

Social capital in the Western Cape Province

Social capital is an academic term. National government used a similar concept in its *Ten Year Review*. President Mbeki also referred to social cohesion in his State of the National address in February 2004 when he said that government must find a way to bridge the gap between the first and second economies. Also social compacts should be built for community and NGO participation in government policy and plans to ensure implementation.

What do concepts like social capital, social compact and social cohesion mean? How will they change the way the Western Cape government works?

How does the Province understand social capital?

Social capital is very similar to the South African idea of 'ubuntu'. 'Ubuntu' says that a person is a person only through other people. It says that our own well-being will be harmed when our neighbours, friends and people in the broader society are not enjoying well-being. Social capital talks about the way we live and work together. Some people say that social capital is the 'glue' that holds society together. It is not about 'what you know but who you know' so that social capital links people to resources and opportunities. Social capital are the institutions, relationships, norms and networks that shape the quality and quantity of society's social interactions and enables collective action.

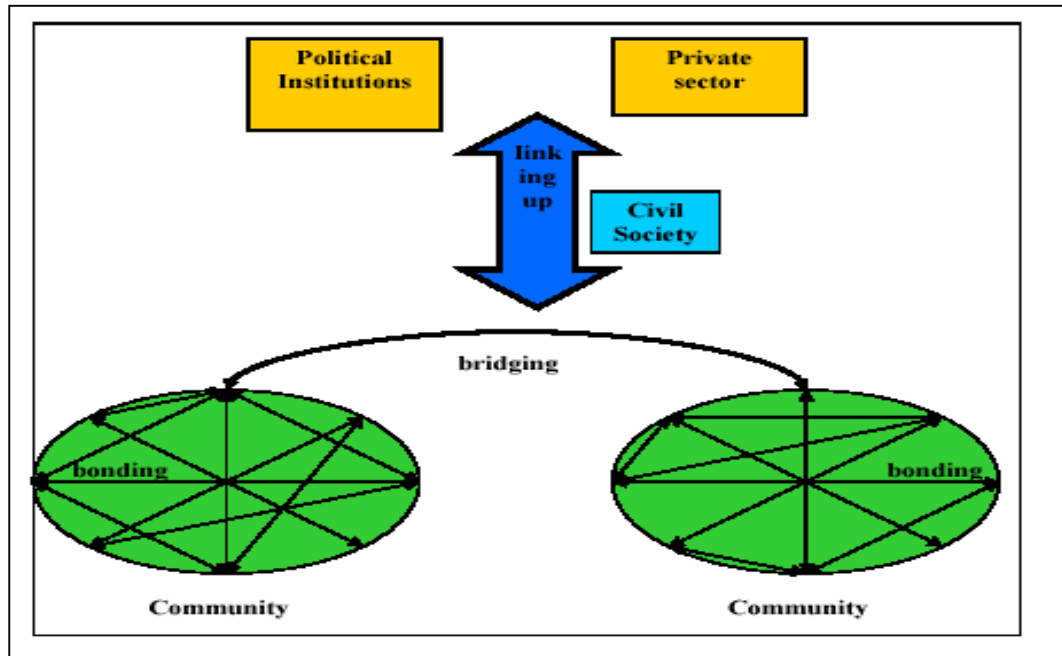
Social capital is the substance that holds institutions together. It is based on trust and shared values that enable exchange of goods and services in a reciprocal relationship. If there exist networks everybody can refer to and have access to individuals but also communities and groups are enabled to manage better challenging situations.

Sometimes the idea of social capital is romanticised. Then it is described how neighbours will help a poor person when they are in difficulties, for example by giving them some bread, even though they are themselves very poor. The Western Cape's social capital strategy aims to strengthen social capital in ways that can help poor people in particular.

But that can only be achieved if social capital is existent in form of bonding, bridging and linking up. What does that mean? Strong inter-community ties are seen as a high level of bonding as for example a strong support through the neighbourhood. If people are brought together across social and racial differences one can speak of bridging. It

connects for example different communities and widen there opportunities for growth and access.

Social capital is not only about the trust and relations between individuals and communities but also about how to link individuals and communities on a basis of trust bottom up and top down with government institutions and the private sector.



Social capital can also be negative. For example, gangs are a form of social capital 'bonds', but the province wants to weaken gangs rather than strengthen them. Another example of negative social capital is when a group comes together to protect their neighbourhood against crime, but later starts using vigilante tactics.

Social capital networks can be negative if they exclude certain people or groups. The province's idea of a 'Home for All' means that social capital must include everybody, not just certain groups. Social capital must be built within communities, between communities, between rich and poor, and between government and the people who live in the province.

Building on our past struggles

Apartheid tried to divide people rather than unite them. It tried to build social capital within race groups, and to destroy links that existed across groups. For example, before the forced removals, District Six was home to a community of people of all colours and religions. These people lived, worked and played together. They lived near to work opportunities and were part of City life. The apartheid government tore this

community apart and sent people to live in racially separate townships far from work opportunities.

Most South Africans did not accept apartheid lying down. They came together across race and other differences in the struggle against apartheid. They did this even though they were forced to live in separate areas, go to different schools, and 'play' in different places and separate groups.

Since the end of apartheid, people have continued to try to work together. For example, in November 2003 workers, employers, government and civil society came together in the Growth and Development summit to discuss how to build the Western Cape Province.

These are positive experiences on which we can build.

Social capital is about participation

South Africa's Constitution says that everyone must have a say in how the country is run. This must not only happen every five years when there are elections. There must also be ways in which people can come together regularly to discuss, debate and agree on what must be done. The Imbizos are one way how government on national, provincial and local level tries to accomplish that.

In addition to discussion and decision-making, the social capital strategy is about finding ways in which government can work together with different parts of civil society to deliver services. Government realises that this will only succeed if it finds a new way of working. Instead of seeing civil society as people who interfere and criticise, government must see people living in the province as its co-workers both in terms of deciding what to do and in terms of doing.

There are already many examples of groups and organisations providing services. For example, there are many welfare organisations which provide services for people in need. Usually most of the work in these organisations is done by women, either unpaid or for very low pay. Government recognises that it cannot expect poor people to bear a heavy burden of work without compensating them in some way.

What does the social capital strategy attempts to achieve?

The Western Cape government hopes that the social capital strategy will help to:

- *Improve access to government services and information*, particularly for poor people This can be done by having government offices open for longer hours, by government officials being able to speak and understand all the province's languages, by having more call centres and helpdesks, and by having more clinics, police stations and welfare offices.
- *Make communities safer*. This can happen through fighting gangsterism, substance abuse, child abuse and neglect, and domestic violence. It can also be achieved through providing more sports and other opportunities to give young people something enjoyable to do.
- *Increase the well-being of people in the province*. This can happen through providing better housing near places of work, health programmes that help youth to deal with their sexuality in a positive way, and sports programmes that support the a healthy and good lifestyle of the youth.
- *Make people good citizens*. Leadership and other programmes, as well as programmes that bring together youth and older people can support this.
- *Build strong families* because if there is not ubuntu in the family, we cannot hope for ubuntu in the wider society. This can be done through programmes on family violence and parenting skills, and encouraging fathers living apart from their children to pay adequate maintenance.