Article

Perceptions of Trust in the Context of Social Cohesion in Selected Rural Communities of South Africa

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Abstract: Although nuances around the definitions and contextualization of social cohesion subsist, this paper views social cohesion through the lens of social cooperation and togetherness within a collective in geopolitical terms, expressed in the attitudes and behaviours of its members. In many countries, including South Africa, social cohesion remains an ideal to strive for and achieve. Extant studies suggest that trust is one of the key factors in building social cohesion. As such, this paper aims to explore trust in the context of social cohesion. This study attempts to address the knowledge gaps regarding the views, feelings, and experiences around trust and also make a contribution to the qualitative inquiry of trust in the context of social cohesion in rural communities of South Africa. Accordingly, the perceptions and experiences of people in two rural communities (Lambert's Bay and Philippolis) regarding trust in the context of social cohesion were explored. A qualitative methodology was employed in order to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of trust. A total of 19 participants were interviewed, comprising of community stakeholders and parents. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect data in face-to-face interviews with participants. Data collected were analysed using Braun and Clark's thematic analysis. The study found that trust among community members in both Lambert's Bay and Philippolis was limited. In instances where there was trust, it was mainly amongst participants who know each other compared to individuals who do not know each other. Thus, in both communities, generalised trust continues to be a challenge.

Keywords: trust; social cohesion; community; low socio-economic; South Africa

1. Introduction

Trust features prominently in the debates around South Africa's transformation. It is often highlighted as a requirement for building a united, democratic, peaceful, and prosperous South Africa. It is listed in the National Development Plan as one of the interventions that can address South Africa's persistent interracial and ethnic divisions and conflicts NPC (2012). Equally, it is considered to have the potential to contribute to envisaged social integration (Bornman 2011; Mmotlane et al. 2010). Noticeably, national efforts to promote social cohesion in South Africa have also elevated the issue of trust. Trust as the key ingredient of social relations and integration is regarded as a key aspect of social cohesion. Ndinga-Kanga et al. (2020) argue that the declining or non-existent trust among citizens impacts negatively on social cohesion. Furthermore, Ndinga-Kanga et al. (2020, p. 407) emphasise that "one of the key measures of social cohesion in social science literature is interpersonal trust or the level of trust individuals in a society place in others". In South Africa, the residue of the distrust inherited from apartheid remains prevalent and evident. The distrust is still observably based on race, gender, class, ethnicity,

and geography (Struwig et al. 2013). In particular, the level of trust differs according to the demographics of communities. This view is constant with You's (2012) assertion that many studies have found that trust is higher and easier to maintain in homogenous societies. According to You (2012), in homogenous societies, it is easier to trust similar rather than dissimilar. In addition, communities that are homogenous are those in rural areas while urban communities are fundamentally diverse (Hajdu et al. 2020).

Research on trust in South Africa has largely focused on the public trust in government (Askvik 2008; Government Communication and Information System 2014; Institute for Justice and Reconciliation 2018; Pillay 2017; Gouws and Schulz-Herzenberg 2016). There is also evidence of limited research on trust in urban areas (Mmotlane et al. 2010). However, there is no published empirical work on trust between citizens in rural areas of South Africa. In particular, there is a lack of research that explores the perceptions of trust in the context of social cohesion in rural communities of South Africa. The research question for this study is "what are the perceptions and experiences of trust among community members of Lambert's Bay and Philippolis?" The Integrated Development Plans of the municipalities under which Lambert's Bay and Philippolis are located categorise these two towns as rural. Both towns are essentially homogenous in race, language, culture and class, which suggests the possibility of a high prevalence of particularised trust. The small population in these areas suggests that even though there's some diversity, the people know each other well and have regular contact. In this regard, it is the aim of this paper to explore trust in the context of social cohesion in Lambert's Bay and Philippolis.

1.1. Social Cohesion in South Africa

The concept of social cohesion has multiple definitions. According to the OECD (2012), there is no single, universally accepted definition of social cohesion. A detailed review of the literature shows that there are many different definitions of social cohesion. The reason for the absence of a single definition and meaning stems from the term being variously appropriated (Schiefer and van der Noll 2017; Burns et al. 2018). The literature also shows, that different countries, authors and researchers approach social cohesion to respond to their own societal challenges. However, this paper adopts the definition of Delhey et al. (2018), which defines social cohesion as the quality of social cooperation and togetherness of a collective, defined in geopolitical terms, that is expressed in the attitudes and behaviours of its members. According to Ballard et al. (2019), the definition of social cohesion should be broad enough for people to embed a wide variety of ideas which reflect their own concerns and beliefs.

In the South African context, social cohesion has a short history, which can be located predominantly in post-apartheid South Africa. Social cohesion is uniquely conceptualised as an effort to bolster the sluggish social transformation in South Africa, especially nation-building (Palmary 2015). At the core of its unique context-specific conceptualisation, the role of social cohesion is to get South Africans to affirm each other's common humanity and address "the divisive effects of racism; class divisions; social fragmentation; language; spatial exclusion; sexism; unemployment; crime and inequality" NPC (2011). The National Development Plan 2030 puts social cohesion at the heart of South Africa's social transformation agenda to promote tolerance, social interaction, inclusion, and solidarity in communities. Fundamentally, social cohesion is being used to harness and enhance relationships between people, irrespective of their diversity. It is widely regarded as an effective way of addressing segregation and exclusion, which continue to reproduce and reinforce the racial, ethnic, and tribal identities of South African society NPC (2011).

Likewise, Steyn and Ballard (2013) state that social cohesion in South Africa has become part of the effort to address the historical context of ethnic hostility, racial segregation, and the dire mismanagement of diversity. Njozela et al. (2019) add that social cohesion is envisaged to promote tolerance, social interaction, inclusion, and solidarity in communities. It is also important to highlight that social cohesion, according to de Beer (2014, p. 3), envisages that:

a community or society that is cohesive to the extent that the inequalities, exclusions and disparities based on ethnicity, gender, class, nationality, age, disability or any other distinctions which engender divisions, distrust and conflict are reduced and/or eliminated in a planned and sustained manner. This, with community members and citizens as active participants, working together for the attainment of shared goals, designed and agreed upon to improve the living conditions for all.

There is a discernible unanimity in the literature that social cohesion is not a natural process but an aspiration that must be consciously promoted and nurtured. For example, Koonce (2011) asserts that social cohesion is the by-product of various activities and conditions that can be recognised ex post. Chan et al. (2006) and Fenger (2012) argue for an appropriate social architecture for social cohesion that needs to be visible and felt. This social infrastructure is also referred to as the indicators, aspects, dimensions, or constitutive elements of social cohesion. According to Tabane and Human-Vogel (2010), Koonce (2011), Fenger (2012), and Ballard et al. (2019), these dimensions constitute behavioural attitudes as well as institutional elements that are intrinsic for meaningful social cohesion to take place. In other words, social cohesion only becomes noticeable when these dimensions are present. Ballard et al. (2019) list social cohesion as having five dimensions, which include (i) common values and civic culture, (ii) social order and social control, (iii) social solidarity and reduced inequality, (iv) social networks and social capital, and (v) territorial belonging and identity. Similarly, Lefko-Everett et al. (2016) lists trust, identity, belonging, solidarity, tolerance, and inclusion as some of the dimensions of social cohesion. Authors such as Chan et al. (2006), Tabane and Human-Vogel (2010), Koonce (2011), Fenger (2012), and Ballard et al. (2019) identify trust as one of the social characteristics, dimensions, or aspects that are supportive and reinforce social cohesion. Observably, all these dimensions are critical to buttress social cohesion in South Africa. However, as indicated in the introduction, this article focuses on trust. Like all other dimensions of social cohesion, it is doubtful that social cohesion in South African communities is possible without trust. The concept and its relationship to social cohesion is discussed below.

1.2. The Concept of Trust

There are different definitions of trust. The quantity and diversity of definitions of trust have resulted in various authors conceding that trust lacks conceptual clarity (Delhey and Newton 2005). Similar to terms that are part of everyday communication, trust is equally used to refer to various aspects by different people to the extent that it is loosely appropriated to mean many different things. This problem is also more pronounced where trust is used interchangeably and erroneously with terms such as loyalty, integrity, and credibility (Sheppard and Sherman 1998). However, we felt that of the many definitions of trust, the following two definitions are adequate for the purposes of this paper. Rossouw and Van Vuuren (2004) define trust as a social phenomenon, based on a history of interaction that facilitates a reciprocal faith in another person's intentions and behaviour. Von der Ohe et al. (2004, p. 6) define trust as a relationship with the "express belief in the positive intent and commitment to the mutual gain of all parties involved in the relationship". These definitions highlight common threads, which are faith, expectation, and belief. Importantly, these definitions highlight a critical aspect of trust, which is to obtain assurance on the sincerity, reliability, dependability, and ability of something or someone's behaviour.

These definitions present trust as a rationally based behaviour involving the knowledge of another person and being able to predict his/her behaviour (Rompf 2012). Another important factor of trust is affective. Colquitt et al. (2007) describe the affective factor of trust as involving feelings and moods and emotions. The affective component of trust is based on shared goals, beliefs, values, and even identities among the parties. These factors are necessary for a person to develop confidence in the other person that the person will behave as expected (Rompf 2012). Studies relating to trust put forth that mutually trusting relationships bind people and communities together. Equally, trust involves mutual respect

and a shared sense of connectedness amongst a group of people or two individuals. That is, if people in a community hold each other accountable for their actions over time, a foundation is built that allows for the development of trust. Thus, accountability precedes the development of trust and the social and economic prosperity of communities (Knack and Zak 2003). Arguably, people who trust one another exchange ideas, goods, and services within local community boundaries, all of which work well for local economic development as well as social cohesion (Bottoni 2018; Stern and Coleman 2015). Therefore, building trust in the local community represents a viable strategy for economic development and social cohesion (Knack and Zak 2003).

Trust is a key determinant as well as a catalyst for social interactions and relationships. It has the ability to cross the borders of familiar relationships to broader societal relations. According to Welch et al. (2005) trust lies at the heart of all positive relationships. Importantly, trust happens between individuals or groups well known to each other, as well as between individuals or groups that are complete strangers (Welch et al. 2005). Stolle (2002) explains these two types of trust as particularised and generalised trust. Particularised trust is described as a practice that places faith only in their own kind (Uslaner 2002). Particularised trust exists among people who know one another and have everyday interactions, such as friends, neighbours, and co-workers. It is "based on first-hand knowledge of individuals and is embedded in personal relations that are strong, frequent and nested in wider networks" (Allum et al. 2007, p. 3). Freitag and Bauer (2013) emphasise that in addition to knowing one another, or knowing something about them, they often share a common identity. Forrest and Kearns (2001) emphasise that in particularised trust, relationships are established between or among only those in the immediate circle or community or neighbourhood. It is also described as an identity-based trust, which is conferred on the basis of group membership (Fiedler and Rohles 2021).

Identity-based trust is described as a trust relationship where a person may not directly know another involved person, but these two people belong to the same group based on ethnicity, nationality, religion, or language (Fiedler and Rohles 2021). This means that homogeneity, identity, and affiliation are central in the identity-based relationship. Commonly, particularised trust creates a relationship in which people restrict their engagement and social activities to their own kind. Thus, particularised trust reflects social strains, where each group in a society looks out for their own interests and places little faith in the good intentions of others. It is observed that informal networks tend to be confined to situations where there are high levels of particularised trust. Berggren and Jordahl (2006) argue that particularised trust benefits for in-group but is undesirable for society at large. Unlike a particularised trust, generalised trust actually encourages taking a risk with strangers. In particular, generalised trust explains the ability to trust generally without prior knowledge and familiarity. Therefore, generalised trust is regarded as a trust relationship between strangers. Stolle (2002) states further that generalised trust differs from particularised trust in that it deals with unknown groups and/or strangers and does not predominantly depend upon specific situations. Uslaner (2002) describes generalised trust as resembling a chicken soup of society in that it makes all kinds of social interaction run smoother (Uslaner 2002). Consequently, generalised trust links people who are different and unfamiliar from themselves.

According to Helliwell and Putnam (2004), generalised trust entails trusting people that one does not know personally. It reflects a bond that people share across society, across economic and ethnic groups, religions, and races (Berggren and Jordahl 2006). In addition to fundamentally strengthening and assessing the well-being of societies, generalised trust contributes to social solidarity. Generalised trust is becoming relevant due to the mobility of people. It is very rare that communities remain homogenous, meaning that as different people move into communities, these communities become diverse. Arguably, the diversity of communities weakens particularised trust while establishing the need for generalised trust. Importantly, generalised trust concerns the expectancy about the trustworthiness of strangers; that is, people we do not have any information about (Bekkers 2012; Uslaner

2002). Hence, generalised trust is widely regarded as indispensable for human beings and communities to function successfully and engender the necessary cooperation and inclusivity (Halpern et al. 2011). It is also essential in promoting social relations and engagement, especially in diverse societies. It is, accordingly, generalised trust that is a dimension of social cohesion.

1.3. Relationship between Social Cohesion and Trust

The definition of social cohesion that we adopted for this paper emphasises interactions between members of society, as characterised by a set of attitudes and norms that include trust. In addition, it is widely acknowledged that trust, either in a personal, social or institutional context, is a critical feature of social relationships. Theoretically, trust has been linked with social cohesion. Hence, it is widely accepted that trust and social cohesion are related. The relationship between trust and social cohesion has long been established. Authors such as Phillips and Berman (2008) and Bureekul and Thananithichot (2012) indicated that research has established trust as one of the key factors in building social cohesion. It is the view of Struwig et al. (2013, p. 407) that "one of the key measures of social cohesion in social science literature is the interpersonal trust or the level of trust among individuals in a society". Similarly, Blake et al. (2008) found that most researchers acknowledge that a high level of social cohesion is often reflected in high levels of trust. Quite significantly, a report by the United Nations suggests that the presence or absence of social trust, measured as trust between citizens within countries, is a fruitful way to analyse social cohesion (Larsen 2014). However, Hooge (2007) cautions that a preoccupation with trust as an indicator of social cohesion is sometimes unjustifiable since trust is but one of the dimensions of social cohesion.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2011, p. 51), a comprehensive description of a cohesive society is offered as one that "works towards the well-being of all the members and promotes trust". Trust provides the cohesiveness necessary for the development of meaningful social relationships. Thus, it has the ability to facilitate the cohesiveness that is necessary for the development of meaningful social relationships. It is considered essential for social solidarity, cooperation, unity, and engagement. Likewise, trust is a fundamental element of socially cohesive societies and potentially serves as a social lubricant to facilitate solidarity, cohesion, consensus, and cooperation. This means that the erosion of trust could harm social cohesion in communities and societies in general. Notably, high levels of trust can be a good thing to promote a cohesive society, a factor to consider for rural communities.

1.4. Trust in South Africa

In South Africa, trust—in particular, a lack of generalised social trust—is a problem. Authors have found that South Africans do not trust each other (Burns et al. 2018). There is unanimity in the literature that the problem of the lack or low levels of trust in South Africa largely emanates from apartheid precisely. Apartheid was a policy that promoted, enforced, and legalised social divisions, prejudice, and state-sponsored racial animosity. Burns (2012) maintains that the apartheid induced distrust and non-cooperation among people and communities. The South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB 2015) and Posel and Hinks (2013) have echoed similar sentiments, that there is a significantly high level of mistrust between members of the different racial groups, individuals, and groupings within South African society. Academic research has demonstrated convincingly that in South Africa, individuals trust those who are similar to themselves, and in most cases, this is based on racial and ethnic identities. In support of this view, Hofmeyr and Govender (2015) argue that one of the explanations for the lack of trust is that un-reconciled persons in South Africa seldom have contact with each other because of the legacy of the apartheid system that separated persons racially, according to economic class, and geographically. Therefore, it is common to have heterogeneous communities with high levels of particularised trust,

while there are visibly low levels of generalised social trust. Specifically, it is widely acknowledged that interracial trust is significantly lower.

That NDP 2030 NPC (2011) mentions the lack of trust as a persistent challenge afflicting social integration in South Africa. According to the NPC (2012, p. 314), "South Africa as a "society still reflects low levels of trust, as groups tend to prioritise their immediate interests". Mmotlane et al. (2010, p. 2) concede that efforts aimed to transform apartheid "have not translated into a considerable increase in trust". Similarly, Sibusiso (2016) highlights that the data from the South African Reconciliation Barometer indicates that 81% of people felt that one must be very careful when dealing with other people. In addition, the study conducted in partnership between Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO) and the University of Johannesburg highlights that fragmentation, division, and polarisation breed distrust among citizens. Similarly, the South African Local Government Association (SALGA 2010) indicates that there is a lack of trust among Africans and white people. BusinessTech (2014) states that "the number of Africans saying they would never trust whites increased from 68% in 2009 to 73% in 2013. Over the same period, the perception by whites had increased from 40% in 2009% in 2013".

2. Methodology

This exploratory study was conducted in the rural towns of Lambert's Bay and Philippolis. Lambert's Bay is situated in the Western Cape. According to the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) of Cederberg Local Municipality (2020), Lambert's Bay is a rural coastal fishing, agriculture, and forestry town. Lambert's Bay, together with Elands Bay and Leipoldtville, constitute a ward with a population of 9141, with coloured people constituting 70% of the population (Cederberg Local Municipality 2022). The IDP of Cederberg Local Municipality (2022) describes Lambert's Bay as a low socio-economic area. Lambert's Bay is one of the towns under the Cederberg Local Municipality where a high percentage of community members receive different social security grants from the South African Social Security Agency (Cederberg Local Municipality 2022).

Philippolis is one of the towns of the Kopanong Local Municipality. The IDP of (Kopanong Local Municipality 2020) states that Phillippolis is situated in the south of the Free State province. The IDP of Kopanong Local Municipality (2021) describes Philippolis as a low-income and poor area. In terms of the Kopanong Local Municipality (2021), Philippolis has only 549 employed people out of a population of 3640 who are above the age of 15 years old. The majority of the people are employed predominantly in the agricultural sector. Philippolis has a diverse population consisting of Africans at 70%, coloureds at 25%, and whites at 5% (Kopanong Local Municipality 2021). Sesotho and Afrikaans are the two most-spoken languages in Philippolis.

An exploratory qualitative design was used for this study. In-depth interviews were undertaken in order to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions and experiences of people in Lambert's Bay and Philippolis regarding trust. Black and Street (2014) state that the exploration of perceptions in a research project assists in developing insights into a complex phenomenon. Thus, perceptions of people in these communities regarding trust constitute a significant indicator of the nature and level of social relations and integration and ultimately social cohesion. It is worth noting that perceptions of the people who participated in the study may not necessarily be truthful and not reflect objective reality. Quite often, the perceptions of the people do not occur in a vacuum but are shaped by geographic and socio-political dynamics. In this regard, perceptions serve as a starting point to better understanding the subjective opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of the people. Hence, the study has explored the peculiarities of the Phillipolis and Lambert's Bay communities.

Study participants were accessed through local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) from both Phillippolis and Lambert's Bay. These NGOs recruited participants purposefully to gather data. A total of 19 participants were interviewed with eight in Lambert's Bay and eleven in Philippolis. The decision to conduct this number of interviews was not based on a statistical approach but guided by the overall aim of the study, which was mainly

qualitative. The selection of the participants from the NGOs was based on a purposive sampling method. This sampling method was deemed appropriate as families and stakeholders are viewed as fundamental agents that contribute to the broader functioning of society (Botha and Booysen 2014). Furthermore, this sampling method allowed the research participants to be selected for a " . . . purpose to represent phenomena, group, incident, location or type in relation to a key criterion" (Creswell et al. 2016, p. 85). A semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect data in a face-to-face interview with participants. During the interviews, the researcher helped the participants describe their perceptions and experiences by asking them prepared questions and follow-up questions without any suggestions or leading questions. In addition, all interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

Subsequently, all recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. A qualitative content analysis was used to reveal people's perceptions and experiences of trust. The qualitative analysis guided the process to obtain a valid and replicable inference of the related data to enable the development of new insights. The data were then analysed using Braun and Clark's thematic analysis (Clarke and Braun 2013). In particular, the thematic analysis approach was used to firstly engage with descriptive information in order to become familiar with the emerging information and secondly develop codes. These codes were generated manually to enable the researcher to summarise, make connections, and develop concrete and coherent new insights that were identified inductively. In accordance with Clarke and Braun (2013), thematic themes were generated from the relevant codes.

3. Results and Discussion

The aim of the current study was to explore the perceptions of people in low socio-economic communities regarding trust and social cohesion. In order to assess the concept of "trust" within the community, questions regarding social trust and generalised trust were asked (Lau and Ataguba 2015). Two key themes emerged related to social trust and generalised trust. These included (1) trust among community members and (2) trust in general. The first theme, trust among community members, included a sub-theme, "the lost wallet/purse scenario and trust" and the second theme, trust in general, was further characterised by a sub-theme, "trusting people in general". The two themes differ in terms of the type of questions that were asked of participants. In the first theme, a hypothetical scenario was given in order to assess social trust among community members. Social trust was explored based on trusting an individual within a hypothetical situation in order to understand whether individuals can also be found to be trusting in real situations. In the second theme, the responses from residents involved the general trust of people based on their real-life situations. Contrasting with social trust, general trust extends in a more abstract manner towards people as a broad unit with an unselective or unspecific situation, thus making this more inclusive to all. The understanding of general trust relies on most people being trustworthy, despite not knowing them personally or socially (Uslaner 2002). Conversely, Misztal (1996, p. 72) further stipulates that social trust falls on a continuum from the personal (particular) to the abstract (general).

The findings of the current study revealed contrasting results. Trust, although limited, was shared amongst participants who knew each other compared to individuals they may not know. The sense of trusting individuals in the community was expressed with a strong sense of affiliation or relatedness based on individuals they are familiar with as opposed to those they are unfamiliar with. The first theme, "trust amongst community members", reveals that people's sense of trust is influenced by their sense of belonging, social practices, and expectations. These expectations are continuously affected by past experiences and interactions within their environment. The following section will include the findings of the current study, which encompass themes one and two. The first theme to emerge included trust among community members which presented participants with a scenario of a lost wallet/purse:

3.1. Theme 1: Trust among Community Members

Lost Wallet/Purse Scenario and Trust

The theme of trust among communities emerged from responses aimed at understanding the perceptions and attitudes of trust among community members. In particular, the sub-theme emerged from responses concerning the possibility of someone returning a lost wallet/purse to the owner. In order to understand trust and relationships among participants, participants were given a scenario of the lost wallet/purse. Although trust is seen as a complex concept to explore and understand, various studies have utilised the "lost wallet/purse scenario" question in order to explore the concept of trust among people both locally and internationally (Adjaye-Gbewonyo et al. 2017; Knack 2001; Morrone et al. 2009). The "lost wallet/purse scenario and trust" sub-theme question included a scenario in which the participants were asked to "*imagine you lost a wallet or purse that contained R200.00 and it was found, how likely is that person to return it*?"

The following findings of the sub-theme that asked respondents to assess the likelihood that someone returns a stolen wallet or purse were equally divided between those who believe that their lost wallet/purse will be returned and those who believe it is less likely to be returned. The views on the "lost wallet/purse scenario" were expressed between parents and stakeholders. Parents in both communities expressed that they would not expect the wallet/purse to be returned. Parents from the Lambert's Bay community indicated the following based on the scenario:

> "*Maybe it depends on whether the person knows you, then he will return it, but nowadays I don't believe so*". (Parent: P7, Lambert's Bay)

Another highlighted the socio-economic status as a reason why it would not be returned to them by saying:

> "*Never, because we live in a community where every cent helps, and I don't think that person if he sees he doesn't have bread in his house, will bring my money back*". (Parent: P4, Lambert's Bay)

Similar views were expressed by parents in the Philippolis community that were presented with the lost wallet/purse scenario and the likelihood of its return. They expressed their views by stating that it would not be returned.

> "*Not here. If I leave my wallet there, they won't bring it, they will say they found my wallet without cash*". (Parent: P11, Philippolis)

Views amongst parents showed a lack of trust in the return of the wallet/purse. However, these views were expressed differently amongst stakeholders in both communities. Although these views were different amongst parents and stakeholders, a stakeholder in Philippolis who was given the same scenario of forgetting one's wallet/purse at someone's house and was asked what the chance of returning it stated that:

> "*Let say 90%. Negative ... Because it's obviously ... We had cases here like for R100 a person got killed*". (Stakeholder: P3, Philippolis)

Stakeholders from Lambert's Bay and Philippolis both openly expressed that they would more than likely receive their money back from someone they know in the community compared to someone they may not know in the community.

> "*Yeah! It depends on where you lose the ... but yeah, it depends on ... obviously on where you lose it*" ... "*I've personally never lost something here in Lambert's Bay that...you know, can give you a direct answer in terms of that. But, I know for certain looking like community, especially when there is no form of income, like the snoek, it's a form of income for many people. But if there's no snoek.., then the R200 would be seen as money falling from heaven. And they would ... they will use that for their own takkies or whatever*". (Stakeholder: P1, Lambert's Bay)

The difference in views between parents and stakeholders is expressed by job opportunities and financial constraints, as participants from Lambert's Bay and Philippolis further

indicated that loyalty and household income play a contributing role to those who might return the participant's money. One participant expressed this as follows:

> Stakeholder: *"I think it will [giggles], it will depend on how that household, the neighbours are well-off maybe than me or they are people that are just struggling. I think that . . . . it's all about loyalty, but I don't think that some would return it with that amount of money in it, they will just return the wallet".* (P1, Philippolis)

One participant who experienced a similar scenario expressed that people can be trusted. The participant view is articulated as follows:

> *"Close to 95%. That they will bring back. I had a bicycle that was standing outside of my house. And I forgot about it and about two days ago I thought to myself where is my bicycle and then one of the youngsters down the road brought my bicycle back home and he said we found your bicycle so they bring back stuff . . . Yes there is a sense of trust. I leave my house doors open . . . Sometimes I will sleep at night with doors open. So you are safe in that sense . . . Yes. The only think you won't trust people with is a cell phone. That's why I said 95%".* (Stakeholder: P7, Philippollis)

However, one stakeholder expressed that their trust is in those they know within their community and not someone whom they do not know in the community.

> *"Mostly you can trust people you know in the community . . . Yes, you can trust them unlike people who come and work like example there are people who come from outside going to build a bridge like you can't trust them because you don't know them. But the ones you know from the community is fine".* (Stakeholder: P9, Philippolis)

This finding is similar to the findings of Njozela et al. (2019), who reported that respondents' trust was low in the event that a lost wallet would be returned by a stranger. The finding above shows that trust between wallet/purse returns and the responses to the trust questions depended on the participants' own experience within their community. Conversely, Knack (2001) argues that responses to trust questions are based on experience within the participant's own area. The current findings further show that building community trust can be identified as a viable strategy for improving the well-being of community members. At the individual level, numerous studies have explored the association between trust and health by utilising survey questions regarding respondents' perceptions of trust.

For example, a cross-country study conducted by Kim et al. (2011) found that stronger country-level trust helped with bettering self-rated health, which was controlled for by individual-level trust and other influencing factors. Similarly, in a multi-country study, Mansyur et al. (2008) revealed that there is a strong association between individual and societal trust among non-former Communist countries, which showed that there is a positive influence regarding trust and self-rated health that was present in countries with greater societal trust. However, the views expressed by the current study's participants essentially note that trust is also viewed as a contextual phenomenon, as trusting someone may vary depending on the situation. This denotes that variations of respondents' views are dependent on their own perceptions and attitudes of their experiences within their community as well as outside their community, and this may change over time and circumstances.

Taking the current findings of both rural communities into account, other studies focusing on community determinants of trust and racial attitudes found that neighbourhood socio-economic status is a key factor that can influence negative attitudes and a lack of trust among community members (Letki 2009). Neighbourhood economic disadvantages are considered to be driving factors that affect particularised trust and social cohesion. Mmotlane et al. (2010) found that patterns of socio-economic disadvantage and vulnerability contribute to trust throughout a place of residence. Their study found that those residing in formal urban areas indicated higher levels of trust as opposed to those in informal low socio-economic areas.

The second theme to emerge from the data included participants' responses to their general sense of trust in people. With the findings of the first theme, "trust among community members", in mind, the second theme, "trust in general", suggests that social context

and environment largely contribute to the equal split between the participants' views of either trusting others in general or distrusting others in general. The following findings for theme two, "trust in general", show that overall trust continues to rely on contextual factors and underlying social factors that may or may not hinder social cohesion. The subsequent findings for theme two are presented as follows:

3.2. Theme 2: General Trust
Trusting People in General

Participants expressed their views of trust in a general sense based on their own experiences. Responses from both areas, Lambert's Bay and Philippolis, had similar findings with an equal split between whether people can be trusted in general or not. The question that participants responded to stated that "*generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you cannot be too careful in dealing with people?*" Responses to this question varied, as responses were context-specific and responses were diverse on the basis of the participants' own unique experiences. Two participants, who were split between Lambert's Bay and Philippolis, expressed that they do trust people in general. These views were expressed based on their own experiences and the context of their environment which have influenced their choice in trusting others. The first participant, who expressed their trust in others, indicated that:

> "... I'm a very trusting person, so I'll trust most people but in the process sometimes be disappointed but I will always give people the benefit of the doubt. I think here we are more trusting, but in the bigger towns people expect the worst of other people ... I think it's the city like that makes people like that, the other things that you read in the newspaper, where the older persons they have been take advantage of". (Stakeholder: P5, Lambert's Bay)

Another participant from Philippolis expressed that their trust in people was due to good experiences with others rather than bad experiences with people. The participant stated the following:

> "I haven't from my side, experienced anything ... I would say I trust 100% because there hasn't been anything funny by me ... And other people's personalities that I have seen, don't look like they will do something bad to me and that isn't what I will to do them ... But, a person ... You will see that time; you didn't think that person was like that ... The younger people are really violent and naughty, like with a lot of phones ... You hear someone lost a phone and someone won't give it back ... ". (Parent: P8, Philippollis)

Conversely, participants also presented conflicting feelings towards either trusting or distrusting people in general. One participant's response included reasons for not trusting people based on economic differences and geographic location and trusting those based on groups of people they had known for years compared to those they were not familiar with. The participant further expressed that social context and environment play a large role in whether they would trust or distrust someone. This was stated as follows:

> "... I am not a suspicious person, but I tend to feel that it is not genuine ... there are very rich people and very poor people, and the average people are ... But with the rising prices of petrol and food, it is more expensive in the rural areas ... Yeah, you know, the people are friendly ... , it depends. At a church everybody is helpful, you know if you phone someone quick to drop something or you, the friends I connect to, you speak to the most, you can ... But you won't phone someone you haven't seen in 6 months to ask them ... To help you quickly ... So, it is your connected friend that you actually see often". (Stakeholder: P2, Philippollis)

Another participant indicated that their trust in others would depend on those who help them and those who become jealous of them. To this extent, people's relatedness to others depended on their trust or distrust. The stakeholder stated the following:

> "It is like 50/50 with that one. Some will help you some would be jealous for example one will say. Like continue with whatever you are doing, like study further. People will

encourage you and the other ones will say 'ha, you a volunteer, why you are doing that? You are not going anywhere with it'". (Stakeholder: P9, Philippollis)

The findings suggest that social interactions, social relations, and cohesion can largely influence people's views on trust in general. Essentially, through a series of ongoing interactions between various groups of people, the characteristics of trust dynamics can be affected over time and may lead to trust, distrust, or both. However, these findings are diverse in nature based on people's diverse interactions and experiences within their social environment. Participants from both Lambert's Bay and Philippolis expressed different views based on their contextual experiences relating to trust in general. Therefore, studying trust as well as distrust highlights the importance of acknowledging the diversity in people's perspectives and views.

In addition, a stakeholder was asked "why is there no trust?" and the response was:

"I believe it is the apartheid era. The history, the mentality is still there . . . It is from the adults but now I see it went to children". (Stakeholder: P9, Philippolis)

A similar finding was indicated by another stakeholder that indicated that trust is shared between groups across groups. The statement was expressed as follows:

"Yes and no. There I have to differ again from location side, and I think there is also groups that can trust each other and that can't trust each other". (Stakeholder: P3, Philippollis)

The current study's findings are aligned to findings that found that trust in diverse and heterogeneous environments is limited to between groups rather than across groups (Hooghe et al. 2007). Hooghe et al. (2007) further stipulate that trust is more present in homogeneous settings, as building a sense of trust is easier when it is with individuals we are familiar with, particularly those with whom individuals can share a shared sense of belonging. Similarly, it has been argued by Delhey and Newton (2005, p. 324) that "generalised trust is strongest where we have something in common with others". This includes people with the same social or ethnic background. Critics from the literature, however, claim that occurrences of higher levels of generalised trust are present in mainly homogeneous societies and neglect the role of intra-societal diversity and social contextual history. In addition, the literature argues that the absence of generalised trust, therefore, gives indications of social disintegrations and lower levels of social cohesion. Distrust may therefore be seen as a consequence of inequality and conflict within society (Hooge 2007).

Essentially, a variety of social challenges continues to impact the frequencies of trust and social cohesion across various communities. For example, Letki (2009) puts forth that social challenges such as unemployment, crime, and social exclusion further threaten feelings of alienation and distrust among community members, which negatively impact the sense of community and lead to low levels of social cohesion. The social environment may broadly influence people's behaviour, attitudes, sense of belonging, and decisions. Therefore, to a large degree, understanding trust dynamics involves unpacking the social environment to explore how trust develops and evolves over time. A similar finding was found by Burns et al. (2018) who explored South Africans' understanding of social cohesion. The study found that participants expressed more levels of distrust towards others and the consensus that most South Africans do not trust each other. These views were expressed in light of the high levels of crime, violence, socio-economic and political views, as well as social values.

Supporting findings were found from The South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB 2015), which found that trust between individuals and groupings within South African society is quite low. Studies relating to social cohesion indicate that levels of trust (particularised trust) can contribute to how communities are socially engaged or socially disengaged as social cohesion is embedded in the process of social interactions and relatedness. The study reveals that trust plays a large role in social interaction and social activities. However, rural communities in South Africa are further challenged by social inequality, which affects coherence within the community and further contributes

to a lower sense of trust and social cohesion within the community. As such, Cramm et al. (2013, p. 142) reported that the effects of marital status and income can be mediated by neighbourhood services, social capital, and social cohesion. These socio-economic conditions may provide security to those who are vulnerable and increase their overall well-being. Thus, Social cohesion remains a driving factor in contributing to the socio-economic state of trust and well-being.

4. Limitations and Recommendations

This study has limitations. The sample is non-representative and therefore the results cannot be generalised to other communities. The second limitation is that trust is an outcome of social relations, and in this regard, this study should have been predicted on an assessment of the state of relations in these communities. With regard to recommendations, it is important to note that trust is not a natural process. It is an outcome of various historical factors largely shaped by social, political, and economic dynamics. It, therefore, is recommended by this article that various community institutions such as churches, schools, and the municipality must champion trust-building initiatives and processes. This leadership will contribute to building relationships that are crucial to facilitating trust. Municipalities in these areas must particularly conduct their municipal processes in a manner that promotes interaction among local citizens. It is also recommended that community organisations must develop trust-building programmes targeting families. These programmes must focus on assisting families to unlearn social behaviours that only emphasise particularised trust. In this regard, families as the nucleus of society should be conscientious of the significance of generalised trust for social cohesion. Thus, families should practice and promote trust with their immediate neighbours and the community at large.

5. Conclusions

This study explored the perceptions and experiences of trust in the context of social cohesion in two low-income settings and found that trust remains a social concern for social cohesion within a diverse setting in South Africa. The study was implemented in two rural communities—Lambert's Bay and Philippolis—with two key themes (trust among community members and trust in general) emerging as the core.

The study confirmed that South African communities have a problem with trust. The prevalent perception of participants in Lambert's Bay and Philippolis is that trust is absent in communities. Consistent with the South African Reconciliation Barometer's (SARB 2015) and Parliament of RSA's (2017) sentiments that there is a significantly high level of mistrust between members of the different race groups, individuals, and groupings within South African society, this study confirmed that trust, in particular particularised trust, is prevalent in Lambert's Bay and Philippolis. Essentially, the expression of trust amongst individuals in the selected communities was informed based on familiarity, affiliation, or one form of affinity or another. As Uslaner (2002) argues, particularised trust is a practice that places faith only in their own kind (Uslaner 2002). Notably, the study highlighted that the lack of trust or distrust was particularly exhibited towards unfamiliar faces or groups of people in both Lambert's Bay and Philippolis.

In addition, the study reinforces a common view in the literature that low socio-economic communities tend to exhibit low levels of trust (Njozela et al. 2019). Similarly, Mmotlane et al. (2010) have also found that communities characterised by socio-economic disadvantage and vulnerability contribute to trust through their place of residence. The high levels of crime in low socio-economic communities such as Lambert's Bay and Philippolis are also regarded as contributing to low levels of trust among community members.

Lastly, this study provided further evidence that South Africa's past is very much still affecting the social relations among community members. According to Letki (2009) and Njozela et al. (2019), the persistent social and racial enclaves in diverse low-income communities of South Africa often result in low levels of trust. In particular, the apartheid

racial divisions between Africans and coloureds manifest a lack of trust, even though these communities have been neighbours for decades. Furthermore, this study indicates that the impact that trust plays in social interaction and social activities cannot be deemphasised, especially in rural communities, which are characterized by social inequalities and challenges such as poverty, inequality, unemployment, and a lack of access to resources. These apparent challenges subsequently decrease community coherence, which negatively impacts trust and social cohesion within the community.

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