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Vertical Social Cohesion: Linking Concept to Practice

Valarie Vat Kamatsiko

Catholic Relief Services (CRS), valarie.kamatsiko@crs.org

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Vertical Social Cohesion: Linking Concept to Practice

Abstract

This article addresses gaps in linking the conceptualization and practice of vertical social cohesion. Through a review of literature, examination of field-based case studies and focused discussions with academics, the article crystalizes the understanding of vertical social cohesion—often restricted to state-society relations—and offers four mutually reinforcing strands of the vertical dimension that are cognizant of the hybridity of state, non-state, formal and informal institutions that exist in most societies. Through a deeper reflection on practice, the article discusses two considerations for strengthening the practice of vertical social cohesion that should start with intentional consideration of the vertical dimension of social cohesion during the intervention design: leveraging governance programming based on its complementarities with social cohesion; and careful blending of interventions that promote horizontal and vertical social cohesion. It argues that, while the focus of community-level social cohesion interventions is often biased towards strengthening horizontal social relations, both the vertical and horizontal dimensions are important in shaping the nature and strength of a society's cohesiveness. The article contends that social cohesiveness is determined by how vertical and horizontal social cohesion interact and proposes a tool—Social Cohesion's Four-Quadrants Model—to harmonize and weigh programming choices in order to influence broader, sustainable societal change.

Keywords: *Vertical Social Cohesion, Catholic Relief Services, Horizontal Social Cohesion, Social Cohesion, Binding Bonding and Bridging (3Bs) Methodology, Social Cohesion's Four-Quadrants Model*

Author Bio(s)

Valarie Vat Kamatsiko joined Catholic Relief Services in March 2017 and serves as Africa Peacebuilding Technical Advisor. With a focus on peacebuilding, social cohesion and conflict-sensitivity, her current role includes technical writing of project proposals, conducting conflict analysis, designing training curricula and capacity building, documenting methodology, tools and field guidance and providing technical assistance to CRS Country Programs across Africa. Vat was a research fellow at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame from March to April 2019. She has over 20 years of field-based experience in humanitarian and development work, with 16 years in peacebuilding and conflict-sensitivity having been Regional Peacebuilding Advisor for World Vision International covering the East and Horn of Africa. With World Vision, she led the regional peacebuilding field-based learning hub located in Rwanda, where she developed and field-tested programming models and approaches, disseminated learnings and promising practice, supported replication and collaborated with universities to strengthen the link between theory and practice. As an advisor, trainer and practitioner, she has applied a wide range of methods and approaches. She holds a Professional Doctorate in Leadership Development, an MA in Economics, and has had several trainings in peacebuilding. Her doctoral research on *Civil Society Organisations, Africa's Great Lakes Region and Attempts at Regional Peacebuilding* is published in the *Journal of Civil Society* (2017). Vat's other publications include book chapters and peer reviewed articles in the *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*. She is home-based in Kampala, Uganda.

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Valarie Vat Kamatsiko

Amid the bewildering range of social cohesion definitions, scholars and practitioners recognize that social cohesion is multidimensional and has both horizontal and vertical elements (Colletta & Cullen, 2000; Chan & Chan, 2006; Dragolov et al., 2016). This article focuses on the gaps in and between conceptualization and practice of vertical social cohesion (VSC) identified by both academics and practitioners. Scholars tend to restrict VSC to state-society relations, and practitioners fall short in integrating the diverse societal relationships that “vertical” linkages are meant to encompass (Brown & Zahar, 2015, pp. 11-14).

In United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)–related practice, VSC is conceptualized as “state-centered”—referring to “cohesion among citizens where perceptions and behaviors reflect trust in state institutions, confidence in national, sub-national or local state actors, institutions and processes, and a commitment to laws, institutions and a common or shared future” (UNDP, 2020, p. 22). In their critique, Brown and Zahar highlight that such a neat understanding of vertical (and horizontal) social cohesion fails to capture the complexity of social cohesion and the multiplicity of dynamics influencing inequalities and power relations that characterize conflict-affected and divided societies (2015, pp. 11-14).

According to Brown and Zahar, practitioners tend to focus on strengthening horizontal social cohesion at the expense of building or reinforcing vertical linkages—an inclination that has been attributed to inadequate conceptualization of both vertical and horizontal dimensions and generally, the complexities of social cohesion (2015, pp. 11-14). This is coupled with shortfalls in social cohesion research that often points to unclear pathways to transform structural root causes of conflict (UNDP, 2018, p. 9). Similarly, case studies from Catholic Relief Services’ (CRS) field practice in diverse contexts, such as, Central African Republic (CAR), Kenya, Egypt, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Mindanao (Philippines) indicate that while there were successes in effecting change at personal and relational levels (horizontal dimension), the opportunities to impact systems and structures and to transform higher levels (vertical dimension) were either missed or under-explored (Bolton, 2017, p. 94).

In the next section, I examine the vertical dimension within social cohesion, drawing from literature to analyze its breadth and depth. I then highlight the methodology I employed including a comparative analysis of two CRS case studies from the CAR and the Philippines. From this

analysis, I propose four mutually reinforcing strands of the vertical dimension—offering a fresh approach to considering VSC. I subsequently discuss two considerations for strengthening VSC including leveraging governance programming to strengthen vertical cohesiveness and blending interventions aimed at strengthening both vertical and horizontal social cohesion. In this regard, I introduce a four-quadrants model to serve as a tool for harmonizing and weighing programming choices. Lastly, I provide concluding insights for the conceptualization and practice of vertical social cohesion.

The Vertical Dimension within Social Cohesion

Before unpacking VSC, it is instructive to discuss the understanding of social cohesion in the context of its horizontal/vertical dimensionality. There is not a commonly agreed upon definition of social cohesion among scholars, think tanks and practitioners, and many scholarly and operational definitions exist. This article only samples a few for illustrative purposes. Relevant for this article is a definition by Chan and Chan:

a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and horizontal interactions of society as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioral manifestations. (2006, p. 639)

According to Chan and Chan, the horizontal dimension reflects cohesion among members of society and the vertical dimension reflects cohesion between the society and the state (2006, pp. 639-640). This definition clearly restricts the “vertical” to state-society relations.

Another definition of interest is by Dragolov et al. (2016). They define social cohesion as “the quality of social cooperation and togetherness of a collective, defined in geopolitical terms, that is expressed in the attitudes and behaviors of its members” (p. 6). They further argue that a cohesive society is characterized by resilient social relations (social networks; trust in people; and acceptance of diversity); a positive emotional connectedness between its members and the community (identification; trust in institutions; and perception of fairness); and a pronounced focus on the common good (solidarity and helpfulness; respect for social rules; and civic participation) (2016, pp. 6-8). Although they refrain from applying the horizontal/vertical distinction, Dragolov et al. align the social relations domain with the “horizontal,” the connectedness domain with the “vertical,” and go ahead to state that “focus on the common good” relates to the two (2016, pp. 6-8). Compared to the Chan and Chan (2006) definition, this

understanding of the vertical dimension is broader and encompasses other key institutions within a community, including the state.

Taking into consideration existing operational definitions, CRS understands social cohesion:

the strength, quality and diversity of relationships between and among individuals, groups and communities, coupled with linkages between society and the state, markets and other institutions, all based on trust, respect, mutuality and equal opportunity, for the dignity and wellbeing of every person and the common good of all. (CRS, 2019, p. 2)

Drawing from several sources (Colletta & Cullen, 2000; Colletta et al., 2001; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2011; CRS, 2017; Kamatsiko, 2019), the CRS definition underscores social cohesion's horizontal and vertical dimensionality across the socio-cultural, economic, and political spheres.

For CRS, horizontal social cohesion denotes:

the quality of relationships between and among equals or near equals for both individuals and diverse groups within a society; [... and is a key ingredient] within identity or affinity groups (bonds) and across multiple groups of diverse characteristics (bridges). (2019, p. 2)

Furthermore, CRS describes VSC as:

linkages that knit relationships across hierarchies, e.g., levels of leadership, authority, power, and influence. It concerns the degree to which state and non-state institutions—e.g., the market, cultural/traditional, religious, civil society groupings, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), etc.—interact with communities and individuals inclusively, equitably, transparently, and accountably, with a double aim of strengthening social relations and reducing inequalities, exclusion and divisions in an environment of equal opportunity for all. (2019, pp. 2-3)

In a civic sense, it refers to state-society linkages and the social contract between citizens and the state (CRS 2019, p. 3). This understanding of VSC compares closely to the definition from Dragolov et al. (2016). In addition to state-society relations, it also considers the linkages and

relationships a range of non-state institutions have with communities and individuals and vice versa.

The Breadth and Depth of Vertical Social Cohesion

This section builds and expounds on the understanding of VSC as stipulated above but is also shaped by the premise that social cohesion has both relational and distributional elements. On one hand, the relational element is concerned with the nature and quality of interpersonal and social relations and calls for the continued strengthening of these relationships and ties, often associated with the building of social capital across the socio-cultural, economic, and political spheres (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), n.d., p. 4; UNDP, 2016, p. 14; Brown & Zahar, 2015, p. 12).

On the other hand, the distributional element refers to the patterns and the extent of the distribution of resources and opportunities, and the extent to which these were determined through just and fair means. According to Dragolov et al., what is key is “the perception of procedural and distributive fairness”—where a prevalent perception of unfairness indicates weak social cohesion and not objectively measurable injustice or inequality (2016, p. 11). The distributive element of social cohesion entails sustained efforts to reduce exclusion, inequalities, and disparities in society across the socio-cultural, economic, and political spheres (GIZ, n.d., p. 4; UNDP, 2016, p. 14; Brown & Zahar, 2015, p. 12). It covers elements related to social inclusion—the extent to which all people, including the marginalized, participate on equal footing in the economic, socio-cultural, and political life of a society, including whether people are protected in times of vulnerability and need (OECD, 2011, p. 53). This also relates to “the degree to which [all] people enjoy equitable access to public information, resources and decision-making” (CRS, 2018, p. 1). Another important aspect is upward social mobility or equality of opportunity to advance in life (OECD, 2011, p. 54).

VSC is also concerned with the quality and multiplicity of linkages and connections of a vertical nature crisscrossing up and down through levels of social status (UNDP, 2016, p. 14). As specified previously, it refers to state-society linkages and the social contract between citizens and the state (CRS, 2017, pp. 7-8). The “social contract” in this case refers to the implicit or explicit understanding between society and the government which defines the rights and responsibilities of each—particularly the exchange of public goods and services—and provides a framework for societal harmony, including a set of formal and informal rules and behavioral norms that regulate

state-society relations (German Development Institute (DIE) MENA Research Team, 2018, p. 1). Regarding the marketplace, VSC refers to relationships and linkages between and among consumers, producers, and other market actors including policymakers (CRS, 2017, pp. 7-8).

These top-down-bottom-up linkages across differing levels of power, social status, hierarchies, or “vertical distance” give local communities and groups an opportunity to leverage such relationships to access external resources and/or sources of power (Mercy Corps, 2017, pp. 4-5). Because vertical relationships are shaped by hierarchical and/or unequal relations due to differences in power or resource bases (Colletta & Cullen, 2000, p. 3), VSC is underpinned by right relationships at the different levels of interactions and linkages.

Since the relational and distributional elements of social cohesion are not only shaped by the nature and quality of state-society relations and interactions as discussed above, the understanding of VSC ought to be expanded beyond state-society relations to also capture the multiple dynamics of a vertical nature embedded in non-state institutions that influence relationships, inequalities, and power dynamics.

Methodology

This article is a product of a study conducted under the auspices of a research fellowship granted by the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame from March 1 to April 30, 2019. The research methodology was qualitative and involved: reviewing scholarly and grey literature that covered social cohesion’s vertical dimension; conducting semi-structured individual discussions with nine faculty members of the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies and the Keough School of Global Affairs; analyzing case studies; examining field practice and emerging insights; as well as synthesizing findings and drawing conclusions. The nine faculty members from the University of Notre Dame (six male and three female) were selected based on the relevance of their research work and international development experience to social cohesion in order to tap into their theoretical and practice-oriented perspectives. Their viewpoints are knitted into the discussions on the four mutually reinforcing strands of VSC and in the strengthening VSC section. The two case studies purposefully selected for examination were from programs that employed CRS’s Binding, Bonding, and Bridging (3Bs) social cohesion methodology (explained below) to enable comparison.

From Concept to Practice: An Assessment of Two Case Studies

Drawing on CRS's understanding of social cohesion and its vertical dimension as discussed earlier, I examine how VSC was treated by comparing two CRS projects to draw out some learnings. In practice, CRS operationalizes this understanding through its *3Bs* signature methodology. The first B, *Binding*, promotes personal transformation for positive agency. The second B, *Bonding*, facilitates intra-group introspection in preparation for positive engagements with the Other. The third B, *Bridging*, fosters constructive interactions between divided/conflicted groups to strengthen social ties and address issues of mutual concern, while building linkages with relevant institutions—the VSC aspect. The two projects under comparison employed the 3Bs social cohesion methodology. Though the two projects were implemented in contexts with different characteristics and dynamics, their comparison presents useful learnings.

The Secured, Empowered, Connected Communities (SECC) Project

The SECC project component implemented from 2014 to 2017 in CAR sought to “support communities’ abilities to maintain and promote social cohesion and address interreligious and intra-community conflicts” (Talla, 2017, p. 48). SECC employed an adapted version of the 3Bs methodology, the 3Bs/4Ds. In this adapted version, the 3Bs are underpinned by Appreciative Inquiry’s 4Ds, explained as follows: The first D is *discovery* through an appreciative view of self and the Other; the second D is *dreaming* to envision a shared harmonious future; the third D is *designing* together an innovative mutually beneficial intervention; and the fourth D is *delivering* the intervention by transforming communities through joint action. A sample of activities that SECC focused on included:

- Binding activities such as building the capacity of religious and community leaders as well as members of established community social cohesion committees (CSCCs);
- Bonding activities such as creating CSCCs made up of members of similar characteristics to mobilize members for cohesive action and single-identity group trainings for: priests and Catholic community leaders; pastors and Protestant community leaders; and imams and Muslim community leaders; and
- Bridging activities such as training workshops and CSCCs that brought together divided groups; meetings for three faith communities to jointly vision and plan actions; creation of a mixed herder-agricultural committee to facilitate planning and

coordination of livelihood activities; and designing and implementation of “connector” projects that give an opportunity to divided groups to work together.

The focus was therefore on strengthening horizontal social cohesion as illustrated by the type of activities and the project design that paid limited attention to achieving change in the vertical cohesiveness of society (Talla, 2017, p. 54). It is not immediately clear from the above activities whether and how SECC engaged in interventions to promote the relational and distributional aspects of VSC. Activities that linked affected communities with state institutions and political actors on critical issues of governance and social justice—identified as key conflict drivers—were either minimal and/or unintended, and results “would have been more sustainable if the vertical dimension had been intentionally planned for and implemented” (Talla, 2017, pp. 53-54). Therefore, the horizontality of SECC’s activities did not directly impact change that might have been possible or desired in the vertical dimension (Talla, 2017, pp. 52-57).

Applying Binding, Bonding and Bridging to Land Conflict in Mindanao (A3B)

On the contrary, A3B—a project implemented in the Philippines (2012-2015)—had a clear focus on achieving change in both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of social cohesion. In addition to binding and bonding interventions (see below), bridging interventions included both inter-group/inter-community activities as well as activities that linked affected communities to leaders, institutions, and structures to engage and effect change in the vertical dimension (Leguro, 2017, pp. 71-82). Some of the activities that were implemented included:

- Binding activities such as understanding-the-self workshops; workshops to prepare individuals experiencing land conflicts for dialogue and resolution; and trauma healing processes;
- Bonding activities such as intra-group peace and conflict mapping sessions, and intra-group land conflict analysis and conflict resolution planning;
- Bridging activities (inter-group) such as inter-faith celebrations; joint legal literacy trainings; inter-group dialogue between conflicting parties on concrete land issues; and
- Bridging activities of a linking nature included connecting stakeholders at village level to mayors and municipal level decision makers to ensure higher-level support for solutions agreed upon at lower level. They also involved facilitating established municipal interfaith networks (made up of credible and influential leaders) to

escalate land-related issues for discussion and resolution by relevant bodies through coordination with the municipal inter-agency working group. The inter-agency working group was created by the A3B project and was made up of municipal agencies, provincial level government officials, and partner agencies to serve this linking and coordinating purpose.

The project explicitly aimed to strengthen both horizontal and vertical relationships and ties. In this regard, the project design included an intentional result that focused on getting government stakeholders to support local decision making to resolve land disputes. The bridging that focused on strengthening linkages and meaningful engagements between affected groups and their leaders and relevant institutions up and down the hierarchies was critical in delivering VSC results.

A key learning, therefore, is that in contexts where VSC is determined to be weak, it is good practice for social cohesion interventions to make the leap required to link, engage, and influence the different levels of hierarchy to strengthen social cohesion vertically. Top-down-bottom-up interactions across levels of leadership, authority, and influence are a core element of the vertical dimension and ought to be pursued in an intentional and systematic manner to improve effectiveness. Similarly, where social cohesion analysis indicates feeble vertical social cohesion, interventions stand a better chance to influence desired change in the vertical dimension if the interventions are intentional in facilitating systematic and meaningful bridging linkages between affected communities and relevant institutions, their leaders, and structures at various levels. As these case studies demonstrate, and based on context, these institutions could include relevant state and non-state, formal and informal institutions. From the literature and case studies analyzed, a fresh approach to considering vertical social cohesion is instructive in bringing about clarity.

Four Mutually Reinforcing Strands of Vertical Social Cohesion

From the literature and discussions above, state and non-state institutions are key in shaping vertical cohesiveness in any society. Institutions are systems of established and embedded social rules (overt or implicit) that structure much of human interactions and constrain and enable behavior (Hodgson, 2006, p. 2; North Douglas, as cited in Acemoglu & Robinson, 2008, p. 2). Hodgson further explains that “Generally, institutions enable ordered thought, expectation, and actions by imposing form and consistency on human activities” (2006, p. 2), thus sustaining themselves. Institutions—whether state or non-state institutions— “define how power is managed

and used, how states and societies arrive at decisions, and how they implement those decisions and measure and account for the results” (OECD, n.d., p. 2). Therefore, they are instrumental in creating an environment (structures, norms, and values) for decision-making that supports or undermines equal opportunities; inclusion; management of diversity and conflict; and enjoyment of rights by all citizens (Fonseca et al., 2018, pp. 13-14).

How society is shaped by these institutions and structures and how they influence thinking, behavior, actions and policies, therefore, matters for promoting or undermining the cohesiveness of society. VSC, therefore, is not just about linking with institutions. It concerns the degree to which engagements between formal and informal leadership; state, non-state; and market institutions and communities are inclusive, equitable, transparent, and accountable, with a double aim of strengthening social relations and reducing inequalities, exclusion, and divisions, in an environment of equal opportunities for all. This paper proposes four mutually reinforcing strands for the unpacking of VSC. It recognizes “hybridity”—a concept that reflects the heterogeneity and diversity of formal and informal institutional systems that co-exist, overlap, and interact to shape various aspects of society including its cohesiveness (UNDP, 2018, p. 11)—as discussed below:

(1) Relations and linkages between society and the state

This strand aligns with the conceptualization of VSC advanced by Chan and Chan (2006, pp. 639-640), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) (n.d., p. 5) and UNDP (2020, p. 22). This strand includes the relations, interactions and interdependency between society and state institutions and structures from the local to national levels. In these interactions, state institutions and societal groups:

negotiate how public authority is exercised and how it can be influenced by people. The interactions are focused on issues such as defining the mutual rights and obligations of state and society, negotiating how public resources should be allocated and establishing different modes of representation and accountability. (Department for International Development (DFID), as cited in Haider with Mcloughlin, 2016, p. 3)

It pertains to the social contract, as defined earlier. To attain and sustain peace, comparative research covering 11 countries identified three mutually reinforcing “drivers” of “resilient social contracts:” inclusive political settlements that address core conflict issues; increasingly effective,

fair and inclusive institutions; and broadening and deepening social cohesion (UNDP, 2018, pp. 13-14).

The quality and quantity of state-society relations and linkages are determined by: the level of reciprocal trust between citizens and the state, including the confidence citizens have in state institutions and leadership; the legitimacy of state institutions and leadership as viewed by all citizens; the level of civic participation and its inclusivity and quality; and responsiveness of the state to the needs of all its citizens, regardless of identity, gender, affiliation or other characteristics (Chan & Chan, 2006, pp. 639-640; UNDP, 2020, p. 22). State-society relations also need to be viewed in the context of policy processes. Social cohesion will be fostered with a focus on inclusive policy formulation and implementation and how it relates to joint decision-making across lines of inequality, mistrust, and divisions (Brown & Zahar, 2015, p. 21). Promoting social cohesion under this strand would also entail the consideration of gender and generational dynamics, and how they shape state-society relations and interactions. Considering the A3B case study, this strand relates to efforts that linked village level stakeholders to mayors and municipal level decision makers to influence and gain their support for resolutions reached at village level.

(2) Relations and interactions between society and non-state institutions

Non-state institutions play an important role in shaping the cohesiveness of society (Colletta & Cullen, 2000, p. 9). For this purpose, non-state institutions are defined as those institutions represented by “organizations” or structures that operate outside of the formal state structures, though they might be recognized to some extent within that formal structure (van der Haar, 2013, pp. 12-13). These include traditional/cultural and religious institutions; civil society organizations and groupings; NGOs and informal institutions; and leadership existing in a particular society.

Traditional/cultural and religious institutions and leadership can be highly respected for their religious and spiritual attributes, as custodians of identity and culture, and as apolitical actors. When credible, they can wield considerable authority and influence over their members and play key roles in community life. In their interactions and relations with their members, these institutions influence the social-cultural, economic, and political dynamics of their communities, and shape relationships and networks within the community and between the community and the outside world. Some are hierarchical in nature and have far reaching vertical (and horizontal)

structures from the grassroots to the international level (e.g., the Catholic and Anglican Churches), which can be deployed to foster social cohesion, including peace and social justice.

Trust and confidence in these institutions and the legitimacy conferred upon them by members of society determine the strength and quality of relations and interactions between society and these non-state institutions. Social cohesion is also shaped by these institutions in the way they socialize their members around issues of identity; tolerance and coexistence; respect for diversity and gender; and the extent to which they are willing to address the structural causes of related divisions and inequalities (OECD, 2011, p. 61). This strand also includes relationships and engagements between communities and NGOs — local and international (Colletta & Cullen, 2000, p. 9; Mercy Corps, 2017, p. 4), as well as civil society organizations and groupings. As was the case with the A3B project, affected communities were linked to municipal inter-faith networks that effectively mobilized around a shared purpose to push for a common agenda.

The impact of these institutions on cohesiveness of a given society is dependent on how they understand social cohesion—as also having potential for unintended negative consequences—and how they apply this understanding in decision-making around their interventions. There are instances where strongly bonded communities/groups practice exclusionary intra-group relations at the expense of integration into the wider society, a negative form of social cohesion (IJR, 2017, p. 14; Struwig et al., 2011, p. 5). Interventions by NGOs and civil society organizations can either strengthen or deplete and undermine social cohesiveness depending on how they factor issues of social justice and existing social and political dynamics in their programming (Mercy Corps, 2017, p. 7). Conflict-sensitivity and the principles and practice of Do No Harm—that call for a thorough understanding of the context of conflict coupled with practice that deliberately considers respect, accountability, fairness, and transparency—are important for healthy, and constructive relations and interactions between communities and these institutions (Wallace, 2015, pp. 79-106).

(3) Relations and linkages between society and the market

This aspect of VSC touches on the patterns and the extent of the distribution of resources and opportunities in a society (GiZ, n.d., p. 4), including how market governance, gender, and generational dynamics influence distribution of resources and opportunities. Some of the issues of concern here include: whether people regardless of their status have equal access to livelihood and employment opportunities; whether there is equity in the sharing, distribution, and management of

resources; whether goods and services are exchanged in a fair environment; whether people enjoy equal opportunity in accessing basic services of a reasonable quality (e.g., education and health) regardless of their identity, location, etc.; and whether people regardless of who they are have equal opportunity for upward social mobility.

Vertical cohesiveness depends on whether market institutions interact with communities and peoples in an inclusive, equitable, transparent, and accountable manner (Colletta et al., 2001, p. 2). In some contexts, the unequal power dynamics between corporations and poor/vulnerable communities facilitate exploitative and harmful practices and reinforcement of inequalities—thus, affecting cohesiveness. In others, powerful market actors dominate politics, culture and other areas of life, promoting their interests at the expense of the majority in a manner that disrupts cohesiveness of society. The market, and how it is governed, has been said to have functions/institutions that make its working consistent with social cohesion, and these include:

- (i) those which guarantee adequate provision of goods and services that a particular society considers should be provided for all of its members, either because of the influence they exercise on their capacities or on their welfare, and that we will call “*goods of social value*” [could be expressed as economic and social rights];
- (ii) *redistributive institutions*, which aim at raising the structure of wealth ownership and income distribution to levels considered desirable or at least tolerable by society and at establishing rules for the functioning of markets, especially markets of factors of production, which could guarantee such outcome;
- (iii) those related to *conflict management* generated by the functioning of markets and to the framing of agreements for their management and eventual elimination; [and]
- (iv) those relating to *participation* in decision-making processes, not only relating to distributive outcomes but also to the very functioning of markets. (Ocampo, 2006, pp. 7-8)

(4) Relations and linkages across hierarchical levels of leadership, authority, and power

These relations and linkages are considered an important aspect of VSC (Caritas Internationalis, 2002, pp. 82 & 170; Mercy Corps, 2017, p. 4). This refers to relations and interactions across levels of leadership, power, authority and responsibility within a society or system, from the grassroots to the highest leaders—referred to as vertical capacity. For instance,

in local government structures, consideration can be given to relations and interactions between various levels—village, sub-county, county and district. Drawing on the A3B case study, this VSC strand was demonstrated by ensuring vertical coordination and linkages between levels. The mayors and municipal level decision makers and municipal interfaith networks composed of credible and influential leaders linked and coordinated with the municipal inter-agency group made up of municipal agencies, provincial level government officials and partner agencies. While the leadership levels are interdependent, each level has unique and/or different capacities, contributions, and needs. Each leadership level's effectiveness benefits from fostering relationships across levels. The relations and linkages between these levels of leadership are important in determining whether certain communities/groups are included in or excluded from decision-making on behalf of the people they represent; thus, either strengthening or undermining social cohesiveness.

Interactions and linkages across leadership levels should be characterized by right relationships and mechanisms of accountability (top-down-bottom-up) to each other. This is important given the asymmetric power dynamics, intricate relations, and vested interests that are always at play when making decisions about service delivery; allocation of resources and opportunity; dispensation of justice; etc. (Kamatsiko, 2015, p. 58). Prevalent gender undercurrents and generational dynamics are closely connected to questions of power and often play a role in shaping decisions around who should take on responsibility and leadership in the social-cultural, economic, and political spheres at various levels. Exclusion of women and youth or their disenfranchisement from meaningful participation undermines cohesiveness of society.

Strengthening Vertical Social Cohesion

The delineation of VSC into these four strands can help development practitioners design more effective social cohesion interventions because they can more precisely isolate and understand the problem; choose the appropriate level/s of focus; decide which beneficiaries to target; select activities with the greatest chance of success; and employ methods suitable to the activities. This article discusses two aspects of strengthening the practice of VSC with intentional consideration of VSC in the intervention design and subsequent implementation: (1) leveraging governance programming based on its complementarities with social cohesion; and (2) considering whether and how to blend vertical and horizontal social cohesion interventions. These possibilities are treated in greater detail below.

Leveraging Governance Programming

Social cohesion is a valuable goal itself, and at the same time can promote good governance. Similarly, promoting good governance contributes to building cohesive societies. The synergy between social cohesion and governance is in their shared agenda. Transparency, accountability, and citizen participation are regarded as key elements for generating more cohesive societies and improving the quality of governance (Mas et al., n.d., pp. 15-16). CRS's Engaging Government Framework suggests three inter-connected pathways to achieving good governance (CRS, 2018, p.1):

- Responsive public policy—public policy increases access, equity and quality of basic public goods and services with consideration of citizens' needs, priorities, and demands.
- Optimal institutional performance—institutions function effectively in their delivery of public goods and services in an inclusive, equitable, transparent, and accountable manner.
- Influential civic participation—citizens and civil society actively engage in public affairs to shape public policy and priorities and improve effectiveness in delivery of public goods and services.

The above pathways embrace principles of good governance and social cohesion programming: equity; inclusion; transparency; accountability; and integrity in leadership (CRS, 2018, pp. 3-4). The assumption is that the greater the transparency, accountability, and inclusive participation in governance systems, the greater the social cohesion in a society.

Civic participation has been described as the linchpin that connects social cohesion, governance, and good government and is essential for achieving all three (CRS, 2018, pp. 79 & 82). In the context of strengthening the cohesiveness of society, civic participation becomes instrumental where it has resulted in the broad involvement of diverse citizens in public processes (linking) and caused more responsive governance (VSC Strand 1). In such cases, public perceptions of government credibility have improved and public trust in public institutions engendered, thus strengthening VSC (CRS, 2018, p. 66). Governance programming that focuses on strengthening civic participation with an intention of enhancing social relations and addressing distributional issues promises stronger contribution to building socially cohesive societies.

Similarly, social cohesion facilitates effective civic participation which in turn engenders good governance. Citizens in cohesive societies—characterized by for example more generalized forms of trust and reciprocity, healthy associational life, diverse networks, etc.—are more likely to act together civically to pursue shared objectives and make collective demands of governance institutions compared to societies without such cohesiveness (Mercy Corps, 2017, p. 1). Such characteristics help advance a process of establishing webs of influence and relationships across diverse spaces through umbrella groups, networks, and/or associations necessary to mobilize horizontally (working with potential allies and diverse stakeholders) and engage vertically with key decision makers at various levels of government to increase support for the desired social change (CRS, 2018, p. 5).

Likewise, bonding gives like-minded individuals a platform to act jointly on shared interests and start developing a voice; bridging enables diverse groups to combine resources, aggregate their demands, and amplify their voice; and linking (vertical dimension) connects citizens to other influencers and ultimately connects citizen voices with government decision-making processes (Mercy Corps, 2017, p. 9). When citizen voices are amplified and critical mass built, political leverage is created and citizens can engage with decision-makers on a more level playing field (CRS, 2018, p. 79). Civic participation precipitates demand for good governance which in turn can trigger supply-side responsiveness, transparency, and accountability from government and other governance actors (Mercy Corps, 2017, p. 9). This, however, is dependent on context. In repressive contexts, for example, demands by citizens for good governance are sometimes met with force and resistance.

In addition, vertical social cohesion and political stability are said to be affected by the way governance actors deliver services (UNDP, 2018, p. 27). Related to VSC Strand 1, a healthy relationship between those who govern and the governed is, among other things, indicated by the extent to which government delivers high-quality services equitably and dependably (CRS, 2018, p. 50). Field practice has, however, revealed that projects aimed at strengthening social cohesion through governance-related programming require intentional integration of activities that foster social interactions across fault lines for them to play a significant role (Mercy Corps, 2015, pp. 1-6). For example, case studies (Mercy Corps, 2015, pp. 1-6) that tested theories of change for projects aimed at strengthening social cohesion between Lebanese and Syrian refugees suggest that improving access to social services and good governance produces incomplete results unless

these are coupled with activities that foster social interactions. These studies were carried out on projects that set out to facilitate collaboration between municipalities and communities to implement social service projects; improve municipal financial and operational capacity; and local and national government coordination to enable municipalities to be more responsive to local needs.

According to Brown and Zahar (2015, pp. 20-21), another area of complementarity between VSC and governance programming lies in the attainment of policies intended to reduce inequalities, create opportunities for upward social mobility, produce social solidarity, and rebuild trust. Social cohesion strengthening requires engaging with policy processes right from agenda setting, policy formulation based on substantive ideas, implementation, and monitoring—the strength of governance programming. This requires consideration of robust conflict analysis and social cohesion assessment that goes beyond the stylized categorization of horizontal and vertical dimensions (discussed earlier) to understand the multiple ways through which rulers, citizens, groups, communities, and regions are interconnected (Brown & Zahar, 2015, pp. 20-21).

In terms of policy formulation, social cohesion puts forth notions of inclusive joint: decision-making; implementation; and fulfilment of mutual needs. If these are done across lines of inequality, mistrust or divisions, and projects implemented jointly, it becomes a powerful way of building and reinforcing mutual trust and interdependence (Brown & Zahar, 2015, p. 21). The process of policy making is as important as the policies for building social cohesion themselves and therefore inclusive and coordinated processes that bring in the views of all stakeholders are crucial (OECD, 2011, pp. 21 & 24-25). However, “inclusive processes do not automatically produce more inclusive results...” and these should be coupled with efforts to address contextually relevant issues such as limited political will, power asymmetries, limited capacity, etc. (UNDP, 2018, p. 28). Reflecting on the above, a carefully considered synergy with elements associated with governance programming must be attained to deliver sustainable VSC results.

A Careful Blending of Horizontal and VSC Interventions

Both horizontal and vertical relations and ties are important in shaping the nature and strength of a society’s cohesiveness. Therefore, understanding the link between them and how they reinforce each other is crucial. Each form is valuable for specific purposes and is deficient in others (see Table 1 for what each form engenders). Table 1 focuses on Bonding and Bridging for Horizontal Social Cohesion and Linking for VSC.

Table 1*Bonding, bridging, and linking: What they engender*

Horizontal Social Cohesion		Vertical Social Cohesion
Bonding <i>Within group / community...</i>	Bridging <i>Across diverse groups/communities...</i>	Linking <i>Across levels and hierarchies...</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solidarity • Social support • Emotional closeness • Shared identities • Intra-group / intra-community trust and reciprocity • Access to limited pool of resources (information, knowledge, finances, connections, opportunities) • Intra-group / intra-community mobilization around a common purpose • Addressing intra-group / intra-community differences • Preparedness of group / community for substantive engagements with the “other” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broader identities • More general forms of trust and reciprocity • Access to larger pool of resources external to a group / community (information, knowledge, finances, connections, opportunities) • Addressing conflictual issues across groups / communities • Purposeful cross-group / cross-community interactions for mutual benefit • Multi-purpose inter-group / inter-community platforms for collective action on shared agendas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connections with civil society organizations, government, service providers and/or private sector • Relationships across hierarchies—formal, informal, institutional lines of power, authority and influence • Increased access to key resources in formal and/or informal institutions outside the community (information, knowledge, connections, finances, technical support, capacity building, etc.) • Increased access to formal decision-making processes • Mutual trust between communities and different hierarchies and institutions (formal and informal) • Legitimacy of formal and informal institutions and leadership • Addressing issues embedded in systems and structures that undermine the building of socially cohesive societies
<i>Note: This table is from Kamatsiko 2019 and was derived from cross examination of field-based case studies in Mercy Corps 2017 and CRS 2017 (Interreligious Action for Peace).</i>		

Bonding facilitates the nurturing of mutual trust, solidarity, and acts of reciprocity within a group/community; therefore, it creates enabling conditions for individuals to mobilize effectively around a shared purpose. However, community-level case studies have found that bonding is

limited in its ability to catalyze efforts aimed at political change and significant economic development (Mercy Corps, 2017, pp. 5 & 6). Bonding is considered a foundation on which to build bridging ties with other groups or communities under the assumption that improved intra-group/intra-community relations benefit inter-group/inter-community dialogue and action (Omer, 2017, p. 6; Mercy Corps, 2017, pp. 5 & 6). A positively bonded community/group can more easily bridge across religious, ethnic, class, geographic or other divides to connect with another community/group. Communities/groups then tap into the pool of resources that come with inter-group/inter-community connections (bridging) to jointly organize and mobilize and link to higher-level structures and leadership (linking) to influence and demand desired changes.

As discussed earlier, case studies from CRS's Interreligious Action for Peace—that employed the 3Bs methodology—indicate the shortfalls of focusing on horizontal relations and ties (bonding and bridging) without paying adequate attention to strengthening vertical linkages. The project in the Philippines, in addition to fostering horizontal social cohesion, was effective at equipping a cross-section of leaders to influence various government institutions and processes for peace and reconciliation (VSC), e.g., strengthened conflict resolution processes and structures, and caused the adoption of 16 land policies and proposals. The one in CAR under-explored opportunities to build on the transformative changes achieved at personal and relational levels (horizontal social cohesion) to cause desired change at higher levels including transforming government systems and structures (VSC) (Bolton, 2017, p. 94). Omer (2017, p. 18) contends that for sustainable change, interventions that strengthen both horizontal social cohesion (bonding and bridging) and VSC (linking aimed at addressing structural inequalities and systemic injustices) should be blended in a harmonized manner that allows each to reinforce the other. Communities that can link across levels of hierarchy to engage formal or institutional lines of power, authority, or influence (e.g., government, service providers, private sector, and/or civil society organizations) have increased access to formal decision-making processes as well as key resources outside the community, e.g., skills, technical support, connections, finances, etc. (Mercy Corps, 2017, p. 6). A community characterized by a blend of both horizontal and vertical cohesion is more resilient and has capacities to effectively address problems when they emerge (Mercy Corps, 2017, p. 6).

The above argument for blended horizontal and VSC is comparable to what proponents of vertical and horizontal integration in peacebuilding put forward. Vertical and horizontal integration is a strategy for seeking change across conflict lines that explicitly supports processes

that link individuals, networks, organizations, and social spaces that demonstrate both vertical and horizontal capacity—enabling working toward a more just and peaceful society (Caritas Internationalis, 2002, p. 170). However, horizontal and vertical integration in peacebuilding may be mutually complementary and/or mutually limiting. A case study on grassroots peacebuilding in the Northern Uganda Early Recovery Project that used the Peace Rings approach established that horizontal integration is needed to broaden the base for vertical integration and adds that vertical and horizontal integration among actors and structures when enhanced, led to a robust peace infrastructure grounded in a multi-sectoral approach to solving issues (Kamatsiko, 2015, pp. 63 & 68). Furthermore, findings reveal that grassroots peacebuilding that embraces both horizontal and vertical integration was effective in achieving peacebuilding and reconciliation outcomes when deliberate efforts to ensure that both reinforce each other were in place. The same is applicable to social cohesion programming. Both horizontal and VSC need to reinforce each other. The challenge is in determining what the right balance is, considering the operating context and the forces working for and/or against cohesiveness in a given society.

Social Cohesion's Four-Quadrants Model

Social cohesion is dynamic and gradually changes over time in its strength and form. As described by UNDP (2020, p. 24), social cohesion is a “dynamic and evolving state that fluctuates with events, relationships and attitudes.” The state of social cohesiveness is determined by how horizontal and VSC interact. Through the Social Cohesion's Four-Quadrants Model, Figure 1 facilitates a reflection on harmonizing horizontal and VSC, the possible programming choices and the likely tradeoffs. As depicted in Figure 1, society is always moving along the horizontal bonding–bridging spectrum. As exclusionary social relations and ties within a group/community of similar characteristics grow, the society moves towards the extreme left of bonding. As social relations and ties between groups/communities of diverse characteristics grow, the society moves towards the extreme right of bridging. Considering the vertical dimension, as the relationships and linkages between community/individuals and the state, non-state, and market institutions become healthier and stronger, the society's VSC improves and there is movement upward along the vertical dimension. In contrast, when the relationships and linkages between community/individuals and state, non-state, and market institutions deteriorate, VSC weakens and there is movement downward on that dimension.

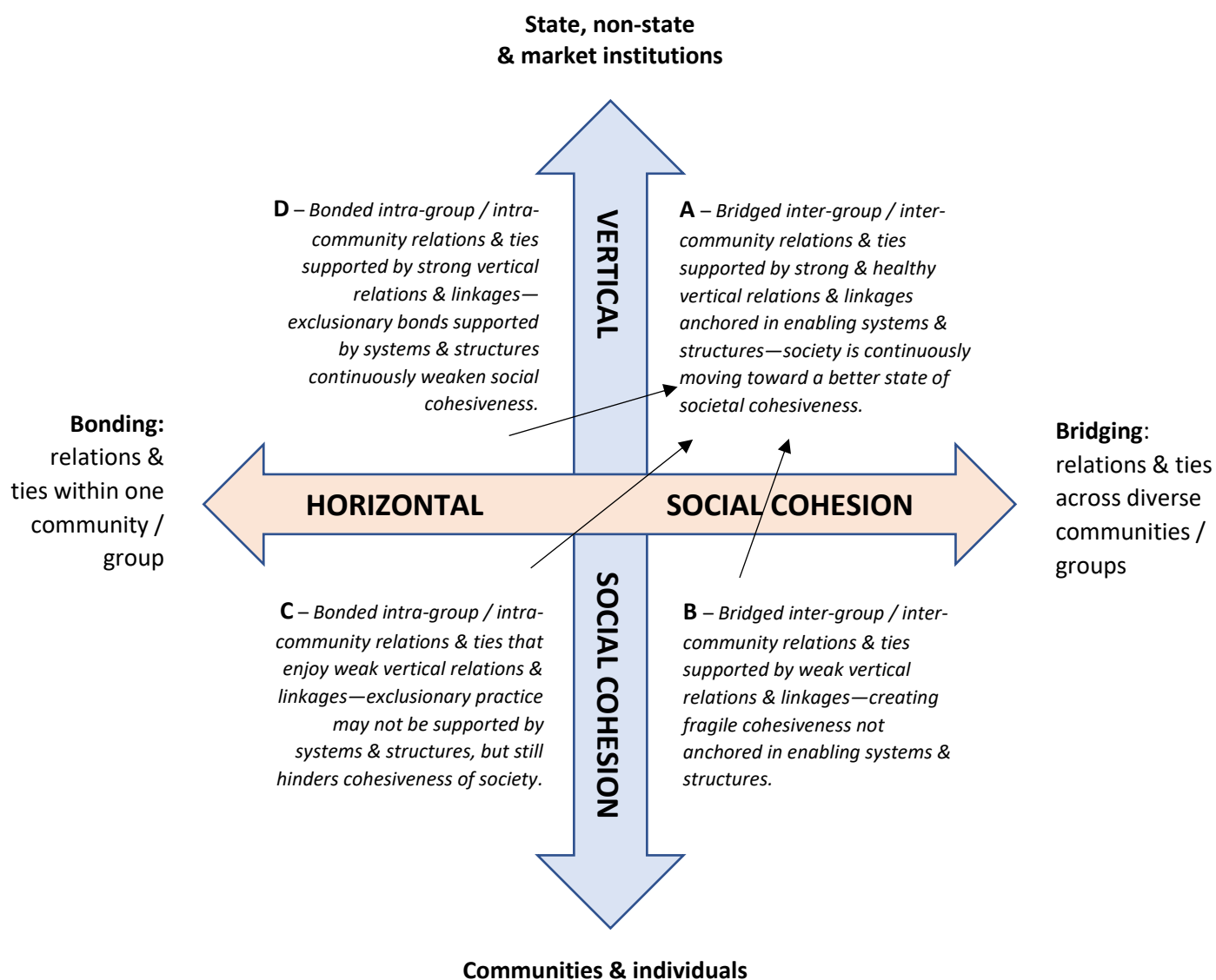
Figure 1 illustrates four scenarios (quadrants A, B, C, and D) that need to be considered in gauging the state of cohesiveness and what interventions need to be carried out to move society to a better state. The tool would be most useful if informed by a social cohesion assessment that considers both horizontal and vertical elements in its analysis of the context. CRS's mini-Social Cohesion Barometer (CRS, 2019) is one of such tools that are used to assess and track cohesiveness and inform programming decisions. This Barometer is a simple perception survey with 18 indicators adaptable to context and covering 3 spheres: social-cultural, economic, and political. The results also show the strengths and gaps to address in bonding and bridging activities. The findings from the assessment would then aid in locating the community/society in question in the quadrant that is most appropriate considering the characteristics identified by the assessment. The interventions suggested below for each quadrant are only illustrative and consideration should be given to local context to arrive at the most appropriate interventions. Even when communities fall in the same quadrant, the tool does not imply, in any way, that the interventions will be the same. Similarly, some of the interventions may be relevant across the quadrants.

Quadrant A: Society is characterized by bridged inter-group/inter-community relations and ties supported by strong and healthy vertical relations and linkages to state, non-state, and market institutions with enabling systems and structures that promote harmony in diversity; equal access to power and opportunity; inclusionary practices; and redress for social injustices. In such cases, society is continuously moving towards a better state of social cohesiveness. Illustrative activities could include (Note that this list, and the subsequent ones under Quadrants B, C, and D, are not exhaustive and are provided only for illustrative purposes):

- Activities to strengthen and sustain bridged relations and ties, including activities that enable bridged communities to continuously act collectively for mutual benefit/to achieve shared goals.
- Activities aimed at addressing root causes of inequalities and other social injustices, including redress for past wrongs.
- Activities to strengthen grievance handling, conflict mitigation mechanisms and diversity management.
- Activities to strengthen broad-based civil society for inclusive civic engagement in decision-making as well as social accountability to monitor and hold governance actors accountable in their efforts to reduce exclusion, inequalities, and other injustices.

Figure 1

Social Cohesion's Four-Quadrants Model: Harmonizing and weighing programming choices



Note: Conceptualization of this diagram benefited from Colletta J. Nat & Cullen L. Michelle (2000), Figure 2, p. 5.

Quadrant B: Society is characterized by bridged inter-group / inter-community relations and ties that have weak vertical relations and linkages with state, non-state, and market institutions. In such cases, social cohesiveness is fragile and may crumble when under pressure since it is not anchored in enabling systems and structures. Illustrative activities could include:

- Activities to sustain relations and ties between bridged groups or communities, including activities that enable bridged communities to continuously act collectively for mutual benefit/to achieve shared goals.
- Activities to mobilize, empower, and build skills (leadership, advocacy, influencing) to enable community groups of diverse membership to aggregate demands, amplify their voice, and engage with decision-makers at various levels.
- Activities that link inter-group or inter-community platforms with leadership and institutional hierarchies for meaningful engagement on community aggregated priorities and to influence institutions and structures to create an enabling environment that promotes social cohesiveness in society.
- Activities that facilitate community-civil society-government-private sector collaboration to explore opportunities and strategies to jointly address issues of social injustice.

Quadrant C: Society is characterized by bonded intra-group/intra-community relations and ties supported by weaker vertical relations and linkages to state, non-state, and market institutions. In extreme situations, society will experience exclusionary bonds within groups/communities. In this case, exclusionary practices may or may not be supported by systems and structures but will hinder creation of a cohesive society. Illustrative activities could include (Note that the first two activities identified under Quadrant D could be relevant for this quadrant):

- Activities to mobilize, empower and build skills (leadership, advocacy, influencing) to enable community groups of diverse membership to aggregate demands, amplify their voice, and engage with decision-makers at various levels.
- Institutional building activities to open space for and embrace civic engagement and establish mechanisms for inclusive and participatory decision-making.
- Activities that link inter-group or inter-community platforms with leadership and institutional hierarchies for meaningful engagement on community aggregated

priorities and to influence institutions and structures to create an enabling environment for a socially cohesive society.

- Activities to strengthen conflict management mechanisms and capacity of community leaders to manage diversity and divisions and to support positive social relations.

Quadrant D: Society is characterized by bonded intra-group/intra-community relations and ties supported by strong vertical relations and linkages to state, non-state, and market institutions plagued by unequal distribution of power and opportunity, and other injustices. In extreme cases, society will experience strong exclusionary bonds within groups/communities—with certain groups/segments of society gaining monopoly over power and resources to the disadvantage of others and at the expense of creating an inclusive and integrated society. Exclusionary practices are supported by systems and structures. Illustrative activities could include:

- Intra-group or intra-community activities aimed at opening up exclusionary bonded groups/communities to embrace the Other and understand the importance and benefits of an integrated society.
- Bridging activities to increase interactions, appreciation, trust and cooperation across lines of division, mistrust and inequalities, including Connector Projects.
- Capacity building for civil society organizations/groupings to develop broad networks that bridge across divides and differences, model cohesiveness and act on aggregated priorities.
- Activities that link inter-group or inter-community platforms with leadership and institutional hierarchies for meaningful engagement to address institutional and structural impediments to building a cohesive society.

As depicted by the arrows in Figure 1, societies gauged to be in quadrant B, C or D should be supported to address their unique social cohesion needs and appropriate interventions put in place to facilitate movement towards quadrant A.

Emerging Insights and Conclusion

This article has discussed the breaches in linking the conceptualization and practice of VSC. It set off by examining various definitions of social cohesion and how they articulate the vertical dimension and analyzed the practice of VSC focusing on two case studies. The article offers a fresh approach to considering VSC—expanding it beyond an understanding that restricts

it to state-society relations by delineating four mutually reinforcing VSC strands that recognize the hybridity of societal institutions including state and non-state, formal and informal institutions. Unpacking the vertical dimension beyond the fine lines of state-society relations—to consider all four proposed strands of VSC—will enable a more nuanced understanding of contextual dynamics and the design and implementation of interventions that are better focused on building strategic linkages and addressing systemic and structural issues.

The literature, case studies, and findings reveal that both the vertical and horizontal dimensions are important considerations and attention should be given to both, in a harmonized manner, in social cohesion research and programming to achieve more sustainable results. Equally imperative is maintaining a focus on how programming will cause change in both the relational and distributional aspects of social cohesion. Often, the relational issues that social cohesion programming aims to address find their roots in the distributional challenges existing in society. Drawing on the findings, the article suggests a holistic and blended approach by means of the Social Cohesion's Four-Quadrants Model which moves beyond a binary either-or approach that has permeated this field of work in the past. The article offers a figurative presentation of the Four-Quadrants Model as a practical tool to facilitate reflection on context assessments/analyses, careful weighing of programming choices, and harmonization of interventions to transform the vertical and horizontal dimensions.

Lastly, social cohesion could best benefit from the complementarities it has with governance programming, particularly by exploring the opportunities presented by the interest of both in inclusive and vibrant civic participation as well as achieving responsive public policy that attends to inequalities, promotes equal opportunity, and manages diversity and conflict.

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