

Brand South Africa
Research Note

*Active Citizenship and
Social Cohesion*

*Findings from Brand SA Domestic
Perceptions Research*

By: Dr Judy Smith-Höhn, Leigh-Gail Petersen

INTRODUCTION

Brand South Africa's Domestic Perceptions Research findings contribute to developing an understanding of how South Africans perceive the nation brand, and particularly tracks indicators such as national pride, attitudes, values and beliefs. This research assists Brand South Africa to identify nuances at play in the social, economic and political milieu.

Additionally, the research informs Brand South Africa's planning to effectively communicate on the nation brand in both the domestic and international environments. What South Africans think of the brand, therefore, matters a lot to Brand SA.

Through the research the organisation receives three indices, being the Active Citizenship, Social Cohesion, and Pride index. This research note will focus specifically on findings and some nuances that emerge from the results. It should be noted that both the Active Citizenship and Social Cohesion indices link directly to key elements of South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP).

This Research Note is the third in a series of publications that will communicate on the findings from this empirical study.¹ This note will illustrate the level of citizen participation in all spheres of life (family, community, state) and the extent to which South Africa is a socially cohesive society.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A nationally representative sample of 2524 respondents from across all nine provinces were interviewed with a structured questionnaire over a 4-week period from 17 November - 12 December 2014. The interviews were conducted at the homes of the respondents for 40-60 minutes and translated into the respondents' home-language where necessary.

The sample is nationally representative across age, race, gender, income, community size and region.

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP INDEX

Active citizenship is considered an essential component that contributes towards the strengthening of South African society, democracy and the economy. According to the NDP, active citizenship relates to rights, equalising opportunities and enhancing human capabilities. More importantly, the NDP emphasises the interdependence of active citizenship and government accountability and responsiveness. Citizens have a civic duty to hold their governments to account and in so doing, contribute to the shaping and implementation of policies at the national and local level.² Active citizenship therefore matters, not only to promote beneficial exchange between citizens, but also in terms of

its potential to contribute to growth and development nationally and thus enhance South Africa's competitiveness.

At the most basic level Active Citizenship could be interpreted as the extent to which individuals participate in societal structures and processes. For example, in order to measure levels of active citizenship one would need to ask to what extent are South Africans involved in their communities, political processes, and how willing are they to commit time and resources to contribute to society.

The impetus for an active citizen is founded on the understanding that the developmental challenges facing South Africa cannot be addressed by the government alone. Active citizenship requires from all to play their part in pursuing sustainable means to contribute to development in their communities and, more broadly, in society at large. Active citizenship is about being accountable and responsible for the change we would like to see in our society.

The Active Citizenship Index score was calculated through allocating possible points to responses of structured close-ended questions from the Domestic Perceptions study.³

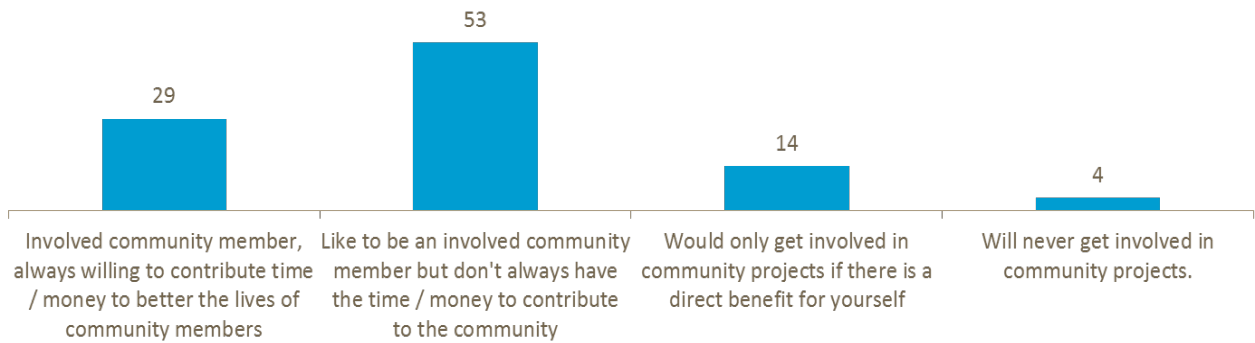
Questions included in the Active Citizenship Index were intended to solicit the views of respondents on a range of issues, from involvement in community and community projects to participation in elections as registered voters.

FIGURE 1: SOUTH AFRICAN'S ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP INDEX SCORE



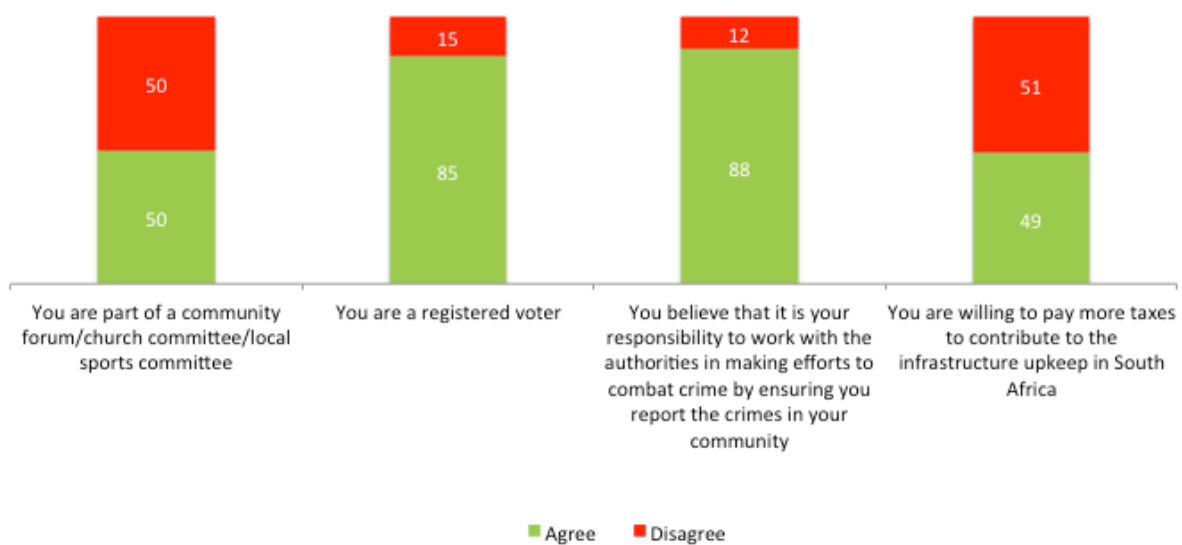
South Africans' Active Citizenship Index score is at 68%, which falls into the 'good' category of the Index. This implies that more than half of South Africa's citizens participate actively in their respective communities (involvement in a voluntary activity or engaging with local government agencies); are empowered to play a part in the decisions and processes that affect them, particularly public policy and services; have a fair amount of knowledge and understanding of the political/social/economic context of their participation so that they can make informed decisions; and are able to challenge policies or actions and existing structures on the basis of principles such as equality, inclusiveness, diversity and social justice.

FIGURE 2: LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT IN COMMUNITY (IN %)



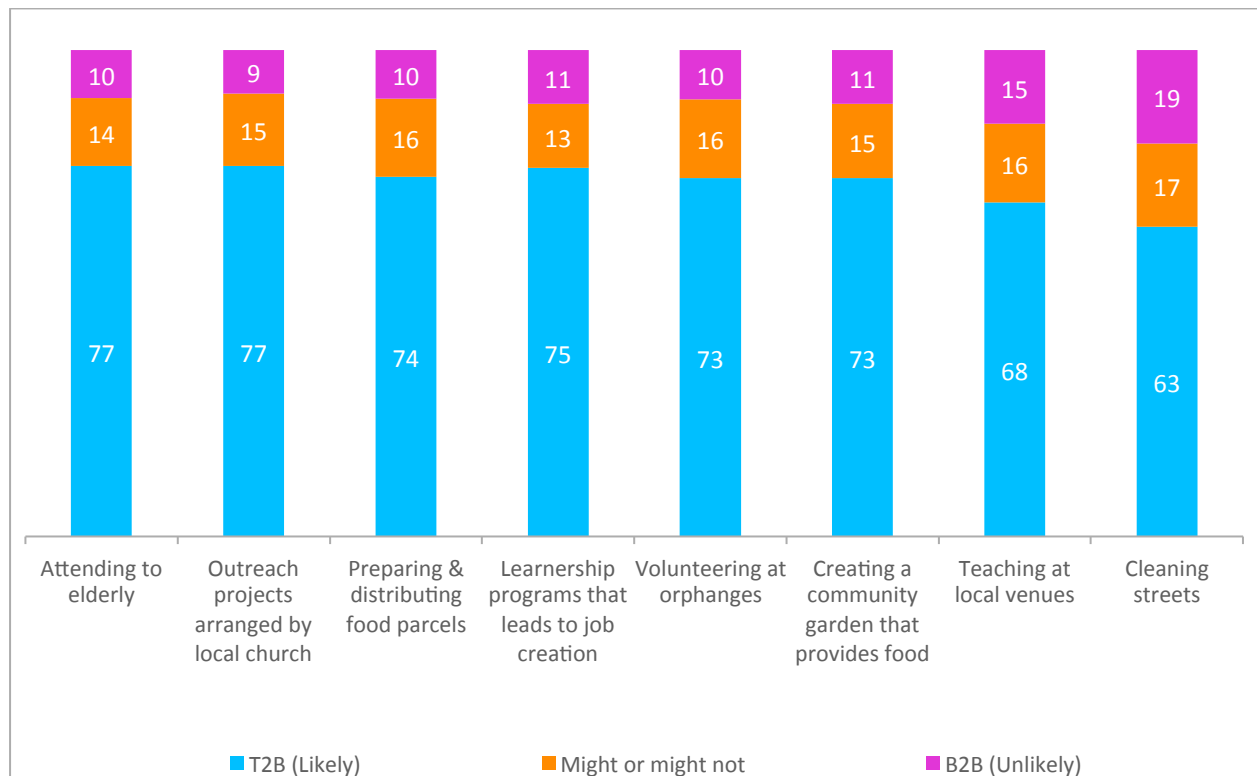
However, despite 29% of the sample indicating that they are involved community members who are always willing to contribute to their communities (as seen in Figure 2); over half of the sample doesn't always have the time or the money to contribute to active citizenry. While there may be perceived obstacles to involvement in social initiatives, Brand SA can, through its Play Your Part programme encourage citizens to see how such contributions impacts positively on both collective good, themselves as well.

FIGURE 3: TAKING PART IN ACTIVITIES / ACTIONS



Most are registered voters and are prepared to take responsibility for reporting crime. A fair amount - 1 in every 2 - are also willing to provide additional personal time or finances to engage in these activities, i.e. to take active part in committees or forums, or to pay more taxes for infrastructure upkeep.

FIGURE 4: LIKELIHOOD OF PARTICIPATING IN COMMUNITY PROJECTS



When it comes to the specific types of activities citizens engage in, a wide variety of associations occur - peaking at “attending to the elderly” and “volunteering at orphanages”. Research findings indicate that South Africans are most likely to work with the elderly, to get involved in church or faith-based outreach programmes, and are least likely to be active in street cleaning and knowledge transfer (teaching). The reason for the willingness to contribute to the former set of activities is likely due to the fact that these are programmes and initiatives that have already been set up by an organisation, thus individuals feel that they can tap into those activities more readily as opposed to starting an initiative on their own.

Factors such as employment/unemployment also play a role in the amount of time and resources people are able to contribute to play their part in active citizenry. While close to 1 in every 3 is already involved, more than half of the respondents (53%) stated that they would like to be more involved but lacked the time and/or money to contribute actively to community initiatives.

SOCIAL COHESION INDEX

As mentioned above, the NDP has prioritised social cohesion and nation building as two of its core priorities for the 2014-2019 electoral mandate. The overarching objectives of “reducing inequality of opportunity, redress, enabling the sharing of common space, awakening the populace to speak when things go wrong and to be active in their own development as well as engendering the knowledge of the Constitution and fostering the values contained therein” therefore link directly to the achievement of higher levels of Social Cohesion in our society.⁴

The above is based on the notion that social cohesion improves a country’s overall competitiveness and economic performance because “more egalitarian societies and settings (...) are correlated with positive outcomes such as good health, child development and labour market adjustments in the face of structural challenges”.⁵ Social Cohesion, in terms of the NDP, is thus considered a prerequisite for sustainable economic growth.

While social cohesion has become a conceptually overloaded concept, Brand SA has, for the purposes of the domestic perceptions survey, defined social cohesion as “the degree of social integration and inclusion in communities and society at large, and the extent to which mutual solidarity finds expression among individuals and communities”.

As with the Active Citizenship Index, the Social Cohesion Index score was calculated through allocating possible points to responses of structured close-ended questions.⁶

Questions included in the Social Cohesion Index focused on three broad categories: inclusion, equality and diversity.

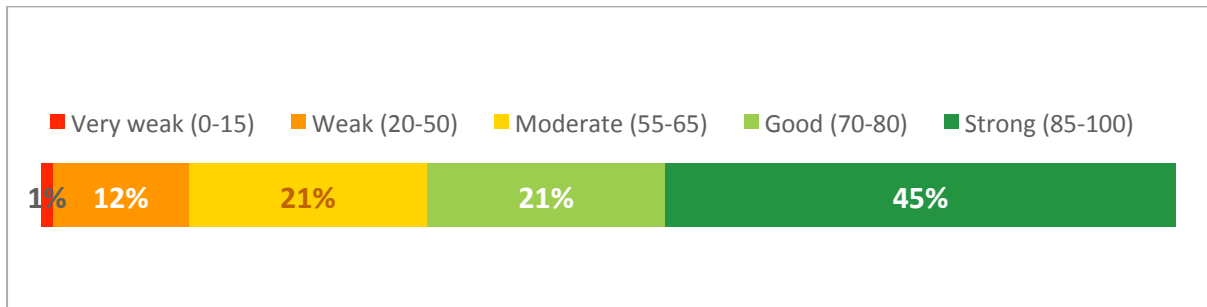
FIGURE 5: SOUTH AFRICAN’S SOCIAL COHESION INDEX SCORE



The social cohesion index stands high at 73 out of 100.

Based on questions posed to all respondents, research findings revealed that almost half of South African citizens have a strong feeling of cohesion (45%), and 21% have a good sense of cohesion.⁷

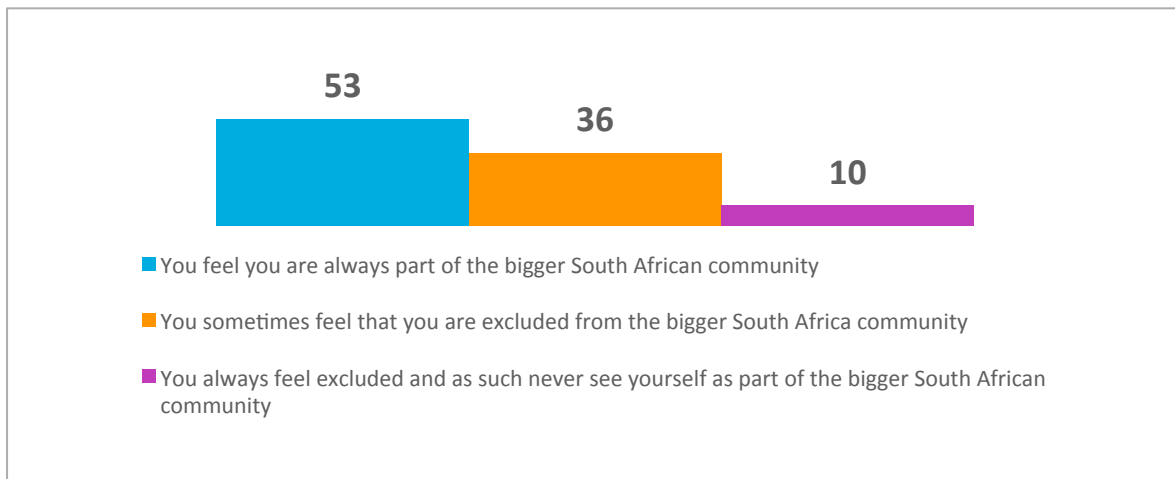
FIGURE 6: BREAKDOWN OF SOCIAL COHESION INDEX



In a country with many diverse histories, cultures and religions, the citizens feel that their living environments are improving - there are less feelings of inequality, exclusion & disparity - they feel included and part of their greater communities.

More than half the respondents felt they were always part of the bigger South African community, and only a 10% felt they were always excluded. The remaining 36% felt that they were sometime excluded (See Figure 7 below).

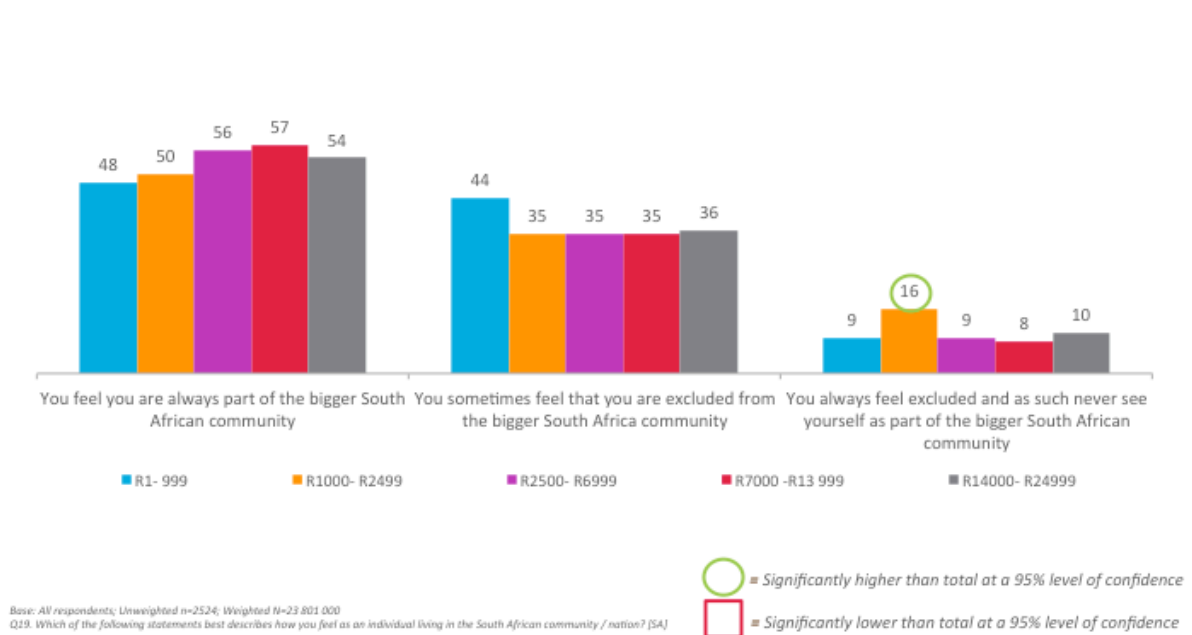
FIGURE 7: FEELINGS OF INCLUSION AS SA CITIZEN



Q19. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel as an individual living in the South African community / nation? [SA]

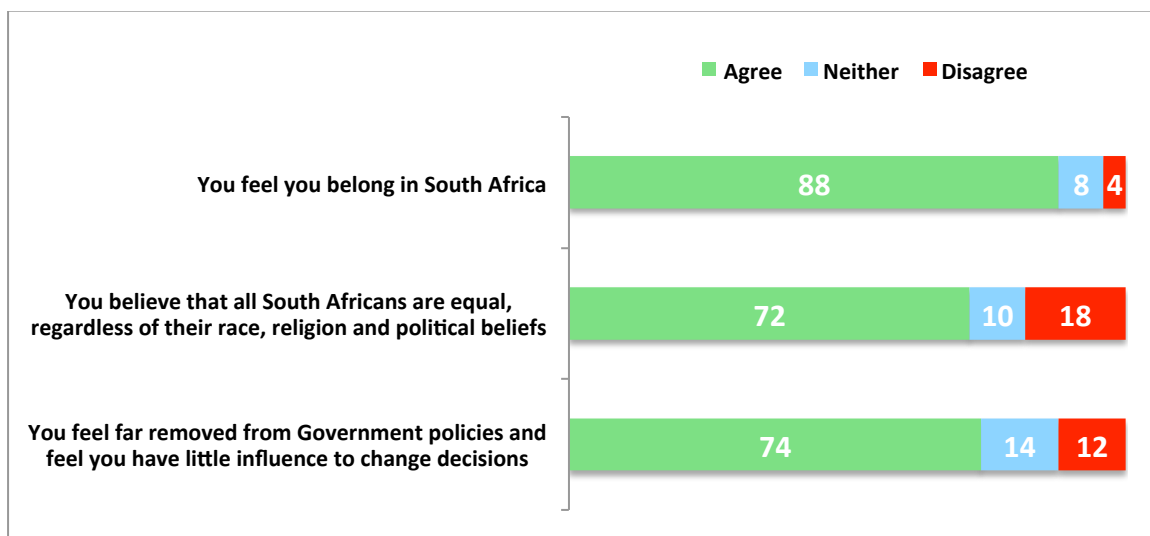
The slight dissatisfaction among South Africans around the feelings of inclusion are, in fact, the reason why the Social Cohesion is “good” and not “strong”. The population group that appear to feel most excluded are the Lower LSM’s (see Figure 8 below).

FIGURE 8: FEELINGS OF INCLUSION AS SA CITIZEN BY INCOME



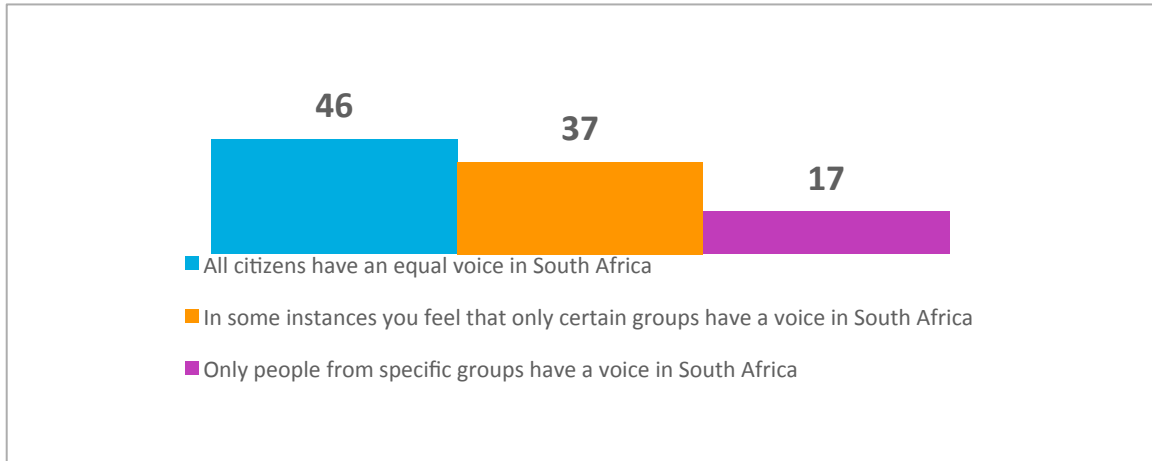
Another interesting finding from the research was the strong sense of belonging among citizens in general (88% feel they belong in South Africa) as opposed to a lesser sense of equality among various population groups (72% of respondents believed that all South Africans are equal regardless of race, religion or political beliefs). Results are also more critical in terms of respondents' perceptions of their ability to exercise their voice in the realm of policy. 74% of respondents felt far removed from government policies and felt they had little influence on decision-making (Figure 9).

FIGURE 9: FEELINGS OF EQUALITY



In line with the generally positive sentiments around broader inclusion noted above, the majority of citizens questioned felt that all citizens had an equal voice in South Africa (46% of respondents agreed, and less than 1/5 noted that only those belonging to specific groups had a voice. (see Figure 10 below).

FIGURE 10: DIVERSITY IN SOUTH AFRICA



Q19. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel as an individual living in the South African community / nation? [SA] / Q20. In South Africa we are privileged to have a diverse population. Which ONE of these statements best indicate how you feel the different groups are being included? [SA]

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The long term objective of the National Development Plan 2030 envisions a South Africa that is both socially and economically inclusive, with a citizenry that shares a set of common values that cut across racial and social groups, with strong leaders in every sphere of a society of active, mobilised and responsible citizens.⁸

An active citizenry is a key component of a more socially cohesive society. As highlighted in Outcome 14 of the MTSF, “citizens need to help shape the development process and hold the government to account for the quality of services it delivers.”⁹ However, a key challenge that has emerged from the research relates to the lack of resources, in particular, that citizens appear to have to contribute to community initiatives.

That said, the results from the domestic perceptions survey are cause for optimism - as they reflect a generally positive attitude towards fellow citizens; a relatively high level of social cohesion despite income inequality and insufficient employment opportunities; and a willingness of citizens to engage actively in their communities and exercise their civic duties and rights by partaking in elections.

Two key recommendations have emerged from the analysis of these indexes:

1. Promote youth participation as a means to enhance active citizenship

South Africa is a youthful nation. The most recent population survey revealed that more than two-thirds of the population are below the age of 34¹⁰. Effective youth development practices engage youth in active roles, viewing them as community resources rather than as passive recipients of services. The potential benefits of youth participation are seen as contributing to the development of a positive individual identity and a sense of responsibility, as young people's legitimate right to participate in decision making as development of democratic societies, as a form of social justice, 'vital engagement' of youth in community life and finally as a means to combat social exclusion.

2. Promote inclusiveness by targeting marginalised groups to enhance feelings of cohesiveness

Social cohesion is an inherently ambiguous concept. It is, after all, a hybrid concept operating in diverse policy communities and, as such, the elements indicating levels of social cohesion would naturally be determined, among other things, by the context in which it is being measured.

Moreover, no society can ever be fully cohesive. Instead, rather than being a goal, social cohesion is an ideal that a society continuously strives for and a government encourages by means of strategies geared towards generating employment opportunities to decrease income inequality for example.

The NDP acknowledges the fact that South Africa remains a divided society, and that access to and the quality of basic services continues to be determined by "the privilege attached to race, class, space and gender".¹¹ Reducing these gaps between rich and poor, black and white, women and men, urban and rural is indeed a mammoth project in social and political engineering with the goal of creating the conditions for sustainable growth and development for the benefit of all who live in that society.

But lest we forget, social cohesion is not the responsibility of government alone. If defined as the willingness of members of a society to cooperate so that all can survive and prosper, then we as citizens each have our roles to play.

Brand South Africa's Research Notes and Research Reports communicate findings from Brand South Africa research and related panel discussions. The Research Notes and Reports are intended to elicit comments, contribute to debate, and inform stakeholders about trends and issues that impact on South Africa's reputation and overall competitiveness.

Views expressed in Research Notes are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of Brand South Africa, or the Government of the Republic of South Africa. Every precaution is taken to ensure the accuracy of information. However, Brand South Africa shall not be liable to any person for inaccurate information or opinions contained herein.

For More Information:

Dr Judy Smith-Höhn

Research Manager

judys@brandsouthafrica.com

Endnotes:

¹ The first Research Note focused on the question of whether South Africa is a brand of optimists. See Petrus de Kock (2010), *South Africa: A Brand of Optimists? Findings from Brand SA's Domestic Perceptions Research*, Brand SA Research Note, Published 10 April 2015, available at:

http://www.brandsouthafrica.com/images/2015/Research_Note_-_South_Africa_-_A_Brand_of_Optimism_-_8.4.152.pdf

² For more on active citizenship and its role in changing the South African brand reality, see <http://www.brandsouthafrica.com/news/1126-active-citizenship-and-its-role-in-changing-the-south-african-brand-reality>

³ Each response could contribute a maximum of 5 points towards the final index score. All scores per respondent were added up to arrive at a score out of 25. The score out of 25 was then converted to a score out of 100 - which is the index score used in the results.

⁴ See Outcome 14, Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), pg. 3, Released by Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, available at: <http://www.thepresidency-dpme.gov.za/news/Pages/Outcome-1-Education-MTSF-Chapter-.aspx>. As Government's strategic plan for the 2014-2019 electoral term, the MTSF has categorized its strategic priorities into fourteen key outcomes and associated activities and targets. For more details, visit: www.thepresidency-dpme.gov.za/news/MTSF/MTSF%202014-2019.pdf

⁵ Jane Jenson, 2010, *Defining and Measuring Social Cohesion*, Commonwealth Secretariat and United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Available at: [http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/%28httpAuxPages%29/170C271B7168CC30C12577D0004BA206/\\$file/Jenson%20ebook.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/%28httpAuxPages%29/170C271B7168CC30C12577D0004BA206/$file/Jenson%20ebook.pdf)

⁶ Each response could contribute a maximum of 5 points towards the final index score. All scores per respondent were added up to arrive at a score out of 25. The score out of 25 was then converted to a score out of 100 - which is the index score used in the results.

⁷ As for the other respondents, 21% fell into the "moderate" category, while 12% were "weak", and only 1% "very weak"

⁸ See e.g. Outcome 14, Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), Appendix 14, Released by Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, available at: <http://www.thepresidency-dpme.gov.za/news/Pages/Outcome-1-Education-MTSF-Chapter-.aspx>

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ In line with the national definition, persons aged between 15-34 years are regarded as youth and adults are aged 35-64 years.

¹¹ Outcome 14, Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF)