

An aspect of the challenge is a false 'cosmopolitanism' under the guise of globalisation, which can conceal, though scantily, a paradigm to view Europe, Australia/New Zealand and Northern America as the paragons of civilisation. In the end, this reflects a modernisation of a colonial mindset, a view that South Africa should be an extension of Europe and its historical offshoots 'in the free world'.

Combined with a history in which acceptance or rejection by 'the world' played a crucial role, this can encourage a 'catwalk syndrome' within society: on the one hand, with those who seek to retain apartheid privilege using racial kith-and-kin sentiment across the globe to demand conformity with norms of already 'normal' more equitable societies; and on the other, with those in political office constantly and subconsciously seeking to demonstrate how 'good and civilised' they are.

Much work needs to be done for the nation to use its own prism to define itself, without craving for affirmation from others as the starting point of self-worth. As with instances where individuals are trapped by loyalty to a cause or reliance on employment for self-sustenance to the extent of tolerating abuse, much of South African society, in its mindset, is still struggling to strike the right balance between self-assertion on the one hand and reasonable, principled conformity based on enlightened self-interest on the other.

In the past few years, the discourse and practical programmes on the regeneration of Africa has posited a new frame of reference whose significance is only now starting to be felt. But as with the long march of the African Renaissance itself, this will be a hard slog – protracted in its time frames and slow in shifting paradigms.

## **IX CONCLUSION – DISTILLING THE MAJOR TRENDS**

### **36 Overall characterisation of society**

The data overall points to a society in dynamic change, both materially and spiritually. It is subject to debate whether some of the volatility, for instance in social



mobility, is a reflection merely of immediate corrections to the history of discrimination – the smashing of the glass ceiling in relation to those who already had some opportunity such as education – or a sustained trend of increased access. It should be expected though that, with the expansion of the economic base and BBBEE, such a trend should continue, even if the pace may slacken.

While there is an improving sense of an overarching identity, the persistence of racial profiles with regard to most of the macro-social indicators does illustrate the road yet to be traversed. In terms of ownership and control of wealth and income, access to social services such as health, water, housing, electricity and education; the character of civil-society structures to which individuals belong; and public opinion on various aspects of government activity, this profile is all still too obvious.

How to mediate the tension between a market-based economic system premised on cut-throat competition, and the desire to build a caring society is one of the critical issues that identify themselves. This is not merely a matter of social values, but also one that impacts on public policy: as a tension firstly between encouraging individual self-advancement and collective development, and secondly between encouraging individual excellence and social equity.

From both public policy pronouncements and social discourse, reconstruction and development as well as nation-building and reconciliation have featured as the core issues defining society's endeavours and aspirations. Are these sufficient to capture the public imagination and define a 'national personality'? Do they constitute a vision? Can societies as diverse as ours – as distinct from ones in which language, religion and/or culture are to all intents and purposes homogeneous – define and collectively pursue a national vision?

Overall, the data points to increasing levels of social cohesion, in terms of unity, coherence, functionality and pride among South Africans. However, this is drawn back by the legacy of inequality, intense migratory trends, crime related to social conditions and vestiges of racism in terms of attitudes and practical actions.



### 37 Main social trends

South Africa has experienced an improvement in the quality of life of the majority of citizens, but the backlogs – defined still in terms of race – remain huge. For those on the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder, there are manifestations of a poverty trap influenced by such factors as education, gender and geographic location and reflected in income, access to opportunities and assets – an expression of two economies in one country.

The system has in the past decade shown a vibrant tendency to provide welcome possibilities, especially where educational opportunities have been provided. The mass migration into the middle strata and beyond, among those who were squashed under the glass ceiling of apartheid is a reflection both of 'normalisation' and the expansion of opportunity. However, inequality even within these strata seems to be increasing.

Data suggests low economic activity and a spirit of entrepreneurship, particularly among African and coloured communities, especially in rural areas. Artisanry and self-employment seem not to be widespread.

Massive migration to areas with higher economic potential confirms the artificiality of the apartheid economic geography, and puts high on the agenda the issue of spatial planning.

The programmes of the democratic Government have put quite a high premium on equity as it applies to targeted groups, including women, children and people with disability. The impact has been discernible, but from a low base. The variety of other social trends such as migration, the poverty trap, and weak social networks affect these groups even more keenly.

Mortality statistics do help to isolate the issues that require attention to improve the health profile of the nation, primarily social conditions and lifestyles. Of critical



importance is to contain the HIV and AIDS epidemic, while using these efforts to improve awareness of health issues generally and improving health infrastructure.

While there is a myriad of causes of a variety of crimes, a critical underlying factor, especially in respect of contact and property-related crimes, is the issue of social conditions. This includes poverty, the built-environment, choice of forms of recreation and so on. Most of these crimes take place in underdeveloped areas among the poor. Combined with this, especially with regard to serious cases of robbery, drug-peddling and commercial crimes, is the element of greed in a society in which 'to make it' is defined in terms of conspicuous riches, irrespective of whether these are acquired by hook or by crook.

### **38 Social networks and social capital**

There is a trend for the nuclear family to recede as a basic unit of organisation, with an increase in single or extended households. At the one level, this reflects the dynamism of a society experiencing social change; but on the other hand, it presents serious challenges of household subsistence in poor areas and the social upbringing of the young.

Many citizens belong to social networks of various kinds outside of family circles. It is striking though that research on this subject suggests that Africans seem to be the least networked: discounting for the fact that burial societies, stokvels and activities related to sport were not included in the research, the critical issue remains that the poor are the ones with the least effective social capital.

Participation in civil-society activities is relatively high, and in broad terms, South African society seems to manifest a high level of socio-political consciousness. This is reflected both in electoral participation and community assertion of rights. It should be noted that empirical data suggests that larger numbers within the white community are recoiling from political involvement; and the level of participation



within the coloured and Indian communities is quite low. However, civil-society participation within these communities is quite high.

Religion is a critical social force among all communities. It is also seen by many as a critical instrument of social intervention, especially in relation to matters of nation-building and reconciliation. While those most active in various religions evince an element of conservatism on some social issues, in broad terms, they reflect the views of the majority of society, and adherence to a particular faith does not seem to translate into rigid political choices.

### **39 Social identity and self-worth**

South Africans evince a strong sense of national identity, at least in terms of association with the geographic and State entity. However, the diversity of society in terms of race, class and nationality/language does manifest a strong presence in the social consciousness. While race and nationality/language seem to be receding as primary forms of self-definition, class identity seems to be on the ascendancy.

The various nationalities or language groups manifest different levels of 'cosmopolitanism' or geographic spread across the country. Many urban areas reflect high levels of acculturation. Multilingualism seems to be quite widespread, especially within the African community, combined with a trend towards English as the real and aspirational language of commercial and political discourse.

In terms of identity, language/nationality features as a secondary form, but quite pronounced within the African community. This is also most prevalent among the elderly and the least educated. This is statistically significant among those aged 50 years and older.

There is general sense that race relations have improved and such experiences and networks as sporting events, the TRC, the church and legislative interventions are



seen as having made a critical contribution to this. Specific rural areas, and the private sector seem to buck this trend or at least to lag behind. At the same time, complaints of racism among especially whites and coloureds seem to reflect a sense of insecurity arising from the formal elimination of exclusive privileges.

Society's value systems reflect a tension between market-based competitive relations and the aspiration for equitable development in a caring society. This tension finds expression in the creative sphere and mediums of discourse. There is also a continuing struggle to affirm an Afrocentric consciousness against a mindset to glorify everything in developed countries as invincible and infallible. This in part reflects a social pathology to seek affirmation from other nations and thus to view ourselves through the prism of other countries' opinions.

Overall, the chain of inherited social attributes – across distribution of wealth and income; access to social services such as education, housing, water and electricity; lifestyles, including sizes of households and age demographics; health and mortality profiles; forms of social organisation and social capital; and matters of identity and culture – still manifests itself, though decreasingly, in terms of racial fault-lines. With regard to a number of attributes, the younger generation seems to evince practices, attitudes and an identity that is strongly integrative.

