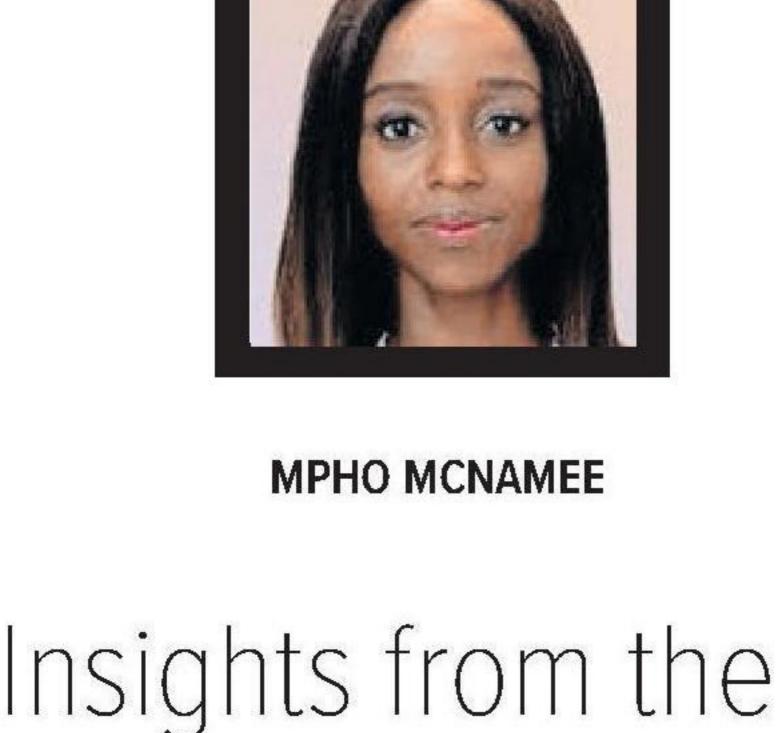
Date: Wednesday, February 12, 2025 Page: 6

Publication: Cape Times

COMMENT



2024 SA social

cohesion index

## sion Index provides powerful insights for civil society, politicians and policymakers, but also offers opportunities for reflection and learning among South Africa's corporate citizens. The research underpinning the Index is important as South Africa begins its historic National Dialogue process shortly. It will have other

benefits too, since understanding

and improving cohesion in society

is fundamental to our growth and

THE latest South Africa Social Cohe-

prosperity. Telkom is therefore proud to have sponsored this work by the Inclusive Society Institute in collaboration with Constructor University in Germany over several years. The 2024 research findings confirm the broader trends that the Social Cohesion Index has tracked since 2021

but show an encouraging reversal in

the downward score of social cohesion

which had been shown at the end of

In 2024, the cohesion index rose

2023.

to 53.3 points from 51.7 in 2023, moving South Africa away from the 50-point threshold which would signal a concerning weakening. The 2024 improvement brings the index close to its 2021 level and suggests a strengthening of social bonds across the country. Limpopo again emerged with the

highest level of social cohesion at 56.5,

while KwaZulu-Natal – having experi-

enced significant political shifts and

civic unrest in recent years - recorded

the lowest at 49.6.

South Africa exhibits unique and often surprising social-cohesion characteristics, important for stakeholders, including corporate citizens like Telkom, to understand. Among the many insights surfaced

in the research is that cohesion in

South Africa is lower in more affluent

sections of society. This contrasts with

other cohesion studies from Western

and Asian contexts, which typically show a positive correlation between GDP and cohesion. Additionally, the research suggests that racial and linguistic diversity in South Africa improve social cohesion, while religious diversity seems to weaken it. Provinces with higher levels of

education tend to show lower social

cohesion, possibly reflecting frustra-

higher in more rural regions than

in urban areas. The study indicates

that access to modern information

technology appears to diminish social

cohesion in South Africa, while con-

Social cohesion is considerably

tion with the state of the economy.

tradicting other findings that suggest technology can bolster it. A significant conclusion is that despite our downward-cohesion trend, South African national identification emerges as the strongest dimension of cohesion in the study scoring 72.2, reflecting the overwhelming support

for the statement that "I am proud to

and classes. Findings like these offer

intriguing possibilities and raise inter-

This remains true across groups

be South African".

esting questions.

For Telkom, the role of technology in social cohesion is an obvious area for further investigation and understanding, particularly with our role as the backbone of South Africa's digital future. Our mission remains to connect South Africans to a better life. This research implies the importance of digital-literacy programmes to

underpin broadening digital inclusiv-

ity and stave off the negative impacts

of social-media platforms and disin-

formation. Citizens must truly benefit

Further, we must protect cohesive

from greater digital access.

real-world social networks from being damaged by their digital equivalents. Telkom is active in this space, having invested over R210 million in digital-literacy projects over the years alongside our network efforts, which have seen us connect over 70000 township homes to the internet. The insight that rural South Africa shows stronger cohesion compared

to the more affluent and educated

urban areas is a rich opportunity for

the corporate community to explore.

from rural community dynamics to

As corporates, we can learn

strengthen urban connections. MPHO McNamee is Telkom's chief

corporate affairs officer.

This material has been copied under a Dalro licence and is not for resale or retransmission.