in South Africa. The one, represents a lament by adults about the today's generation of young people: the annual complaint that the youth flocking to the June 16 Youth Day rallies for the music performances are doing a disservice to the memories of 1976, or about their consumerism, westernisation and lack of respect for adults. The second approach, which the above quote highlights, is to recognise that young people's identity are shaped as much by their own choices as by the environment in which they live. Thus Everatt (2000:37) contends that “the worst thing the youth of 2000 have done is become teenagers, retreat into their own cultures whose codes are opaque to adults, and mimic the consumerism that marks South African society.”

##### **4.4.1. Global youth culture. Local is lekker**

Part of the environment in which the post-apartheid generations grew up, is that of a globalised image of youth culture on the one hand and of a society in transition on the other hand.

Global youth culture, according to Kahn and Kellner (2008:53), is the trans-disciplinary category used to understand the complex and hybrid forms of culture and identity that occur amongst young people worldwide, as a result of the proliferation of film, television, popular music, the internet and other forms of information and communications technologies in their everyday lives. Whilst arguing that hybridity is common to culture generally and has characterized all colonial history, Khan and Kellner (op cit) contend that the globalisation of companies and the rise of the information society with its new technologies, has given rise to a particularly dynamic global cultural industry. This image of a global youth culture, according to Heaven and Tubridy (2003), is mainly based on the assumption that young people are more likely to be receptive or at least susceptible to ‘foreign cultures’ and “the most likely to engage in a process of

cultural borrowing that is disruptive of the reproduction of traditional cultural practices, from modes of dress to language, aesthetics and ideologies.”

The second influence on the post-apartheid generation is that of a society in transition, which itself is in the process of defining its identity. This process of self-definition ranges from Mandela’s *rainbowism and reconciliation*, the *simunye* and *mzansi fo’ sure* of the public broadcaster, Mbeki’s *African renaissance* and the *two nations* to the constitutional principles of *unity in diversity*, *! ke e: / xarrra / / ke* and *ubuntu*; and much in-between.

Apart from these two influences, youth identity is also about setting itself apart from the identities of older generations (Hebdige, 1979), taking the forms of either sub-cultures or countercultures, in opposition to the dominant (adult) culture. Thus, youth subcultures often exist at the cultural fringe and tend to be anti-establishment and confrontational (Heaven and Tubridy, 2003: 151). The emergence of *Kwaito* or the *Alternatiewe Afrikaans* music genres in South Africa is a typical example of youth musical subcultures going against the grain of the dominant and establishment music industry of the time. Alternative Afrikaans music, writes Strauss (2003) “has its roots in protest music and has never lost its unconventional edge.” And decade after the launch of youth radio station *Yfm*, it still struggled to attract revenue from mainstream advertisers. The station’s chief executive officer is quoted in Nxumalo (2002:47): “Its ridiculous that we are the biggest commercial radio station in the country by far and that we still struggle to survive. We are the first station to join the ‘Proudly South Africa’ campaign, and we play more local music than any other commercial radio station. Yet the media buyers spend more on stations with less than \*/+#\* our audience in Gauteng.” And yet, subcultures are also frequently (eventually?) appropriated by and integrated into dominant culture, as has happened to many an alternative music genre.

Countercultures on the other hand tend to present a more fundamental critique of the status quo and/or dominant culture, taking the form not so much as cultural movements or trends, but of student, youth and social activism (Heaven and Tubridy, op cit). Roszak (1969:2) writing on the youth and student revolts of the 1960’s puts this rather eloquently:

*“Throughout the West (as well as Japan and parts of Latin America) it is the young who find themselves cast as the only effective radical opposition within their societies. Yet no analysis seems to make sense of the major political upheavals of the decade other than that which pits a militant minority of dissenting youth against the sluggish consensus-and-coalition politics of their middle class elders.”*

South African youth identity and culture historically is very much associated with the counterculture phenomena – from the days of Lembede, Mandela, Tambo, Sisulu and others rebelling in the ANC Youth League for a different vision and strategies to fight apartheid to that of the then ANC old guard of the 1930’s and 40’s, to the generations of 1976 and the young lions of the 1980’s. Comparisons between the post-apartheid generations and previous generations are therefore mainly about this mould.

And yet, the post-apartheid generation of young people has made and are making groundbreaking contributions towards South Africa’s cultural identity and

industries. It has been argued that this contribution reflects both the global context, as well as the crafting of uniquely South African identities within global (and African) culture (Nxumalo, 2002, Haupt, 2005). This contribution of the post apartheid generation and the representation of the global: local dichotomy can be felt across a range of genres: music, film and animation, media (new and old), comedy, drama, dance, literature, fashion, theatre and poetry. Sachs, 2005 described it thus:

*“Today’s youth culture is much maligned in society in general as being self-centred as opposed to community orientated, dominated by foreign influence, apolitical and disrespectful of authority. Kwaito music is said to epitomise these tendencies. (And yet) kwaito music, house, hip-hop and reggae form a single cultural milieu among South African youth and are a fertile expression of a truly South African, non-racial culture. While strongly asserting African and black identity, it is a fundamentally non-racial movement, and draws in large number of youth from racial minorities. As a direct consequence of the democratic victories of the last decade this is the social context in which a new subjective non-racialism is emerging. Anyone familiar with the lyrics and symbolism of the emerging black youth culture in South Africa cannot but be struck by the extent to which politics of the liberation struggle and the discourse of emancipation have been reinvented by new generations. The youth are giving new meaning to the politics of their mothers and fathers and are creating a new politics of human liberation that is entirely appropriate to the democratic order.”*

#### **4.4.2. Opinions and identities**

Public opinion surveys on the transition throughout the last fifteen years have consistently reflected much greater optimism about the direction of the country, race relations and hope for the future amongst younger generations. The *Macro Social Trends Report* (Presidency, 2006:45) draws attention to the fact that in the 1999 FutureFact Mindset Survey conducted in 2000, larger sections of young people (16-35 years) than older people described themselves as African.

Everatt (2000:35) notes that two thirds of youth surveyed in 2000 agreed that, “although it will take time, South Africa will become a united nation.” The HSRC study of Gauteng learners (referred to in Richter, et al, 2005:262) also observed the “considerable idealism, desire to help others and concern about public good among all categories of learners in Gauteng.”

Young people, probably more so than adults, are grappling with what it means to be a South African, not only in a context of competing identities, but also in the context of being African and living in a global village.

#### **4.5. Participation and networks**

*“No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifeline; it is condemned to bleed to death.” Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations. (United Nations World Youth Report, 2003)*

#### **4.5.1. Youth participation**

The issue about the right to participation of young people in matters that affect them directly, let alone in the affairs of the country, is by no means a given and has been a matter of contest. According to the *World Youth Report, 2003* (United Nations, 2003:272) it represents “a profound challenge to traditional attitudes towards young people in most societies throughout the world. It implies a radical change in youth-adult relationships in all spheres of life including the family, schools, local communities, programmes, social services, and local, regional and national government. A commitment to respecting the participatory rights of young people is incompatible with the age-old propensity of adults to take decisions concerning young people in their absence.”

Since the radicalising role played by the young generation of Lembede, Mandela and other others from the 1940's, there has fortunately been an acknowledgement of the importance of young people's participation, reflected in the oft-quoted maxim of Moses Kotane to the youth: ‘the future belongs to you, it will be what you make of it.’ At the same time, there are deep-seated social and cultural norms and practices that make it difficult to give effect to this commitment to youth participation, not least of which is the respect we give or are expected to give to our elders.

*Youth participation is a process of involving young people in the institutions and decisions that affect their lives. It includes initiatives that emphasize educational reform, juvenile justice, environmental quality, and other issues; that involve populations distinguished by class, race, gender, and other characteristics; and that operate in rural areas, small towns, suburbs, and neighborhoods of large cities in developing areas and industrial nations worldwide. As expressions of participation, young people are organizing groups for social and political action, planning programs of their own choosing, and advocating their interests in the community. They are raising consciousness, educating others on matters that concern them, and providing services of their own choosing. No single strategy characterizes all approaches to participation. (Checkoway and Gutierrez, 2006:1)*

Young people want to be part of society and respected for their contributions, as well as play a role in improving their communities and societies (Perold, 2006). Where and how this happen – in politics, civil society or social networks – is something that requires constant reflection, and also changes over time.

##### *(a) Youth and elections*

Since the end of apartheid, concerns about the participation of young people tend to rear its head mainly in the context of participation in elections. Levin (2000:90) observes: “before and after the 1999 elections, there has been a strange silence about what happened to the youth vote. No one tried very hard to get young people to vote for them, and no one seems to have worried much when young people neither registered nor voted in great numbers.”

Since then, the issue of the youth vote has reared its head in every election, especially when the startling figures about young peoples' (non) participation in the 1999 elections were revealed. According to figures of the Independent Electoral Commission (quoted in Levin, op cit: 92), whereas between 80 and

97% of older people registered to vote; less than half (48%) of those aged 18-20 years bothered to register. This group, said Levin (2000:93), had never voted before, “yet showed little excitement about their new enfranchisement.” This pattern continued during the subsequent local government elections, as well as the 2004 general elections. By the time of the third democratic elections, only 50% of those between the age of 18 and 25 – the first time voters – were registered (Sachs, 2005).

Sachs (op cit) notes that South Africa is not unique, that young people’s engagement from formal politics is a global phenomenon and notes that there are two reasons forwarded for this state of affairs. In the *life cycle explanation* it is said that young people do not participate in formal politics because they have less (than older people) familiarity with political parties, processes and the electoral system; they are less integrated into the ‘establishment’; and have less political knowledge and experience. Thus, as they grow older, they become more knowledgeable and experienced, and in turn will increase their turnout to vote. “The implication of the life cycle approach” Sachs (2005) continues, “is that as youth grow older they will participate in politics. We should not worry too much about the current generation because, like their mothers and fathers before them, they will mature into full political citizens.” The second *generational explanation* assumes something specific about the current generation of youth. They, the argument goes, withdraw from politics not because of lack of experience or integration, but because they do not believe that the electoral process make a difference and because they feel excluded and alienated from politics in general. Although the post-apartheid youth generation seems to follow the course of their peers in especially Europe of declining interest in formal politics, Sachs presents a number of arguments why this should not be the case, and in fact calls for a ‘specifically South African understanding of the relation of youth to politics.’

This theme – of understanding young people’s relation to politics - has been taken forward on a number of occasions subsequently and especially in the lead-up to the 2009 elections: “*Will Generation Next show up to vote?*” asked a Mail and Guardian (2009) headline as the ‘youth vote’ became part of the lexicon of electoral commentary (Mataboge, 2009, Misra-Dexter, 2009, Roberts and Letsoale, 2009 and Sokupa, 2009).

The voter registration campaign for the 2009 elections, however, surprised all. The success of the IEC 2008/2009 voter registration campaign, according to Lefko-Everett and Sacramone-Lutz (2009), “can largely be attributed to new registrations among young voters, aged 20-29.” Of the 1.5 million new voters added to the roll nearly 78% were under the age of 20 years. This, they argued, represented a correction of “a historical disparity between a young national population, and a relatively ‘older’ voters roll.” Whether this trend will continue into the next local government elections in 2011 or the next general elections in 2014 remains to be seen.

(b) *Youth and community and social organisation*

*“Community participation is also about building social capital and networks. Young people who are active in some form of organisation, whether it is a youth club, church or cultural or sports group, are less likely to fall through the cracks in society and engage in risky and self-destructive behaviour. Organisational participation also enhances skills in networking,*

*accessing information, communication, self-esteem and a range of other competencies.” State of the Youth Report, 2003-2004 (Morrison, Panday and Richter, 2005)*

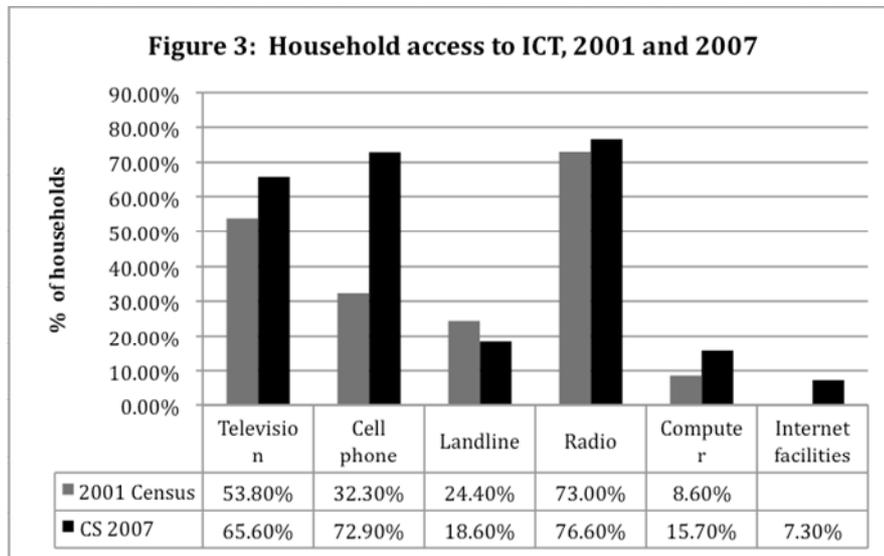
The *Macro Social Trends Report* (Presidency, 2006:74) notes that the trend of participation in community and social organisations since 1994 has been contradictory, with ebbs and flows. All organisations saw a decline in their membership after 1994, with a sudden increase in 1997, peaking in 1998; another period of decline between 1999 and 2000 and a large increase in 2001. The report further noted that youth organisations experienced the greatest surge (75%), followed by anti-crime organisations (67%), women’s organisations (60%) and trade unions (50%). This surge in membership of youth organisations is still substantially lower than in 1992, when 17% of young people belonged to a youth organisation (CASE, 1993), with the sector dominated by the 18-24 year cohort and the 25-34 year cohort dominating in political parties (Kivilu, 2007:126).

The National Youth Commission (merged with Umsobomvu into the National Youth Development Agency in 2009) and the South African Youth Council, and the various national youth policy documents have emphasised the importance of volunteering and community participation by young people. Although the core component of the National Youth Service serves to provide work experience and skills training (with a stipend) to young people; there is also a strong emphasis on voluntary work by advantaged and disadvantaged youth as part of the NYS programme.

#### **4.5.2. Youth, technology and social networking**

*“The debate about the impact of media and technology on children has always served as a focus for much broader hopes and fears about social change. Young people are seen to be at risk, not only from the obvious dangers such as pornography and online pedophiles, but also from a wide range of negative physical and psychological consequences that derive from their engagement with technology. Like television, digital media are seen to be responsible for a whole litany of social ills – addiction, antisocial behaviour, obesity, educational underachievement, commercial exploitation, stunted imaginations... and the list goes on.” Buckingham (2008:13)*

No discussion about the current generation of youth is complete without a discussion on the role of new technology and in the context of participation and networks, and more recently the growth of social networking services. Although access to information and communications technology in South Africa is still largely based on race, class and geography, access to ICT is steadily expanding (Table 2):



Source: Statistics South Africa (2007). *Community Survey, 2007*

There is no question that the new technologies, especially but not exclusively cell phones and the Internet, are a fact of life for today's generation of young people, hence the reference to current youth generations as the Digital Generations. Apart from the laments about the possible dangers (highlighted in the quote above) of technology to children and youth, technology is also being regarded as a 'force of liberation for young people – a means for them to reach past the constraining influences of their elders, and to create new, autonomous forms of communication and community. Far from corrupting the young, technology is seen to be creating a generation that is more open, more democratic, more creative and more innovative than their parents' generation.'" (Buckingham, 2007:13)

The importance of technology has been recognised in various South African government initiatives, in particular the drive to improve science, mathematics and engineering (SME) education, numbers and results in schools; the introduction of science, maths and technology as part of the learning areas in schools; programmes to introduce more computers at school such as Gauteng Online and others; as well as efforts spearheaded by the Department of Science and Technology such as the *Foresight Youth Project* and general efforts to increase the number of young researchers in the country.

One of the features of the recent ICT revolution is the generational distinction it has introduced – between the generation who grew up with television and the new generation who are growing up with cell phones and the Internet. Prensky (2001) thus makes a distinction between digital 'natives' (who have grown up with this technology) and digital 'immigrants' (adults who have come to it later in life). Tapscott (1998) in his seminal *Growing up digital: The rise of the Net Generation* explains the difference between the two generations of technology: television is passive, broadcasts a singular world view and it isolates, whilst the Internet is active, democratic and interactive and builds communities. Given this 'generational digital divide' the concerns about technology amongst parents and older people are therefore not difficult to understand.

*“Cell phones introduce a range of new possibilities for social networking and communication, media use and production, political activism, as well as education. Young people in South Africa have adopted a range of innovative communicative practices, notably those which exploit low-cost mobile applications, many of which are unique to this context.” (Kreutzer, 2008: III)*

Although Internet penetration in Africa, South Africa included, is still very low by global standards, cell phones have bucked this trend. According to GMSA figures (2008, quoted in Kreutzer op cit), “across Africa, there is currently one active mobile phone for every three inhabitants.” This development according to Kreutzer has led Castells (2006) to revise his theory of computers and the Internet as the main conduit of his ‘network society’ to explicitly include cell phones. It also clearly calls into question the emphasis in public policy solely on access to Internet and computers as a means of ensuring broadened access to ICT technology. This also means that the research into the cell phone usage amongst young people is still in its infancy.

One development that is of interest in the context of a discussion of young people and networks are the new social networking services. Social networking services (SNS) are normally web-based services that focus on building online communities of people that have similar interests and activities. In most instances people join these sights to connect with other people so as to share their experiences and get what they need i.e. information, support, ideas and products. Although social networking sites are a recent phenomenon in South Africa, they have been around globally since the 1980’s. However in recent years, networking sites such as *Facebook*, *MySpace*, *Twitter* and *Mxit* have been gaining popularity amongst the youth of South Africa due to their affordability and reach. *Facebook* currently has 924 760 active South African users who are between the ages of 15-24 years of age. South Africa is also ranked number 10 globally for *Twitter* usage.

Although the linkage between social networking sites and social cohesion remains under researched, most researchers will agree that such sites support the maintenance of pre-existing social networks and assists strangers to connect based on their shared interests, political views or activities (Boyd: 2007: 01).

So what are social networking sites? According to Boyd, social networking sites “are web based services that allow individuals to construct a public profile within an enclosed system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others” (Boyd, 2007:02). Although many people believe that SNS’s are there to create new network links, a study by the Sunden in 2003 on the 20 SNS’s in the United States found that the network sites simply cemented existing off-line networks; any new networks that were created were simply secondary to the maintenance of offline networks.

Social networking sites have many advantages. It can extend job search networks, for example a site like *LinkedIn* allows users to create a profile highlighting their interests and previous work employment experiences, and it allows companies to visit the site to locate suitable candidates for employment. The sites also create other labour market such as exposure to people who can

assist with career advancement or advise. Many businesses advertise on these networking sites (for example both *Facebook* and *Twitter* allow companies to advertise), and although this is mainly to sell their products, they often use the same space for recruitment advertising. Social networks also allow for connections with other people who share their interests i.e. starting a business. Social networking sites can also be leveraged, assisting young entrepreneurs by exposing them to large numbers of potential consumers and networks.

Social networking sites such *SixDegrees.org*, *TakingITGlobal*, *Care2*, *idealist.org*; *WiserEarth* and *Network for Good* all assist fragmented industries and small organizations without resources to reach a broader audience. (Boyd: 2007:03) *Mxit* - the South African networking site - is also used by NGO's to disseminate and distribute information. *Lovelife*, for example, has a page on *Mxit* where it runs competitions and informs young people about various issues, ranging from HIV prevention, to giving pointers on how to deal with examination stress and advise concerning depression and suicide.

There has been growing concern on many of the large SNS's about users inputting too much personal information into their profiles and the threat of sexual predators. Although the issue of sexual predators and teenagers has been exaggerated somewhat, these sites are continuously issuing out warnings to young people about not giving out information about their whereabouts to people and also not meeting up with strangers that they chat with off-line. There is also the potential for misuse, especially the phenomena of Cyber bullying, like the example of a fake *MySpace* profile that was created by Lori Janine Drew, which led to a suicide of Meagan Meier (Boyd: 2007: 5).

What is the implication of this and how does it affect social cohesion? Although SNS's have their disadvantages, it certainly has great potential to enhance social networks and thus contribute to social cohesion. These sites allow individuals to connect with people that they would have otherwise been unable to share off-line connections with. Social networking sites have become popular for popular youth culture, providing platforms, interactions and the sharing cultural artefacts. In a country like South Africa, where people are disaggregated by race and geography, SNS's if correctly utilized can help to build bridges between people from different backgrounds, to connect and to share their experiences, thereby encouraging knowledge of each other and instilling some sense of togetherness.

#### **4.5.3. Youth and sport**

Sport is a powerful symbol of identity in South Africa, and played a both in dividing people during apartheid, and since the end of apartheid bringing people together. Who can forget the 1995 Rugby World Cup, when former South African President Nelson Mandela donned Springbok T-shirt and embraced captain Francois Pienaar. Ever since that awe-inspiring moment, South Africa has had the fortune of hosting the Cricket World Cup and in 2010, it will be the first African country to host the FIFA Football World Cup.

Despite these moments, many believe that the role of sports in "creating better communities, a better society and a better life for all" has been relegated to a backseat seat. Kleim (2005) argues that these big events such as the Soccer World

Cup are motivated more by economic gains rather than the potential transformative capacity attached to such events.

Sport plays a huge role in people's lives; be it as active participants or passive spectators. For many, sport is not just an activity, but an area of social interaction. Jarvie and Maguire (1994) argued that "sports and leisure activity are an integral part of social life in any community and are intricately linked to society and politics".

There are many positive values that can be attributed to sports. According to Ndubuisi Iruh and Broere (2004), these positive attributes include benefits for health, socialization, self-confidence, leadership skills, and mutual understanding across divisions of race, class, culture and gender.

Sports also play an important role in the development of children and young people, because it "provides children with fun and gratification; it fulfills what social psychology refer to as "affiliative" need for friendship, a sense of belonging, and such alike; it offers in the short term the prospect of healthier minds and bodies through physical exercise; and for the long-term cumulative favorable outcome and benefit generally associated with youth development" (Taylor, 2006).

South Africa has seen a decline in school sport after 1994 (Department of Sports and Recreation, (2008), and sporting codes have generally struggled with broadening access what is referred to as 'development in sport', mainly referring to sports amongst black youth. According to the Department of Sports and Recreation website, there are "approximately 3,3 million youngsters between the ages of 13-15 participating in sport in SA. Most of them participate in more than one sport."

Another challenge is the difficult for the majority of people to gain access to sports facilities. Mass mobility and access to sporting facilities and venues are frequently inhibited by the lack of an affordable and effective public transport system in the country. Most sporting facilities in the country are situated in urban areas while some people (mostly the marginalized/ socially excluded and poverty stricken children who could benefit the most from sports) live in rural areas. These are the areas where donors or major players in the field can make a big contribution. For sports to have the intended impact (that of nation building) a few factors have to be met. These include but aren't confined to:

- Public support, political acceptability and viability
- Co-operation between organizations and multi-cultural exchanges
- Co-operation between schools and sports club
- Improving the situation of woman in sports
- Integration programmes between schools

Multicultural sport teams beginning at the community level, led by coaches and trainers who are able to navigate team building to a process that includes all parties and creates mutual respect between cultures and races. And most importantly the government and sporting organizations could help to provide

sporting facilities, provide equipment, help to recruit trainers, provide programmes for talent scouting, among other things.

#### 4.6. Safety and security

Besides the material well-being of young people, the issue of the safety and security of today's generation of young people is amongst the most worrying issues facing our society. Young people are disproportionately represented amongst both the victims and perpetrators of violence and this has been a subject of study for a number of years. Some of the trends which recent studies draw attention to are:

- Burton (2007): "...the ages between 12 and 21 are the peak years for both offending and victimisation."
- Pelsler (2008): "...children and youth ages 12 to 22 years are victims of all crimes at twice the adult rate; they experience assault eight times the adult rate, theft five times and robbery four times the adult rate."
- SAHRC (2006): "...many of the crime takes place in what should be 'safe spaces' for youth and children – at school or at home – and 92.9% of victims knew the identity of the perpetrator."
- Burton (op cit): "...approximately 302,000 rapes (are) endured by young girls under the age of 18 in South Africa in 2005/2006 reporting year."
- CPJS (2008): "...more than three quarters of youth offenders have themselves been victims of crime."
- Leoschut and Bonora (2007): "... South Africa's first offending age is getting much younger: 43% of youth crimes committed between the ages of 10-15 years; 35.9% by 16-18 years and 18.7% by ages 19-25 years."
- Pelsler (op cit:11): "...crime and particularly violent crime is typically a youthful male enterprise, ... whilst global trends show high risk of offending in the 15-24 year age, and then "age out."
- Leoschut (2009): "Although the overall youth victimisation rates have decreased since 2005, young people are still being victimised at rates higher than that experienced by their adult counterparts, with the rates for violent crimes such as assault and robbery being more than double the rates observed among adults."

The above, coupled with the issue of violence in schools covered in earlier sections, gives a picture of a culture of violence, with young people seemingly at the centre, with implications for the present safety and security of society and young people, as well as for the future:-

*"The implications of this violence are profound. Young people who are exposed to any form of violence, or who are themselves being victimised, are significantly more likely to become perpetrators of criminal, violent or other anti-social behaviour. Ergo, in a society that is characterised by high levels of violence against and by young people, and in which for youngsters violence is an everyday occurrence, levels of violence are likely to increase over time*

*unless drastic interventions succeed in breaking the cycles of violence.”*  
(Burton, 2007: 2)

Most of the above studies mentioned, have also sought to explore the reasons for the high levels of violence and crime. In general, two global theories for high levels of youth crime and victimhood are presented. Firstly, Merton's Strain Theory (explored in Bruce, 2007) argues that crime increases when there is a widening gap between the cultural and material goals of society and the distribution of opportunities to achieve these goals in socially acceptable ways. This is particularly true in the information age, where young people are being bombarded with messages to consume and with lifestyles centred on consumption, without the opportunities (decent work) to make this possible. Bandura's social learning theory, on the other hand makes the case that criminality and violence are learned through exposure, modelling or imitation, and internally and externally reinforced.

More specifically to South Africa, Burton (2007) argues that the fact that the parents of children today are the very generation growing up amidst and brutalised by the violence and repression of the 1980's, a context also characterised by the breakdown in respect of authority is indeed a factor in the current wave. Leoschut and Bonora (2007) include in their list of the causes of youth violence and criminality such as exposure to crime and violence in families or communities; poverty and unemployment; gender and conceptions of masculinity; peer relationships; acquisition of material goods; state of security in the country; substance use and abuse; the family environment; and children's rights and responsibilities.

In a manual on Community Safety strategies, developed for the Department of Safety and Security (2000:62), one of the examples of a focus area for a municipality crime prevention strategy is listed as 'Reducing youth-related crime'; including such strategies as measures to ensure young people stay and complete school, are safe at school, support to families and providing opportunities for extra-mural activities. Leoschut and Burton (2009) in their research report *Building resilience to crime and violence in young South Africans*, concur with these measures to break the cycle of violence. They identified nine key factors which enhance the resilience of youth and children to engage in violence and crime: education (ensure that young people remain and complete school with opportunity for post-school education); gender (different ways in which young men and women relate to violence and crimes, and gendered interventions); support for the creation of non-violent family environments; limiting exposure to criminal role-models; substance abstinence; interactions with non-delinquent peers; reducing child and youth victimisation; and changing societal attitudes to violence and anti-social behaviour.

## 5. Conclusion

The issue of social cohesion is complex and multi-faceted. The paper sought to examine some of the key aspects of the context in which the current generation finds themselves, which affect, contribute or detract from social cohesion. There

are some major areas of concern – particularly with regards the material well-being of young people and their safety and security.

With regards material wellbeing, the most important factors are poverty, education and employment. Not only are we continue to add new generations of low-skilled workers to the labour force, but we are condemning each year new generations to join the ranks of the long-term unemployed and thus perpetuating intergenerational poverty. Though South Africa has made progress in education, the system still marginalise millions of young people, depriving them from second chance opportunities because they dropped out of school or did not complete Matric. And even those who completed Matric confronts opportunities for further education that is limited to less than a quarter of the age cohort. The situation with regards employment and labour market participation is dire, and has correctly been called by Labour Minister as a “powder keg waiting to explode.”

An even more worrying and related factor is the exposure and participation of young people in violent crime. The numbers are simply staggering, but more importantly, we are reproducing a culture of violence, in places where young people and children should be the safest – at home and in school. The interventions to build young people’s resilience to crime and violence are already those that a comprehensive national youth policy should embrace – education, positive role models, positive peer inter-actions, support to families and safety at home and schools.

Other dimensions of social cohesion – the family, religion, sport and civil society - face major challenges, but there are important signs of hope – expressed by public commitment to support families, a search for relevance amongst all religions, reaffirming the place of sports in youth development and the importance of the spirit of participation and voluntarism.

It is testimony to the resilience and innovation of youth, that despite the above odds, they are immensely positive and are making an invaluable contribution to our society and to our identity as an emerging nation. They are indeed our most valued assets.

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