



# Moving beyond insecurity?

A survey of community security in Shida Kartli



**Tamara Patariaia** and **David Wood**

March 2011

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## **Acknowledgements**

This report was written by Tamara Pataria and David Wood. It is based on quantitative and qualitative data gathered by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers in December 2010 and January 2011 as part of Saferworld's regional programme to increase understanding of, and responsiveness to, the security needs of conflict-affected communities. Saferworld's activities in Shida Kartli, including this report, are jointly implemented with the Caucasus Institute for Peace Democracy and Development and have been funded by the European Union through the Instrument for Stability. The UK Department for International Development also provided financial assistance for the publication of the report.

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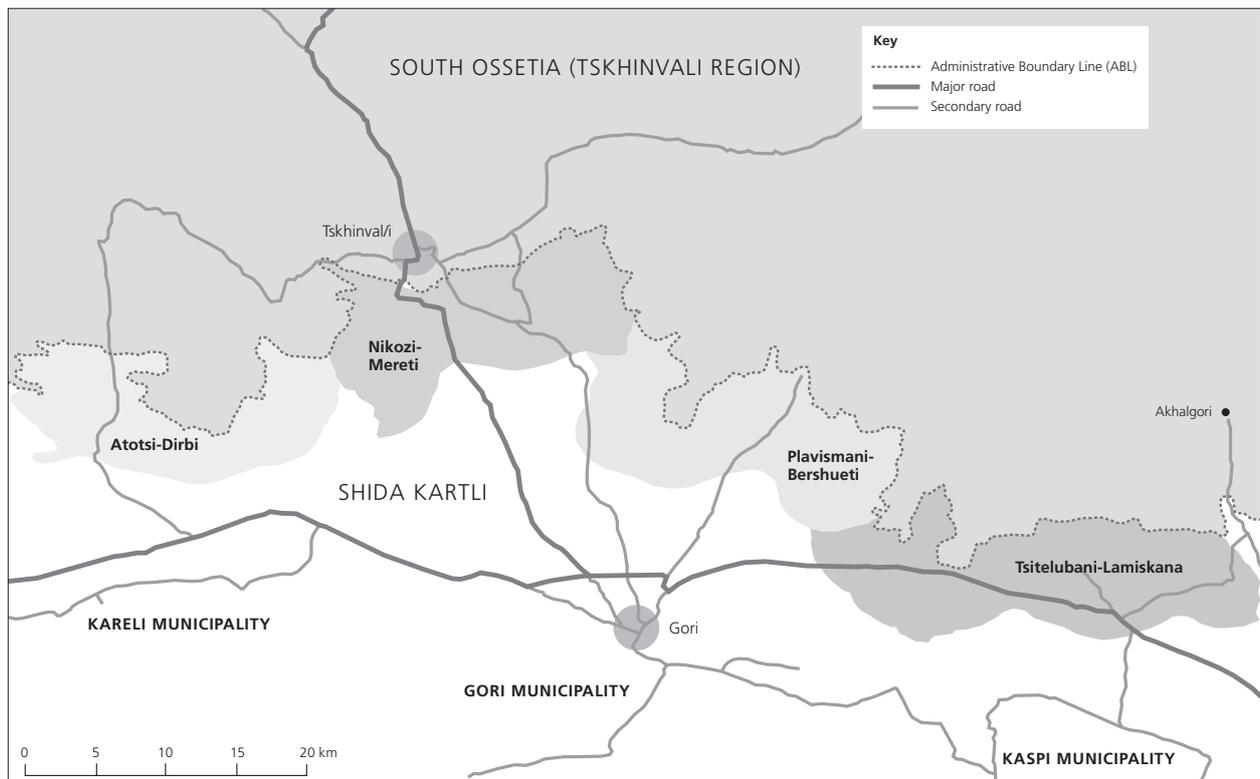
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## Map of the four research areas in Shida Kartli



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# Executive summary

**ALL INDICATORS POINT TO INCREASED STABILITY** in the conflict-affected communities along the administrative boundary line (ABL) between Shida Kartli and South Ossetia. As such, there is no greater opportunity to test ways of increasing mutually-beneficial contact and interaction across the ABL; and for the parties to the conflicts to develop processes for consultation between affected communities and security providers on security issues. Such processes would provide information on security issues and clearer ‘rules of the game’ for communities living along the ABL, on issues from maintaining water sources to trading across the ABL. They would also entail greater opportunity for affected communities to raise issues of concern to them in relevant formats, not least the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM).

There is a danger that if processes for consultation on security issues are not established, the lives of affected communities could become more difficult over the coming year. Indeed, while security incidents have become less frequent, competition over the ABL and its status is becoming more of an issue. That is, attempts to ‘patrol’ and ‘protect’ the ill-defined boundary line are having an ever greater impact on communities whose livelihoods involve movement and working in this ‘grey zone’. At the same time, without such processes, it will be harder to address reoccurring seasonal issues, such as access to irrigation water in the summer and firewood in the winter.

To inform thinking on such processes, this report summarises research conducted in December 2010/January 2011 regarding the needs of communities living along the ABL according to four different research areas – Atotsi-Dirbi, Nikozi-Mereti, Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana (see map). The results from this study are further compared with a previous study conducted in July/August 2010, allowing us to track changes in community perspectives.

## The needs of conflict-affected communities

- Depopulation is an ongoing issue along the ABL, especially in **Atotsi-Dirbi**, albeit at a reduced rate, and is mostly driven by physical security issues. Nevertheless, as external assistance to the region decreases in 2011, increased poverty could become a more important driving factor as underlying vulnerabilities are exposed.
- Physical security is less of a community priority than in July 2010, due to a reduction in the frequency of all incidents. Instead, people are more concerned about the impact on their communities’ sustainability of a) reductions in external assistance and b) ongoing ambiguity over the ABL. In addition, there is the perception that seasonal needs, such as the drought in the summer of 2010, are not being properly planned for.

- The most critical problems facing communities are: a) proximity to the conflict zone, due to associated physical security threats – especially in **Atotsi-Dirbi** due to the potential for violent competition over the ABL; b) poor access to irrigation water – especially in **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana**; c) less opportunity to earn money – especially in **Plavismani-Bershueti** and **Nikozi-Mereti**, where people believe the overall situation in their communities has worsened; and d) inability to access pastures and sources of firewood – especially in **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana**.

#### **Recommendations for responding to community priorities**

- Develop a ‘community sustainability’ strategy specific to communities living along the ABL that would provide shared objectives for beyond the crisis response. This strategy should identify and plan for those threats that drive depopulation, especially the physical security threats in **Atotsi-Dirbi**.
- The strategy should also include measures to increase economic security, especially in the **Nikozi-Mereti** and **Plavismani-Bershueti** village groups, and explore ways of increasing opportunities for communities living there to increase agricultural production and trade, including across the ABL when desired.
- Finally the strategy should take account of seasonal issues affecting communities along the ABL and in **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana** in particular. These include access to water during the summer, access to firewood during the winter and access to pastures during sowing and harvest seasons.

#### **Personal safety and the role of security providers**

- According to respondents, the frequency of all types of incidents has decreased since July 2010, with the possible exception of agricultural thefts in **Nikozi-Mereti**. Shooting is the most frequently reported incident, with the majority of respondents in **Atotsi-Dirbi** and **Nikozi-Mereti** reporting that such incidents occur in their community at least once a month. While detention cases have reduced significantly overall, a quarter of respondents from **Atotsi-Dirbi** report that their communities have suffered from a detention incident since July 2010.
- In spite of reductions in incidents, overall people feel physically less safe than in July 2010, due to the impact of attempts to ‘patrol’ and ‘protect’ the ill-defined boundary line. This means: a) in **Atotsi-Dirbi**, there is potential for violent competition over the ABL, as demonstrated by the reportedly high levels of shootings and detentions; b) in **Plavismani-Bershueti**, deterioration of the economic situation due to problems in trading across the ABL; and c) in **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana**, difficulties in accessing water and firewood located across the ABL in South Ossetia. **Nikozi-Mereti** is the only area where people’s perceptions of security are stable.
- People are most satisfied with the police and are most likely to turn to them if in need. However, estimations of the effectiveness of all security actors have worsened since the July 2010 study, due to the belief that external actors have not delivered on promises made.

#### **Recommendations for improving security providers’ responsiveness to local needs**

- All actors should, where possible, reduce attempts to ‘patrol’ and ‘protect’ the ABL, as this is having an impact on communities whose livelihoods involve movement and working in the ‘grey zone’ near the ABL.
- This entails adopting a varied approach that responds to the specific needs of different communities. For example, by reinforcing physical security in some communities (especially in **Atotsi-Dirbi** and **Nikozi-Mereti**) but by taking a more permissive approach in others that could increase movement across the ABL (especially in **Plavismani-Bershueti** and **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana**).

### The potential for increased tension and a return to violence

- So as not to further lose support and trust of communities along the ABL, all actors should prioritise strengthening communication, consultation and joint-planning with communities along the ABL. This would involve developing measures for communities to access the IPRM (e.g. pre and post consultation).
- People living along the ABL are more optimistic about the future than in July 2010, with a reduction in the number of people expecting increased tensions. Nevertheless, over half of respondents from **Nikozi-Mereti** still thought increased tensions or a return to violence likely in the first half of 2011.
- The events thought to carry the greatest risk of increased tensions/renewed violence were: a) political escalations – equally in all groups; b) shootings – especially in **Atotsi-Dirbi**; and c) the ABL being moved by Russian or South Ossetian forces – especially in **Nikozi-Mereti** and **Plavismani-Bershueti**. In contrast with the other groups, people in **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana** view problems with access to firewood and irrigation water as presenting the greatest threat of increased tensions.
- People believe that the political environment has stabilised, and consider political escalation less likely in the first half of 2011. Instead, the trigger events thought most likely to occur were problems with the supply of irrigation water and shootings. Importantly, people consider movements of the ABL more likely than in July 2010, reflecting apprehensions over the ambiguity of the ABL and the threat of violent contest.

### Recommendations for reducing tensions in communities and the likelihood of violence

- Take preventative measures to ensure that access to irrigation water (especially in **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana**), shooting incidents (**Atotsi-Dirbi**) and movement of the ABL (**Nikozi-Mereti** and **Plavismani-Bershueti**) do not become an issue in 2011.
- Establish measures for providing information back to communities on these three types of incidents, as well as wider political issues related to the conflict, so as to manage tensions and apprehension at the community level.

### Contact, trust and confidence across the divide

- Contacts with Ossetians continue to be at very low levels, apart from in **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana** where more people maintain cross-divide relationships. Indeed, it is becoming more difficult to maintain such relationships in **Plavismani-Bershueti**. Contacts are low, partly because people are worried that those who maintain contacts across the divide will be viewed with suspicion by the Georgian Government.
- There is increased support for all measures to encourage engagement across the divide, reflecting increased stability and the passage of time. People in **Nikozi-Mereti** are, however, still less supportive due to the psychological impact of the war and the feeling that they live ‘on the front line’.
- Human rights protection is the most *supported* measure for increasing contact across the ABL. This means: a) increasing social assistance and protection from attacks/kidnapping in **Plavismani-Bershueti** and **Nikozi-Mereti**; b) addressing property and housing needs in **Atotsi-Dirbi**; and c) addressing freedom of movement in **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana**. In addition, communities in **Nikozi-Mereti** should be provided with psychological assistance. As in the previous study, enabling trade is considered the most *effective* measure, reflecting the desire for practical measures that benefit the community and allow people to decide on when and how to engage with communities across the ABL.

**Recommendations for increasing contact, trust and confidence across the divide**

- De-stigmatise contacts across the divide, so that those people who wish to maintain relationships do not feel that this will lead to suspicion regarding their motives.
- Review human rights mechanisms and how they function along the ABL, so that they are more relevant for the needs expressed in the four research groups.
- Explore measures to encourage trade across the ABL, as well as other engagement measures focused on practical issues of benefit to communities on both sides. Measures should not be driven by the Georgian Government or the international community, but should be allowed to develop organically on the basis of local initiatives.

# 1

## Introduction

**ALL INDICATORS POINT TO INCREASED STABILITY** in the conflict-affected communities along the administrative boundary line (ABL) between Shida Kartli and South Ossetia.<sup>1</sup> Physical security incidents, such as shooting, robberies and detentions/kidnappings near the ABL have decreased since mid-2009. At the same time, the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) established under the Geneva Process has proved relatively effective in managing local issues of importance to both sides. This means that there is now greater opportunity to test ways of increasing mutually-beneficial contact and interaction across the ABL; and for the parties to the conflicts<sup>2</sup> to develop processes for consultation between affected communities and security providers on security issues. Such processes would involve providing information on security and developing clearer 'rules of the game' for those living along the ABL, on issues from maintaining water sources to trading across the ABL. They would also entail greater opportunity for affected communities to raise issues of concern to them in relevant formats, not least the IPRM.

There is a danger that if processes for consultation on security issues are not established, the lives of affected communities could become more difficult over the coming year. While security incidents are less frequent, competition over the ABL and its status is becoming more of an issue. That is, attempts to 'patrol' and 'protect' the ill-defined boundary line are having an ever greater impact on communities whose livelihoods involve movement and working in this 'grey zone'. Indeed, this report includes early indicators that such attempts are already impacting on community stability and people's sense of personal security; especially as people doubt that upcoming seasonal issues (such as access to water in the summer and access to firewood in the winter) will be resolved.

This report looks to inform thinking on the development of such processes by exploring four dynamics: 1) the overall situation in conflict-affected communities along the ABL with South Ossetia, and their critical needs; 2) the frequency of physical security incidents, how they impact on feelings of security, and perceptions of the performance of different security actors; 3) the potential for increased tensions and potential trigger events; and 4) the level and types of contact that presently exist across the ABL, and the types of measures that could increase confidence and contact.

It is important to note that the picture of security needs provided by this report is incomplete, as it does not capture the experiences of communities living on the other

<sup>1</sup> The parties to the conflict disagree on the use of terminology for the disputed area ('South Ossetia' or the 'Tskhinvali Region') and the boundary line ('Administrative Boundary Line' or 'Border'). Use of terminology in this report reflects that most commonly used by the international community.

<sup>2</sup> 'Conflicts' refers to the various disagreements that resulted in the initial violence in the 1990s and the war in August 2008. These disagreements are between the Georgian Government and the Russian Government, between Tbilisi and Sukhum/i and Tskhinval/i, and even between Russian and the Western international community.

side of the ABL in South Ossetia. While little public information is available on the situation in South Ossetia, it is clear that communities living there suffered greatly during the events of August 2008 and continue to live precariously. It is hoped that ways of mapping and responding to the security-related needs of these communities will be found in the near future.

### Community-based approaches to security

This study is part of Saferworld's programme to promote community-based approaches to security in conflict-affected communities across the Caucasus region. A community-based approach to security places a greater emphasis on understanding what makes communities feel insecure and finding locally appropriate ways of responding to the causes of insecurity. This approach entails: 1) gathering local perceptions of security and analysing how these perceptions are influenced by security incidents and other dynamics; 2) supporting security actors to develop the internal systems and tools necessary for responding to the causes of insecurity; and 3) increasing the capacity of communities to better articulate their concerns, to have more confidence in requesting responses to what makes them feel insecure, and to play a role in developing solutions. It also emphasises preventing threats from occurring, rather than responding to them after the event.

As such, community-based approaches to security can have a transformative impact on security-related behaviours and relationships within communities, as well as between communities and those responsible for ensuring their security.<sup>3</sup> Within communities, this approach empowers communities to identify local drivers of tension and insecurity, and to play a positive role in responding to them. This approach also builds trust between communities and security providers by improving the capacities of both to work together to deliver relevant and sustainable solutions to security threats. This approach can be especially relevant in conflict contexts, as by transforming security-related behaviours within communities and between communities and security providers, the potential of both groups to reduce tensions and thereby to reduce the likelihood of violence is reinforced.

In line with this approach, we used both household surveys and focus group discussions with communities to measure their perceptions of community priorities, levels and causes of insecurity, potential triggers of future tensions and violence, and the potential for increasing contact, trust and confidence across the divide. When assessing changes in the situation over time, we focused on the six months preceding the household survey, which took place in December 2010. We were also able to compare results from this survey to one conducted six months early in July 2010, thus allowing us to track changes in perceptions of security. More information on the research methodology used for this report can be found in the annex.

### Research areas

After preliminary research in 2008 and 2009, Shida Kartli was divided into four village groups identified as having similar security characteristics. This report further compares and contrasts the experiences of communities living in these village groups, in order to deepen understanding of their specific needs.

Villages in the **Atotsi-Dirbi** area were not as affected by the violence of 2008 or by the initial fighting in the 1990s. Prior to August 2008 there appeared to be good levels of interaction with communities on the other side of the ABL. At the same time, these villages suffer from limited economic opportunities in part due to their remote location.

Villages in the **Nikozi-Mereti** area were at the centre of the 2008 hostilities and sustained greater casualties and physical damage than villages in the other research areas.

<sup>3</sup> *Making Community Security Programmes more Effective: Synthesis Report* (Saferworld, 2010). Research paper produced for the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID). (Unpublished, available on request.)

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They are also closest to the most populated areas in South Ossetia and were reportedly regularly affected by security incidents. The area has received large amounts of international and government aid post-August 2008.

The **Plavismani-Bershueti** villages also suffered during the August war, but to a lesser extent than Nikozi-Mereti. These villages are more difficult to access and have been only a secondary target for relief activities. There appeared to be varying levels of contact with Ossetians across the ABL.

The villages of the **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana** area did not previously border territories under the control of Tskhinval/i and only became affected by the conflict when Ossetian and Russian security forces took control of the Akhagori region (which borders this village group) during the August 2008 war. Communities in this area tend to be ethnically mixed and to maintain contacts with relatives and friends across the divide.

It is important to note that the particular trends ascribed to each of the research areas are indicative only, and that there remains a good deal of discrepancy between the situations in communities in the same group. As such, it is essential that local and international actors properly consult with local communities before undertaking initiatives focused on ensuring security and responding to conflict.

# 2

## The needs of conflict-affected communities

**THIS SECTION EXPLORES THE OVERALL SITUATION** in conflict-affected communities situated along the ABL. It looks at the make-up of these communities, how they live, what they feel are their most critical needs, and how they believe the situation in their communities is changing. The analysis below provides strong evidence of those areas and issues that need prioritised attention from local and international actors.

### Who lives in the communities and how do they live?

Depopulation continues to be an important issue along the ABL, especially in Atotsi-Dirbi, and is at present primarily driven by physical insecurity rather than poverty.

Nearly half of respondents (52%) report that the number of people living in their community did not change in the period July to December 2010. Over a quarter of people (39%) believe that there are less people in their community, while only 9% think there are more people. Overall, this represents a decrease in the proportion of respondents identifying a reduction of people in their community – from 50% in July 2010. It is, however, difficult to assess whether this represents a reduction in the rate of depopulation, as the previous research looked at a much longer time period (from August 2008 to July 2010), rather than the six months covered in the most recent research. Nevertheless, these figures demonstrate that, in spite of significant investments in livelihoods and shelter, depopulation continues to be an important issue for the region. The relative importance of depopulation for the four research groups is the same as in July 2010, with Atotsi-Dirbi the most affected area, followed by Nikozi-Mereti (figure 1).

**Figure 1: Respondents reporting a decrease in population in their community<sup>4</sup>** Are there more, less or the same number of people living in your community compared to six months ago?

	... between July and December 2010 (present study)	... between August 2008 and July 2010 (previous study)
Atotsi-Dirbi	62%	86%
Nikozi-Mereti	47%	60%
Plavismani-Bershueti	31%	37%
Tsitelubani-Lamiskana	6%	15%
Overall	39%	50%

<sup>4</sup> Please note that in some cases there appears to be a 1–2% difference between figures represented in the graphs and those described in the text. This is where unrounded separate figures have been aggregated into categories and the aggregate figure has then been rounded to the nearest whole number.

In the July 2010 survey, a strong correlation was observed between perceptions of depopulation and the general sense of security within a community, rather than with levels of poverty. A similar correlation was observed in the results of the December 2010 survey. Respondents from Atotsi-Dirbi, which has witnessed the highest rate of depopulation, were more worried about the threat of renewed violence, shootings and ambiguity of the ABL than the other groups, while respondents from Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, which has the lowest rate of depopulation, were the least worried about these issues. At the same time, a far lower proportion of respondents from Atotsi-Dirbi reported their family having less than 50 lari a month to spend than in the other groups; the highest proportion was in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana.

**Continued high levels of poverty may contribute to depopulation in the future as external assistance to the region decreases.**

The overall economic picture has not changed substantially among villages living along the ABL with South Ossetia since July 2010. Average incomes in Shida Kartli are very low, and many people suffer from poverty. More than four out of five respondents (87%) spent less than 200 lari<sup>5</sup> (approx 80 EURO) in the month prior to the survey; over half (57%) spent less than 100 lari (approx 40 EURO), and 17% spent less than 50 lari (approx 20 EURO). These response rates were 81%, 49% and 12% in July 2010. The share of relatively poor people is thus still significantly higher than the average for other rural areas, where only 15% spend less than 90 lari.<sup>6</sup> Tsitelubani-Lamiskana and Plavismani-Bershueti stand out as experiencing especially high levels of poverty, with 30% and 24% of households in these areas having spent less than 50 lari respectively, compared with 9% in Nikozi-Mereti and 6% in Atotsi-Dirbi.

**Factors influencing communities and their needs**

The report demonstrated that the following factors influence communities' needs:

**Geography and experiences of the conflict.** Communities have diverse needs due to geographic factors such as level of isolation and proximity to markets. At the same time, experiences of the conflict inform how people view their present environment.

**Less security incidents.** There has been a decrease in the frequency of security incidents along the ABL. Nevertheless, there is still a discrepancy in the type and frequency of incidents experienced – with Atotsi-Dirbi experiencing most incidents, followed by Nikozi-Mereti, Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, in that order. Evidence of this is provided in section 3.

**Decrease in the level of external assistance.** The level of assistance to the region is decreasing and will tail off in late 2011. In October 2008 international donors committed to a three year package of assistance, comprising of \$1,743 million in the first year; \$1,680 million in the second; and \$1,111 million in the third. The package ends in October 2011.

**Drought in summer 2010.** The entire region experienced a significant drought in the summer of 2010. However, this had a greater impact on communities along the ABL due to existing challenges in accessing water arising from the conflict context.

**Seasonal needs.** Communities are presented with different challenges at different times of the year. For example, access to water becomes an issue during summer, while access to firewood is an issue during winter. Similarly, security issues become particularly important at harvest time, while access to markets is most important after harvest time.

**Adaption over time.** People adapt to the context in which they live. So, for example, people may get used to living in an insecure environment, or may look for alternative markets for their produce.

People living along the ABL are dependent on agriculture (81%) or social assistance and pensions (57%) for their income. As identified in the July 2010 survey, with a very weak private sector, an over-dependence on state transfers and reduced agricultural potential – including the inability to trade across the ABL – the local economy is structured in a way that makes growth unlikely. At the same time, as explained below, people feel they have less opportunity to earn money, partly because the amount of

<sup>5</sup> Georgian Lari. At the time of publication, 1 Euro was approximately 2.3 Lari.

<sup>6</sup> The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2010) Caucasus Barometer 2010, Georgia. Retrieved through Online Data Analysis – [www.crrc.ge/oda/](http://www.crrc.ge/oda/) on 1 February 2011.

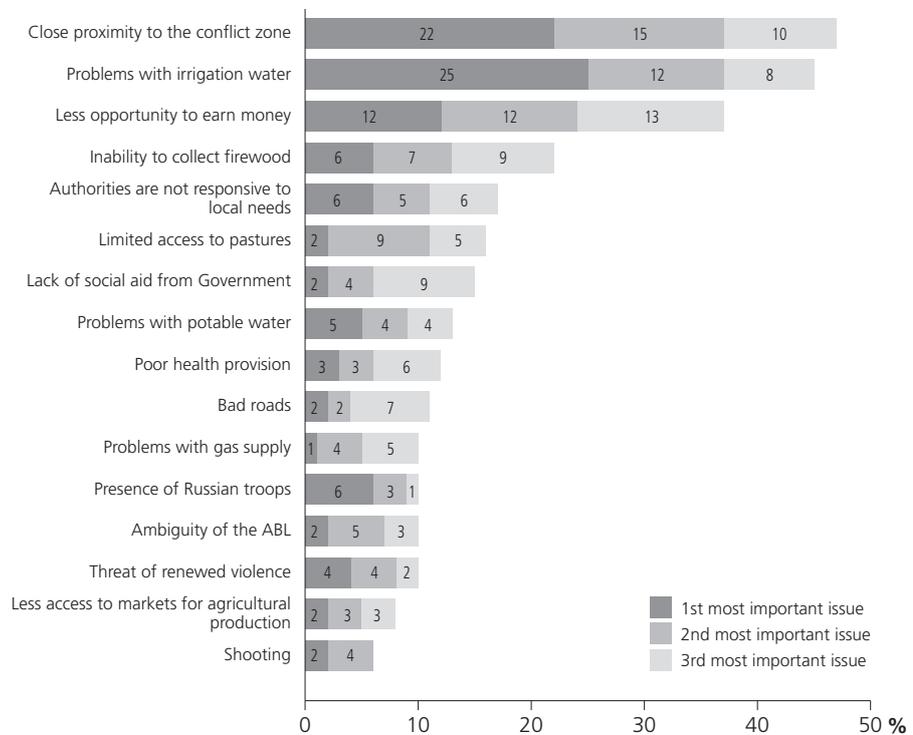
international assistance to the region is declining. This reduction in support could expose underlying vulnerabilities and further encourage people to leave the region.

### What are the critical needs facing communities?

**People consider close proximity to the conflict zone to be the most critical concern facing their community because of associated physical security threats.**

Forty eight per cent of respondents named close proximity to the conflict zone as one of the three most urgent problems facing their community (see figure 2), making it the most critical need. This compares with 55% in July 2010, demonstrating that the perceived threat posed by the conflict context has declined. Proximity to the conflict zone has the most impact in Atotsi-Dirbi (74% consider it one of the three most urgent problems), followed by Nikozi-Mereti (66%) and Plavismani-Bershueti (37%), with no respondents from Tsitelubani-Lamiskana thinking it an urgent problem.

**Figure 2: The most urgent problems facing communities in Shida Kartli**  
What are the most urgent problems facing your community/village?



As demonstrated by the July 2010 research, close proximity to the conflict zone is considered to be a critical problem, because of associated physical security threats. For example, people in Atotsi-Dirbi (where this issue is most important) suffer most from security incidents and are the most worried about them. People in Nikozi-Mereti experience the second highest rate of security incidents and concern over them, while in Plavismani-Bershueti this is the third highest-rated cause of concern. At the same time, incidents are extremely rare in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana and almost nobody expresses concern about them. Indeed, it is telling that the proportion of respondents selecting close proximity to the conflict zone as an urgent concern has declined (from 55% to 48%) at the same time that the frequency of security incidents has also decreased.

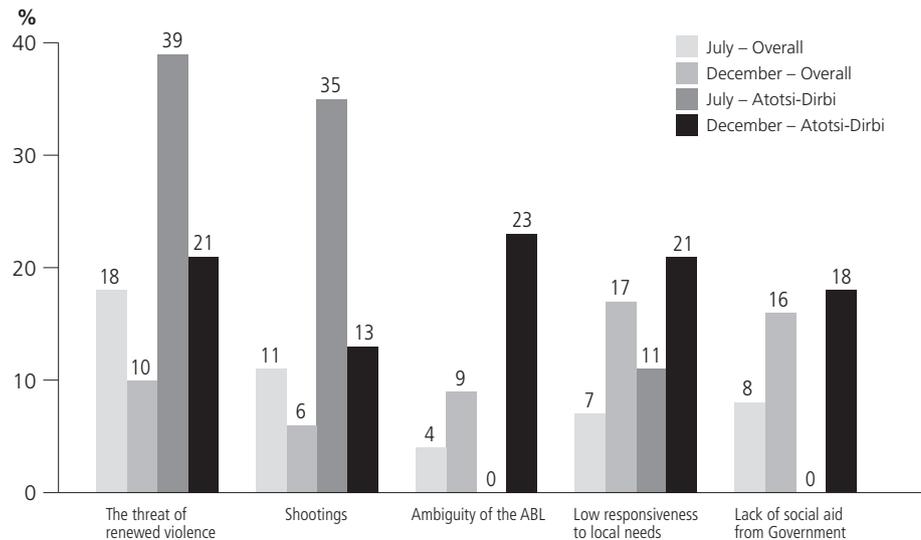
**People are less concerned with physical security issues and more concerned by the impact of reductions in external assistance on communities' sustainability.**

While proximity to the conflict zone and associated physical security threats is of primary concern to respondents, overall people were less worried by physical security issues in December 2010 than they were in July 2010. Instead, people are becoming

more concerned about the nature and level of external assistance to conflict-affected communities. For example, people are more concentrated on the lack of social aid from the government to conflict-affected communities, with 16% of respondents noting this as one of the three most urgent problems facing their community, compared to 8% in July 2010. Similarly, 17% now consider the low responsiveness of authorities to local needs an urgent problem, compared to 7% in July 2010. At the same time, in the present research, 6% of respondents identified shooting incidents, and 10% the threat of renewed violence, as urgent problems, compared to 11% and 18% respectively in July 2010. This change in concerns is most evident in Atotsi-Dirbi (figure 3).

**Figure 3: Comparison of physical security problems and external assistance**

What are the most urgent problems facing your community/village? (aggregated top three)



This change in prioritisation can in part be explained by the overall reduction in security incidents along the ABL between July and December 2010. It is, however, also probably because the level of international financial support, much of which is allocated to local government service delivery, has reduced and will end in 2011.<sup>7</sup> “The people in the village live in such poverty that we don’t even think about security anymore.”<sup>8</sup>

**The ongoing ambiguity of the ABL is also impacting on communities’ sustainability, especially in Atotsi-Dirbi due to the potential for violence along the ABL.**

People are also more concerned over the ambiguity of the ABL, with a larger proportion of respondents identifying this as one of the three most urgent concerns facing their community – an increase from 4% in July 2010 to 9% in the present study. This is because communities are struggling to understand the ‘rules of the game’ for managing a range of issues associated with life along the ABL, from trade to how to collect fire-wood.

Concern over the ambiguity of the ABL is most pronounced in Atotsi-Dirbi, where this issue was identified by almost one in four compared to no respondents in July 2010. At the same time, more than double the amount of people in Atotsi-Dirbi than in the other groups consider this issue (23% compared to an average of 9%), along with the threat of renewed violence (21%; 10%) and shootings (13%; 6%), as one of the three most urgent problems facing their communities (figure 3). This indicates that the conflict context is more volatile in this area, and that there is greater scope for violence along the ABL and confrontation over its status than elsewhere. Indeed, the majority of security incidents, especially shootings and kidnapping, happen in this group and it is the only group where the following security issues were considered an urgent

<sup>7</sup> At a donor conference in Brussels on 22 October 2008, the international community pledged a total of \$4,536 million to be spent over three years on the crisis response: \$1,743 million in the first year; \$1,680 million in the second; and \$1,111 million in the third.

<sup>8</sup> Focus group participant, Female, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana.

community problem (though by a small number of respondents): kidnapping, ethnic-based tensions and the lack of police posts. The relative volatility experienced in this region may be because it is more isolated than the other groups and receives less international attention.

#### **Impact of the conflict on access to water**

Problems accessing irrigation and potable water are mostly associated with the conflict, due to the fact that many water sources are situated on the other side of the ABL. As communities are unable to cross the ABL, they are not able to clean and maintain these sources, while in some cases water sources are believed to be purposely tampered with or diverted so that they do not reach Georgian communities. Access to irrigation water is essential for agricultural work in the region and, given the dependence on agriculture in the area, for livelihoods. The issue of water provision from South Ossetia is discussed in parallel with the provision of gas to South Ossetia in the Geneva Process meetings. So far, no solution acceptable to both sides has been found.

#### **Poor access to irrigation water is overall a more pressing concern, especially in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, partly due to the summer heat wave.**

The second most critical need is access to irrigation water, selected by 44% of respondents as one of their community's three most urgent problems. This issue is also considered more critical than in the July 2010 study, when it was prioritised by 36% of respondents. Access to irrigation water is of particular concern in the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana group, where 99% of respondents identified this issue as one of the three most urgent priorities for their community, followed by Nikozi-Mereti (68%), Plavismani-Bershueti (31%) and Atotsi-Dirbi (16%). However, this is partly due to the fact that this group is less affected by the physical security implications of the conflict, rather than because this issue is more pressing than in the other groups. Indeed, it is noticeable that no respondents from Tsitelubani-Lamiskana identified proximity to the conflict zone, the threat of renewed violence, shootings, the ambiguity of the ABL, or the presence of Russian troops as urgent community problems.

Access to irrigation water became a more critical need in 2010 due to the severe summer drought, which badly affected communities along the ABL. There are also indications that communities are becoming more frustrated with slow progress in reaching an agreement on the provision of water from South Ossetia: "The Government should negotiate this problem with the other side and then, maybe, it will be resolved."<sup>9</sup>

#### **People in Plavismani-Bershueti and Nikozi-Mereti think that the situation in their community is getting worse, and that this is due to fewer opportunities to earn money.**

As well as being asked to identify their communities' most urgent concerns, respondents were also asked to assess the overall situation in their community compared to six months earlier – whether the situation was the same, worse, or better. All respondents from Tsitelubani-Lamiskana (100%) and almost all respondents from Atotsi-Dirbi (92%) responded that the situation in their community had not changed. The context in Plavismani-Bershueti, however, provides cause for concern, with the negative trend noted in July 2010 deepening at the end of the year – 52% of respondents from this group stated that the situation in their community had worsened, compared to 36% in July 2010. While fewer respondents from Nikozi-Mereti identified a worsening situation, this group has seen the greatest reversal, with over a quarter of respondents (26%) stating that the context in their communities had worsened, compared to 9% in July 2010. Indeed, it is disquieting that only 15% of respondents from this area noted an improvement, compared to 53% in July 2010.

The main reason cited for the worsening context is fewer opportunities to earn money – 82% of those who think that the situation has worsened named this as the reason. The second greatest cause was perceived to be less opportunity to conduct agricultural activities (named by 55%), followed by inability to collect firewood (42%) and a

<sup>9</sup> Focus group participant, Male, 60, married, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti.

worsened supply of irrigation water (39%).<sup>10</sup> Indeed, less opportunity to earn money is considered the third most critical need overall and is given greater priority than in July 2010, as identified by 36% of respondents in the present survey, compared with 29% in July 2010. This issue was considered most pressing in Nikozi-Mereti (49%), followed by Plavismani-Bershueti (45%) and Atotsi-Dirbi/Tsitelubani-Lamiskana (both 26%). The increased importance of this issue can be explained by the fact that the security situation has stabilised and hence people are now focused on other needs, because of the reduction in external assistance coming into the area, and because of the cumulative impact of not being able to access markets in South Ossetia.

**Lack of access to markets is no longer an issue for most communities, apart from in Plavismani-Bershueti, where trade is affected by the presence of Russian troops.**

One of the most unexpected findings from the present study is that, compared with July 2010, people are less likely to consider lack of access to markets for agricultural products an urgent community problem – this issue has slipped from 3rd to 15th in overall priorities and was selected by only 8% of respondents, compared with 34% in July 2010. While access to the South Ossetian market is still restricted, this change may be because there were fewer incentives at the time of research for communities to attempt to trade across the ABL. The heat wave of the summer of 2010, combined with ongoing problems in accessing irrigation water, resulted in a poor harvest. This in turn meant that people had fewer products to sell: “We cannot sell anything. If we harvest something we just keep it for ourselves and eat it during the winter.”<sup>11</sup> People have also had some success in selling their products in other parts of Georgia: “If we harvest anything we [now] sell it in Gori or other markets in Georgia.”<sup>12</sup>

#### **Impact of the conflict on opportunities to earn money and access markets**

Reduced opportunity to earn money and access markets is closely associated with the conflict, as communities along both sides of the ABL have historically traded with one another. Restrictions on crossing the ABL, and the threats of kidnapping/detention for those that do, have caused a substantial reduction in trade across the ABL – with less than 1% of respondents stating they have any business links with communities in South Ossetia. This has in turn meant that communities have less opportunity to earn money; and are required to find other markets for their produce.

This issue is, however, still considered pressing in Plavismani-Bershueti, where 17% identified it as one of the top three most urgent problems (compared to 2% in Nikozi-Mereti, 1% in Atotsi-Dirbi and 0% in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana). The fact that people in Plavismani-Bershueti consider access to markets important and people in Nikozi-Mereti do not, while both identified less opportunities to earn money as an urgent community problem, is probably due to two factors. First, due to the psychological impact of the war and the ongoing feeling of being ‘on the front line’, people in Nikozi-Mereti are less willing to explore opportunities to trade across the ABL. Second, road connections to villages in Plavismani-Bershueti are worse than in Nikozi-Mereti, meaning that people living there have less opportunity to access alternative markets. This might also explain why people in Plavismani-Bershueti consider the presence of Russian troops a more urgent community threat than in the other groups (18% compared to an average of 10%) – i.e. that the Russian presence is restricting potential trade across the ABL.

**Inability to collect firewood and to access pastures are critical concerns for communities in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana; and the former may further undermine livelihoods.**

Twenty one per cent of respondents consider access to firewood to be one of the top three urgent problems (making it the fourth most critical need overall),<sup>13</sup> while 17%

<sup>10</sup> Respondents could choose more than one cause.

<sup>11</sup> Focus group participant, Male, Plavismani-Bershueti.

<sup>12</sup> Focus group participant, Male, 50, married, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti.

<sup>13</sup> This response option was not included in the July 2010 Survey.

think the same for limited access to pastures/inability to cultivate land (making it the sixth most critical need). These issues are considered more pressing in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana than in the other groups – access to firewood was identified by 79% and access to pastures by 65% of respondents. As for access to water, it is most likely that these issues were given higher priority in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana due to the limited impact of the conflict on physical security in this group, rather than because such needs are greater than in communities in the remaining groups.

#### **Impact of the conflict on access to pastures and firewood**

Pastures and traditional sources of firewood are often either in areas close to the ABL or in South Ossetia itself. Inability to access pastures can impact on families' livelihoods, while inability to collect firewood can become dangerous during the winter period as many families do not have access to gas or electrical heating. Those people that identified access to firewood as an urgent community problem were asked to explain what stopped them from collecting firewood. All respondents stated that this was either due to the risk of being detained by Russian or Ossetian forces for illegal crossing of ABL (81%), for 'illegal' woodcutting (less than 1%) or for unknown reasons (19%).

According to official sources, the Georgian Government provided each family living in close proximity to the conflict zone two square metres of firewood during the winter period.<sup>14</sup> However, the focus group discussions demonstrate that not all communities had access to this assistance, and some were even forced to cut down orchards for firewood: "We all have the same problem – we cut down all trees in our gardens to get firewood."<sup>15</sup> Such actions could have a significant impact on livelihoods in the future, because for many families orchards are an important source of income.

## **Summary and conclusions**

Depopulation is an ongoing issue along the ABL, especially in Atotsi-Dirbi, and is mostly driven by physical security issues. Nevertheless, with the end of post-crisis international financial assistance in 2011, increased poverty could become a more important driving factor as underlying vulnerabilities are exposed. Communities are less worried about physical security issues than in July 2010, due to a reduction in incidents. At the same time, people are more concerned about their communities' sustainability, due to reductions in external assistance and ongoing ambiguity over the ABL, and hence the 'rules of the game' for living close by it. In addition, critical community needs are influenced by seasonal factors such as access to firewood in winter and water in summer. Indeed, access to water became a particularly critical issue in the summer of 2010 because of a sustained drought. The most critical community needs identified are: a) proximity to the conflict zone because of associated physical security threats, especially in Atotsi-Dirbi due to the potential for violent competition over the ABL; b) poor access to irrigation water – in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana more than in other village groups; c) less opportunity to earn money, especially in Plavismani-Bershueti and Nikozi-Mereti, where people believe the overall situation in their communities has worsened; and d) inability to access pastures and sources of firewood – especially in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana.

As such, priority should be given to developing a 'community sustainability' strategy specific to communities living along the ABL, which would identify and manage the causes of depopulation. This plan should look to increase communities' agricultural production and trade – including across the ABL – and take account of the seasonal issues affecting communities such as access to water in the summer and access to firewood in the winter.

<sup>14</sup> Official web-site of the Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources, News, 29 December 2010: [http://moe.gov.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=GEO&sec\\_id=40&info\\_id=1247](http://moe.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=40&info_id=1247)

<sup>15</sup> Focus group participant, male, 30, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi.

# 3

## Personal safety and the role of security providers

**WHEREAS THE PREVIOUS SECTION** analysed perceptions of the overall situation at the community level, this section looks at the frequency of physical security incidents, the levels and causes of perceptions of insecurity, and the performance of security providers. The evidence below should be of help to both international and local agencies when planning security responses, and when balancing national security and local community priorities.

### What physical security incidents affect communities?

The frequency of incidents has reduced since July 2010, although shootings are still common – especially in Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti.

**Figure 4: Frequency of security incidents<sup>16</sup>**

Since July 2010, how often has the following happened in your community or village?

		Present research	Previous research (July 2010)
... a few times a month	Shooting	38%	51%
	Drunken disorder	0%	7%
... once a month	Shooting	5%	0%
	Agricultural/livestock theft	2%	0%
	Drunken disorder	1%	11%
	Conflict between neighbours	0%	14%
	Kidnapping/detention	0%	0%
... at least once during the last 6 months (present research)	Agricultural/livestock theft	16%	18% / 17%
	Drunken disorder	8%	9% / 0%
... at least once a year/at least once since August 2008 (previous research)	Kidnapping/detention	8%	7% / 12%
	Shooting	5%	0% / 0%
	Conflict between neighbours	4%	9% / 0%
	Other thefts	3%	8% / 7%
	Injuries through UXO	0%	0% / 18%

Respondents were asked to assess the frequency that a range of physical security incidents, from theft to ethnic-based violence, affected their communities in the

<sup>16</sup> Less than 1% of respondents stated that violent attacks and domestic violence occurred in their communities, and no respondents noted the following incidents: robbery, extortion/forced donations, murder, rape/sexual assault, blackmailing, injuries caused by unexploded ordnance, destruction of property and ethnic or religious-based violence.

period July to December 2011. The frequency of all types of incidents has declined since the previous research in July 2010, with the possible exception of agricultural/livestock theft, demonstrating that the overall security context has stabilised (figure 4). For example, 51% of communities experienced shooting incidents a few times a month from January to July 2010, compared to 38% in the period July to December 2010: “Six months ago Ossetians were shooting at us from the hills every day. Now the Russians have made them leave and there are no shootings”<sup>17</sup>

As in July 2010, shootings are by a large margin the most frequent type of physical security incident, and are most frequent in Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti, with respectively 71% and 58% of respondents reporting that their community was affected by shooting once a month or more (compared to 31% in Plavismani-Bershueti and no one in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana).

### The nature and impact of shooting incidents

Those respondents who stated that their communities have been affected by shootings were asked about the nature of the shootings, in terms of on which side of the ABL they occur, whether they are aimed at a target or in the air, the type of weapons used and the impact. All shootings were thought to be on the other side of the ABL (96%, with 4% replying ‘don’t know’) and were not thought to be targeted at anyone or anything (86% ‘in the air’; 1% ‘aimed’; 13% ‘don’t know’). 50% of those who had heard shots thought the source to be automatic weapons, 15% grenade launchers and 7% artillery, with the remainder answering ‘don’t know’. To respondents’ knowledge, the only impact of the shootings is fear amongst the population (92%; with 8% answering ‘don’t know’), rather than death, injury or damage.

### Most detentions take place in Atotsi-Dirbi, with the majority of people detained by Russian forces and released after paying a ‘fine’

Communities in Atotsi-Dirbi are most affected by detentions, with almost a quarter of respondents from this group (24%) stating that such incidents had taken place in their community, followed by Plavismani-Bershueti (5%). No incidents were reported by respondents from Nikozi-Mereti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana. Respondents who stated that their communities had been affected by detentions were asked to describe their nature, including the perpetrator and what happened to the affected persons. According to respondents, 65% of detentions were conducted by Russian military forces, 19% by ‘criminal groups’ and 10% by Ossetian forces. Of those detained, almost half (47%) were released after payment of a fine, but had been physically harmed (figure 5). The remainder responded ‘don’t know’.

**Figure 5: Resolution of kidnapping incidents**

What happened after the kidnapping?

	Payments made for release	Released without payment
Physically harmed	47%	20%
Not harmed	16%	8%

**Agricultural and livestock thefts are a particular problem in Nikozi-Mereti, affecting almost half the population living there, while injuries from unexploded ordnance were not reported during the research period.**

While the frequency of most security incidents has reduced since July 2010, it is difficult to judge whether this is also the case for theft of agricultural products and livestock. This is because the present study uses the category of ‘at least once during the past 6 months’ (selected by 16% of respondents) rather than the categories ‘at least once a year’ (18%) and ‘at least once’ (17%) used in July 2010. Either way, the fact that 16% of respondents reported an incident of agricultural and livestock theft in their community since July 2010 provides ample cause for concern. Nikozi-Mereti is most affected by this problem, with almost half of respondents reporting such incidents in their community since July 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Focus group participant, male, 56, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi.

Finally, it is notable that no respondents identified injuries caused by unexploded ordnance during the period July to December 2010, whereas 18% of respondents included in the July 2010 research stated that such issues had happened 'at least once' since August 2008. This may be because de-mining activities undertaken in the period after the August conflict have been successful. However, perhaps it is also because communities are too nervous to travel to or work in areas that may still be exposed to unexploded ordnance.

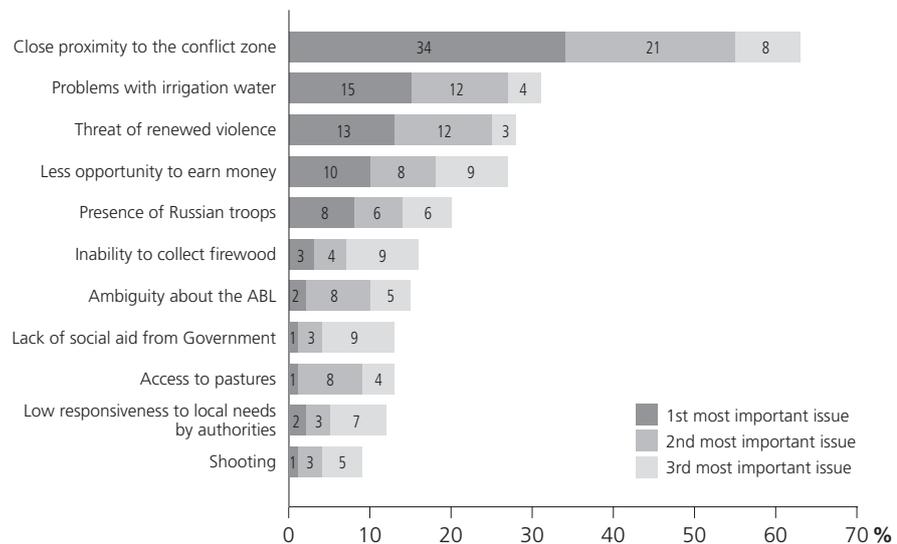
### How safe do people perceive themselves to be, and what influences perceptions of security?

In spite of reductions in security incidents, overall people feel less safe than in July 2010, due to 'patrol' and 'protect' measures along the ABL with South Ossetia.

As in July 2010, slightly more people feel safe than unsafe. When asked to evaluate changes in feelings of personal security in the period July to December 2010, 14% of respondents stated that their personal safety had worsened, 4% noted an improvement and 82% noted no change. While this compares positively with the community level (where 28% of respondents noted deterioration), it means that the personal security context has still deteriorated to some degree.

**Figure 6: Greatest personal threats to people along the ABL<sup>18</sup>**

What represents a threat to you personally?



As in July 2010, physical security problems are considered a greater threat to individuals than to the community as a whole. For example, the threat of renewed violence is ranked third at the individual level, while it was only the 14th most urgent community problem. However, there are some important changes to the prioritisation of physical security threats since July 2010. The threat posed by shooting incidents seems to have decreased, dropping from the sixth greatest personal threat in July 2010 to the eleventh in the present study. At the same time, the threat posed by the presence of Russian troops (previously eighth; now fifth in priority) and the ambiguity of the ABL (previously not ranked; now seventh in priority) seems to have increased. The decline in the importance of shootings can be attributed to a reduction in their frequency since the previous research. The increase in importance of the presence of Russian troops and ambiguity about the ABL is perhaps because attempts to 'patrol' and 'protect' the ill-defined boundary line are having an ever greater impact on communities whose livelihood involves movement along and working in this 'grey zone' (e.g. the collection of firewood during the winter).

<sup>18</sup> The question asked for the five most important personal threats. Those options which less than 10% selected as a top-three threat are not included. Among other options, respondents did not select the presence of unexploded ordnance, the presence of unofficial armed groups, crime in general or kidnappings of people as personal threats.

**People in Atotsi-Dirbi feel the least secure due to the threat of violent confrontation over the ABL, demonstrated by high levels of shooting incidents and detentions in the area.**

Atotsi-Dirbi is subjectively the least safe area, with 43% of respondents stating that they feel quite or very unsafe, and 9% feeling quite or very safe. In Plavismani-Bershueti, opinions are evenly split, with 27% feeling unsafe and 27% feeling safe. On the whole, more people in Nikozi-Mereti feel safe than unsafe and people in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana overwhelmingly feel safe. People in Atotsi-Dirbi also believe that the context has become less safe since July 2010, with only 1% noting an improvement and 18% stating they feel less safe (but no one stating they feel much less safe). This is a continuation of the negative trend for this group identified in the July 2010 study, when 14% noted a worsening context in the period from January 2010.

It may be surprising that people in Atotsi-Dirbi feel less secure when in fact all types of incidents have decreased. This can be explained by the greater potential for competition over the ABL in this area, partly as a result of its geographic isolation and partly because of the relative lack of attention it receives compared to Nikozi-Mereti and Plavismani-Bershueti. This potential for greater competition is demonstrated by the ongoing high levels (albeit reduced) of incidents – more than 50% of respondents in Atotsi-Dirbi reported that shootings take place several times a month in their communities, while 24% state that community members have been detained by Russian or South Ossetian forces. Indeed, both the high levels of insecurity and the ongoing security incidents are indicators that Atotsi-Dirbi is a hot-spot that needs particular attention.

Ongoing insecurity may also be due to the fact that people believe that the reduction in security incidents is not sustainable and that there will be an increase after the winter period. This is because people do not work in the fields or let their livestock out to pasture during the winter, and hence face fewer threats along the ABL: “Yes, there are fewer kidnappings. But this is because people do not go to their land plots, it is winter now and they do not work in the fields. They also do not let their cattle into the field. I do not know what will happen in spring and summer.”<sup>19</sup>

**People feel less safe in Plavismani-Bershueti, due to the worsening economic situation, and in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, due to drought and problems in gathering firewood.**

Respondents from Plavismani-Bershueti also believe that the security environment is deteriorating, with 3% saying they feel less safe than in July 2010, 16% saying they feel much less safe, and only 8% noting an improvement. This compares with the July 2010 study, when opinions were evenly split – 8% felt safer and 8% less safe than in January 2010. This negative trend can be attributed to the worsening economic situation in this area resulting from ongoing restrictions on trade across the ABL – 41% of respondents from this area consider fewer opportunities to earn money one of the three most serious personal threats (compared to an average of 27%), while 18% thought the same about lack of access to markets (compared to an average of 8%). As noted above, people in this area are also more likely to view the presence of Russian forces as a threat than respondents from other groups.

Perhaps most surprisingly, 100% of respondents from Tsitelubani-Lamiskana also feel less safe. This is unexpected because in the July 2010 study, 69% of respondents felt personally as secure as in January 2010, with the remainder (31%) feeling even more secure. In addition, as noted above, serious security incidents do not seem to occur in this group. Reduced feelings of security are most probably due to the drought experienced in the summer of 2010, challenges in accessing firewood for heat and to the belief that these issues will not be addressed in the future.

**Increased security in Nikozi-Mereti, as noted in the July 2010 study, has endured because there are less security incidents and because people have got used to living ‘on the front line’.**

<sup>19</sup> Focus group participant, female, 51, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi.

In the July 2010 study, 40% of respondents from Nikozi-Mereti stated that their personal safety had increased since the beginning of 2010, and only 16% noted a worsening situation in the same period. This sense of security remains constant, with 92% of respondents stating that their security situation in December 2010 is the same as in July 2010, 3% noting an improvement and 4% noting a decrease in personal security.

The focus group discussion in Nikozi-Mereti confirmed this positive finding. Participants stated that previously they felt less secure, experienced more security incidents and believed themselves to be less supported by the police. In addition, they thought that increased feelings of safety are in part because people have adjusted to the realities of living ‘on the front line’: “People have got used to the life that we have. Six months ago we were more afraid but we still remained in the village. Now I am in the same village and I am used to the state of fear as well. If you put a man in prison, he will suffer the most during the first month; then he will get used to it.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, it is telling that far less people from this group are worried about the presence of Russian troops than in July 2010 – 41% considered the presence of Russian troops one of the top three threats in July 2010, compared to 8% in the present survey. “Before we would run and hide when we heard the sound of tanks. Now we come close and watch them.”<sup>21</sup>

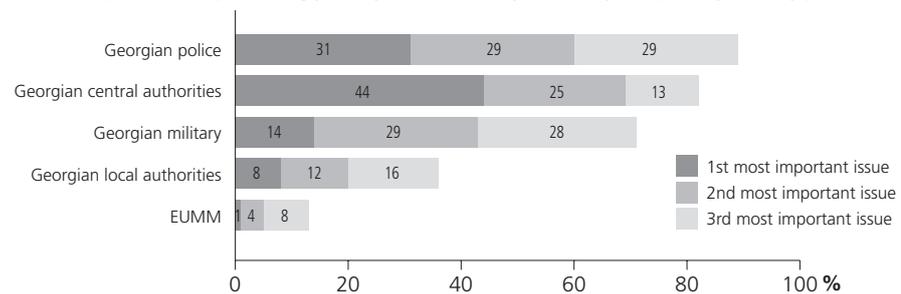
### Who provides security and how do communities relate to these security providers?

The Georgian central authorities provide security through political management of the conflict, while the Georgian police are the main security provider on the ground.

As in July 2010, the Georgian central (national) authorities are perceived to be the ‘primary security provider’ when it comes to protecting people in their community – 44% of respondents identified them as the most important provider (figure 7). The Georgian police are, however, the most vital provider overall – 31% of respondents cite them as their primary security provider, 29% put them second and 29% put them third. The other actors perceived to provide security are the Georgian military, Georgian local authorities and the EUMM. In line with the July 2010 study, non-state actors such as Georgian NGOs, churches, relatives or friends have virtually no role as security providers in respondents’ minds, and no respondents identified the Russian military or border guards as security providers.

**Figure 7: Perceptions of primary security provider**

Who is responsible for protecting you in your community – who is your ‘primary security provider’?



As observed in the July 2010 report, the primacy of the Georgian central authorities for communities hints at a perception that the conflict and associated security issues depend on political discussion between Russia and Georgia and between Tbilisi and Sukhum/i Tskhinval/i, rather than on local dynamics: “[The outcome of the conflict] is in the hands of the Government, not only our Government but the Russian Government as well. No one asks Ossetians anything.”<sup>22</sup> The perception of the police as overall the most important security provider reflects the fact that the police is the primary

<sup>20</sup> Focus group participant, male, 50, married, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti.

<sup>21</sup> Focus group participant, male, 60, married, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti.

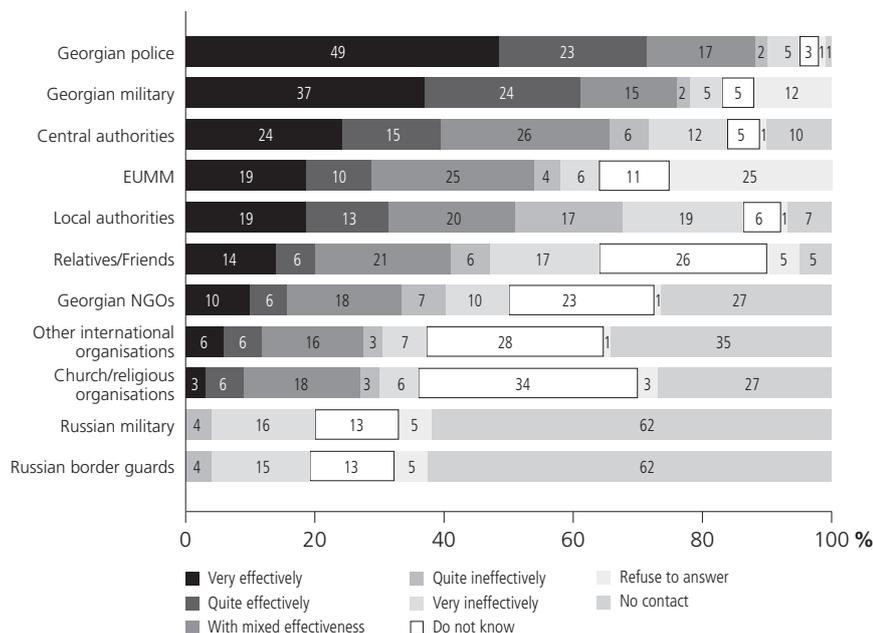
<sup>22</sup> Focus group participant, Male, Tselubani-Lamiskana.

actor on the ground, with responsibility both for managing the ABL and ensuring the security of communities living there.

**People are most satisfied with the police and are most likely to turn to them if in need – apart from in Atotsi-Dirbi, where people would turn to the Central Authorities.**

Respondents are most positive about the contribution of the Georgian police in providing security in their communities, with 72% of respondents stating the police is ‘very effective’ or ‘quite effective’ (figure 8). The second most effective security actor was thought to be the Georgian military (61% estimated the Military as very or quite effective), followed by the Georgian central authorities (39%), local authorities (31%) and the EUMM (29%). This order of perceived effectiveness is the same as in the July 2010 survey.

**Figure 8: Effectiveness of security providers at dealing with local concerns.**  
Who is responsible for protecting you in your community – who is your ‘primary security provider’?



Almost all respondents would turn to the Georgian police (87%) if in need, followed by the central authorities (36%), the courts (13%), the Georgian military (10%), relatives or friends (8%) and international organisations other than the EUMM (8%). Importantly, only a very small proportion of respondents said they would turn to the EUMM (4%), journalists (2%), NGOs, or religious groups (all less than 1%). Respondents from Atotsi-Dirbi stand out as they are more likely to turn to central authorities, and less likely to turn to the police (81% and 71% respectively). While this is probably because of the more volatile situation in the region, these findings deserve further investigation.

**People’s estimations of the effectiveness of all security actors have declined since the July 2010 study due to a feeling that they have failed to deliver on promises.**

Ratings of effectiveness have declined for all actors. For example in July 2010, 80% of respondents rated the police as quite or very effective (compared to 72% in the present research), while 41% of respondents rated the EUMM as quite or very effective (compared to 29% in the present study). Importantly, assessments of non-state actors have fallen the furthest – by between a third and half. Thirty per cent of respondents rated relatives/friends as either very or quite effective in July 2010, compared to 20% in the present study. Ratings of effectiveness for Georgian NGOs reduced from 30% to 16% in the same period; for international organisations other than the EUMM from 22% to 12%; and for the Church/other religious organisations from 21% to 9%.

The focus group participants explained that the lower estimation of effectiveness across the board is partly due to increased feelings of distrust towards external actors working in the region. It was felt that external actors, and international organisations in particular, had not delivered against promises made to communities, and that there is little transparency over their work: “Today we do not believe anyone. They come, ask questions and then disappear.”<sup>23</sup> In general, it was thought that no substantial assistance has been provided since the period directly after the war: “The substantial help that we received was just after the war, from the Red Cross. Since then we have not received anything considerable.”<sup>24</sup> However, it should be noted that estimations of the efficiency of security providers are also influenced by deepening economic problems. That is, people find it difficult to distinguish between the impact of organisations working on development and the impact of organisations working to alleviate the impact of the conflict.

## Summary and conclusions

The frequency of all types of incidents has reduced since July 2010, with the possible exception of agricultural thefts in Nikozi-Mereti. Shootings are the most frequent incidents, with the majority of respondents in Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti reporting that they experience such incidents in their communities at least once a month. While detention cases have decreased significantly overall, a quarter of respondents in Atotsi-Dirbi reported a detention incident in their community since July 2010. In spite of a perceived reduction in incidents, overall people feel physically less safe than in July 2010, due to the impact of attempts to ‘patrol’ and ‘protect’ the ill-defined boundary line. This means: a) in Atotsi-Dirbi, the potential for violence over the ABL, as demonstrated by high levels of shooting incidents and detentions; b) in Plavismani-Bershueti, deterioration of the economic situation due to problems in trading across the ABL; and c) in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, access to water and firewood located across the ABL in South Ossetia. Nikozi-Mereti is the only area where people perceptions of security are stable. People are most satisfied with the police and are most likely to turn to them if in need. However, estimations of the effectiveness of all security actors have reduced since the July 2010 study, due to a feeling that external actors have failed to deliver on promises.

As such, all actors should, where possible, reduce attempts to ‘patrol’ and ‘protect’ the ABL, as this is having an impact on communities whose livelihoods involve movement and working in the ‘grey zone’ near the ABL. This entails adopting a varied approach that responds to the specific needs of different communities, for example by reinforcing physical security in some areas (in Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti), and by taking a more permissive approach in others to increase movement across the ABL (in Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana). In addition, so as not to further lose the support and trust of communities along the ABL, all actors should prioritise strengthening communication, consultation and joint planning with communities along the ABL. This would involve developing measures for communities to access the IPRM (e.g. pre and post consultation).

<sup>23</sup> Focus group participant, female, 51, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi.

<sup>24</sup> Focus group participant, male, 27, single, unemployed. Atotsi-Dirbi.

# 4

## The potential for increased tension and a return to violence

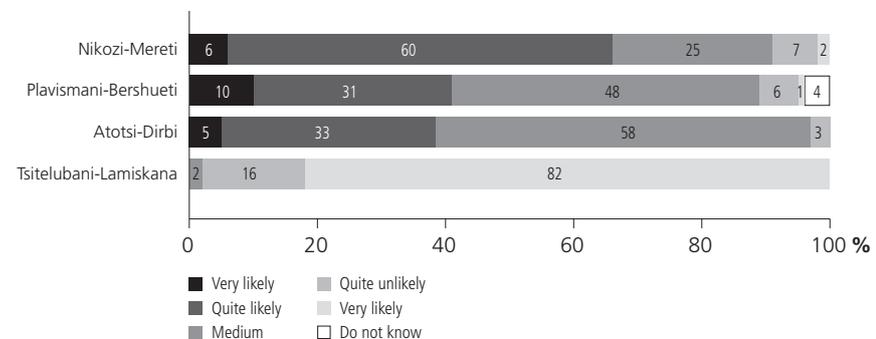
**SECURITY AND CONFLICT DYNAMICS** can change rapidly, both for better and for worse, and within a relatively small geographical area different communities can experience different trends. It is often the case that small negative trends in one area can end up having a wider impact and even trigger a return to violence. Conflict-affected communities have unique insight into the potential for increased tensions at the local level, potential triggers, and the likelihood of their occurrence. The following findings should be of use to local and international actors when designing strategies to reduce tensions and prevent a return to violence.

### What is the potential for increased tensions in communities?

People are more optimistic about the future, although over half of respondents from Nikozi-Mereti still think increased tensions or a return to violence is likely in 2011.

**Figure 9: Potential for increased tensions**

How likely is it that the situation in your community/village will become tenser?



Overall, 41% of respondents think that it is 'quite likely' or 'very likely' that the situation in their community will become more tense by July 2011, 40% deem increased tensions a medium risk, and only 17% think it 'quite unlikely' or 'highly unlikely' that the situation will become more tense. This demonstrates a positive trend since the July 2010 study, when 50% thought increased tensions to be 'quite likely' or 'very likely'. In spite of this improvement, the results demonstrate that a substantial amount of the

population living along the ABL continue to be concerned about the future. As in July 2010, respondents from Nikozi-Mereti are the most pessimistic, with 65% of respondents believing that increased tensions or renewed violence are likely (figure 9 – this figure was 68% in July 2010). While this pessimistic outlook runs contrary improved security in the area since the beginning of 2010, it corresponds to the feeling of being on the ‘front line.’

### What events could trigger increased tensions and how likely are they?

Political escalations, shootings and the ABL being moved by Russians or Ossetians are thought to carry the greatest risk of increasing tensions or renewed violence.

Similar to July 2010, people believe that political escalations – either between Georgia and Russia (75%) or between Tbilisi and Tskhinval/i (36%) – are the most likely trigger of renewed violence (figure 10). This indicates that people perceive the main causes of tensions as external to their community and outside their influence. The other prominent triggers for increased tension are shootings (35%) and movement of the ABL by Russian or Ossetian forces (20%).

**Figure 10: Potential triggers for increased tensions**

This event is able to cause increased tensions or renewal of conflict:

	Present study	July 2010	Tsitelubani-Lamiskana
Further political escalation between Georgia and Russia	75%	56%	100%
Further escalation between Tbilisi and Tskhinval/i	36%	31%	11%
Shootings	35%	41%	0%
Moving the boundary line by Russian or Ossetians	20%	27%	2%
Problems of supply with irrigation water	17%	15%	94%
Clashes between armed forces	16%	23%	0%
Domestic political upheaval or unrest	13%	23%	0%
Inaccurate or inflammatory statements by politicians	12%	6%	0%
Inability to collect firewood for winter <sup>25</sup>	12%	—	83%
Worsened criminal situation	10%	9%	1%
EUMM leaving the region	10%	14%	0%
External political situation	8%	5%	7%
Worsening economic situation	7%	11%	0%
Inaccurate or inflammatory reporting by journalist	5%	3%	0%
Moving the boundary line by Georgians	4%	2%	1%
Reduced ability to cross the ABL	3%	1%	0%
Flow of arms into the region	2%	4%	0%
Problems with the supply of potable water	1%	6%	1%
Increase in illegal movement of people	1%	1%	0%

Response rates in the present study are slightly different from July 2010. Mostly notably, the proportion of respondents that view political escalation between Georgia and Russia as a potential trigger event increased from 56% in July 2010 to 75%; and from 31% to 36% for the potential for escalation between Tbilisi and Tskhinval/i. This probably reflects the reduction in local incidents, and hence the potential for local events to get out of hand, rather than a worsened political environment. It is also notable that the proportion of respondents identifying clashes between armed forces and domestic political upheaval has reduced, from 23% to 16% and 23% to 13% respectively. The former may mean that the July 2010 survey was influenced by a fake report of a Russian invasion, shown on Imedi, a Georgian television network, in March 2010. While this report caused substantial panic among Georgians at the time,<sup>26</sup> more than six months on anxiety regarding potential Russian aggression has significantly lessened. The latter

<sup>25</sup> This category was not included in the July 2010 study.

<sup>26</sup> See for example: [www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22080](http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22080)

is probably due to the fact that, in contrast to 2009, Georgia has not seen any major internal political unrest or demonstrations in 2010.

**People in Atotsi-Dirbi are more likely to identify shootings as trigger events; while people in Nikozi-Mereti and Plavismani-Bershueti are more likely to identify movement of the ABL.**

Fifty eight per cent of respondents from Atotsi-Dirbi identified shootings as a potential cause of increased tensions, compared to an average of 35%. This is in line with the relative prevalence of shooting incidents experienced by communities living in this area, but also with the reduction in such incidents since July 2010; the proportion of people identifying shootings as a potential trigger event was 84% in the previous study. It is also important to note that the criminal situation was considered a real threat in this area, with 20% of respondents identifying this issue as a potential trigger compared to only 9% in Plavismani-Bershueti, 7% in Nikozi-Mereti and less than 1% of respondents in Tselubani-Lamiskana. The authors were not able to analyse why this is the case, and as such recommend that the level and nature of criminality in Atotsi-Dirbi is studied in more detail.

Movement of the ABL by Russian or Ossetian forces was identified as a potential trigger for increased tensions by 28% of respondents from Nikozi-Mereti and 29% from Plavismani-Bershueti, compared with only 4% of respondents in Atotsi-Dirbi and 2% of respondents in Tselubani-Lamiskana. These perceptions might be affected by the incident that took place on 29 September 2010 when the EUMM observed unilateral border demarcation activities by Russian border guards. It was reported that these activities, about which communities had only limited information, caused anxiety locally.<sup>27</sup> These findings also underline how worried people in Nikozi-Mereti and Plavismani-Bershueti are by ambiguity of the ABL. It is notable that 27% of respondents from Nikozi-Mereti also considered clashes between armed forces (compared to an average of 16%) and inaccurate or inflammatory statements by politicians (against an average of 12%) as potential trigger events – reflecting that people living there continued to feel on the front line, even if security incidents have reduced.

#### **Tselubani-Lamiskana – a special case**

Responses from people living in Tselubani-Lamiskana differ from the other four research areas on most issues. Communities in this region are least worried about proximity to the conflict and are least affected by depopulation. In addition, people in this region rarely experience physical security incidents and do not prioritise them as either urgent community problems or personal threats. Instead, people in this region are worried about access to water, pastures and firewood. Indeed, people in this area overwhelmingly feel safe. This is because the area did not previously border territories under the control of Tskhinvali and only became affected by the conflict when South Ossetian and Russian security forces took control of the Akhgori region (which borders this village group) during the August 2008 war. In addition, communities in this area tend to be ethnically mixed and to maintain contacts with relatives and friends across the divide.

**People in Tselubani-Lamiskana are more likely to consider problems with irrigation water and access to firewood as potential triggers of future tensions.**

Responses about potential triggers of increased tensions differ substantially between Tselubani-Lamiskana and the other research areas, with people from this area tending to be much less concerned with the physical impacts of the conflict. Apart from political escalation between Russia and Georgia (100%), the only conflict-related events they deem likely to cause new tensions are an inability to collect firewood for winter (83%) and concerns about the supply of irrigation water (94%). Indeed, no respondents from this group named (for example) shootings, clashes between armed forces, the EUMM leaving the region or the flow of arms into the region as potential

<sup>27</sup> The Georgian Government claimed that the demarcation activities took place near Kvemo Nikozi, Zemo Nikozi, Ditsi, Arbo and Kordi. The EUMM confirmed movement of markers only in Ditsi: [http://eumm.eu/en/press\\_and\\_public\\_information/press\\_releases/2315/?year=2010&month=12](http://eumm.eu/en/press_and_public_information/press_releases/2315/?year=2010&month=12)

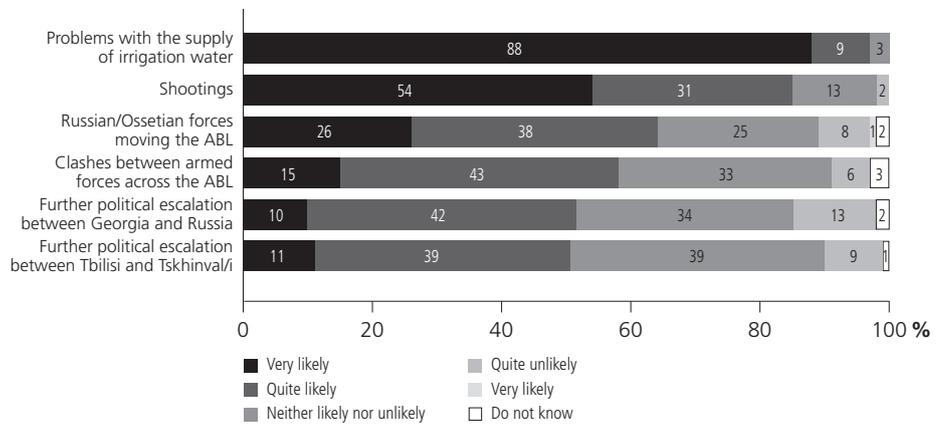
triggers of violence (figure 10). As noted previously, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana is very much removed from the conflict and does not suffer from the daily security impacts felt in the other three groups.

**People think that the trigger events most likely to occur in the first half of 2011 are problems with the supply of irrigation water and shootings.**

People who had identified a specific event that could cause increased tension or renewed conflict were asked whether they thought the event likely to happen during the first half of 2011. From the top six potential trigger events, problems with the supply of irrigation water were considered the most likely to happen in the first half of 2011 (97% of respondents considered it ‘very likely’ or ‘likely’), followed by shooting incidents (85%) and Russian and/or South Ossetian forces moving the ABL (figure 11). These findings correspond to communities’ struggle to access irrigation water, and demonstrate that people do not think political resolution of this issue likely during 2011. It also attests to the ongoing high levels of shootings experienced by communities situated along the ABL; and concerns over the ambiguity of the boundary line.

**Figure 11: Likelihood of trigger events happening over the next 12 months**

How likely is it for each event to happen during this year?



**People believe that the political environment has stabilised and that political escalation is less likely in the first half of 2011; but consider movements of the ABL more likely.**

People believe that most potential triggers are less likely in the first half of 2011 than they believed in the last six months of 2010. Most notably, the proportion of respondents who identified political escalation between Russian and Georgia has declined from 72% in July 2010 to 52% in the present study, and escalation between Tbilisi and Tskhinval/i from 74% in July 2010 to 50% in the present study. This demonstrates that people think the political environment has stabilised in the intervening period.

At the same time, people are more apprehensive about Russia and Ossetia moving the ABL, with 64% of respondents believing such incidents ‘likely’ or ‘very likely’ compared to 16% in July 2010. This concern could, in part, be explained by the movement of the ABL check-points toward the Georgian side in September 2010 (described above). It also underlines the fact that people are worried about the ambiguity of the ABL and provides further evidence for the argument that in some places there is the risk of clashes over the position and status of the ABL.

**Summary and conclusions**

People living along the ABL are more optimistic about the future than in July 2010, with a reduction in the number of people expecting increased tensions. Nevertheless, over half of respondents from Nikozi-Mereti still thought increased tensions or a return to violence likely in the first half of 2011. The events thought to carry the greatest risk of increased tensions and/or renewed violence were: a) political escalations (equally in all groups); b) shooting incidents (especially in Atotsi-Dirbi); and c) the

ABL being moved by Russian or South Ossetian forces (in particular, in Nikozi-Mereti and Plavismani-Bershueti). In contrast with the other groups, people in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana view problems with access to firewood and irrigation water as presenting the greatest threat of increased tensions. People believe that the political environment has stabilised, and consider political escalation less likely in the first half of 2011. Instead, the trigger events thought most likely to occur were problems with the supply of irrigation water and shooting incidents. Importantly, people consider movements of the ABL more likely than in July 2010, reflecting apprehensions over the ambiguity of the ABL and the threat of violence.

As such, all actors should take preventative measures to ensure that access to irrigation water (especially in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana), shooting incidents (Atotsi-Dirbi) and movement of the ABL (Nikozi-Mereti and Plavismani-Bershueti) do not become an issue. In addition, measures should be taken to provide information back to communities on these three types of incidents, as well as wider political issues related to the conflict, so as to manage tensions and apprehension at the community level.

# 5

## Contact, trust and confidence across the divide

**CONTACTS BETWEEN COMMUNITIES** living in South Ossetia and Shida Kartli have traditionally been high, but have been more difficult to maintain since the start of the conflict in the early 1990s, and especially since the August 2008 war, as opportunities to cross the ABL have become increasingly restricted. Reducing tensions and preventing violence at the local level depends on the ability and willingness of communities to engage with each other across the divide. This section explores the level and types of engagement that presently exist, the types of engagement in which people would be willing to participate, and how effective people think such measures would be in increasing trust and confidence.

### What is the nature and level of contact with communities across the divide?

Contacts with Ossetians continue to be at very low levels, apart from those in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana.

The nature and level of relationships with ethnic Ossetians living in South Ossetia has not changed substantially since July 2010 (see figure 12). The overwhelming majority of respondents (78%, an overall drop of 5% from July 2010) do not presently have any relationships with South Ossetians, while 17% report family links, 11% entertain friendships and less than 1% have business links.

**Figure 12: Nature and level of contacts across the ABL**

What relationships does your family have with ethnic Ossetians living in South Ossetia?

	Present study	July 2010
Friendships	11%	6%
Family links	17%	20%
Business links	0.3%	0.3%
No relationship	78%	73%
Mistrust	0.2%	2%
Open hostility	0%	0.4%

The level of ties with communities on the other side of the ABL varies among the village groups, with people in Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti reporting fewer ties (less than 10%, as in July 2010). In Plavismani-Bershueti, people with family ties make up almost

one fifth of the population (18%; 20% in July 2010). In Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, links are even more widespread: 52% report family ties, while 79% state they have maintained friendships (compared to 66% and 26% respectively in July 2010). The higher levels of relationships across the divide amongst people from Tsitelubani-Lamiskana can in part be explained by the large number of ethnic South Ossetians living there (46% of the population) and proximity to the Akhagori region, which is now under the control of Russian and South Ossetian forces. This is logical given the presence of ethnic Georgians in the Akhagori region, which is now under the control of Russian and South Ossetian forces, and the fact local residents often cross the ABL to see friends and relatives living in the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana area. However, it was unclear to the authors why the proportion of respondents from the area with family ties had decreased and the proportion having friendships increased.

**It is becoming more difficult to maintain relationships in Plavismani-Bershueti, while Tsitelubani-Lamiskana has seen an improvement.**

The overwhelming majority of respondents (93%) state that their relations across the ABL have not changed during the last 6 months, with 5% stating their relationships have worsened and 2% noting an improvement. It seems that it is most difficult to maintain relationships across the divide for people in Plavismani-Bershueti, with 9% in this area stating that relationships had worsened. It is important to note, however, that the rate of deterioration has halved since July 2010, when 10% of all respondents and 19% of respondents from Plavismani-Bershueti noted worsening relationships. By contrast, no respondents from Tsitelubani-Lamiskana noted worsening relationships and 11% noted improvements.

In the July 2010 study, focus group participants explained that in many cases they do not try to renew connections with friends or relatives, due to concerns about negative consequences for them. Similarly in December 2010, people said they hesitated to reach out across the divide, and this was in part due to worries about reactions from the Georgian authorities: “Even though our villages are next to each other, we are not allowed to have any contact at all. If we try to establish some contact and our [Georgian] police catch us, we will be branded traitors.”<sup>28</sup>

**What willingness exists for contact and what form should it take?**

**There is increased support for most measures to encourage engagement across the divide, compared to July 2010; and measures to protect human rights are most supported.**

**Figure 13: Support for engagement measures (including ‘strong support’ and ‘support’ responses)**

How supportive are you of the following activities to encourage engagement with Ossetians living in South Ossetia

	Present study	July 2010
Protecting human rights	95%	90%
Ensuring security for agricultural work	90%	82%
Enabling trade with each other	85%	78%
Creating conflict resolution mechanisms at the community level	78%	67%
Travelling to meet friends and relatives on the other side	76%	69%
Sharing ideas on how to prevent a return to violence	74%	65%
Meeting in dialogues with former neighbours	73%	67%
Sharing ideas on how to support economic development	72%	61%
Police working with the community to combat criminal activities and insecurity	66%	59%
Ensuring services (e.g. gas, electricity)	56%	50%

<sup>28</sup> Focus group participant, Male, 50, married, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti.

As in July 2010, only a very small number of people in Shida Kartli feel mistrust or open hostility (see figure 12) towards ethnic South Ossetians. This indicates that with time, and given the opportunity, communities would rebuild ties across the divide. Indeed support for all potential measures for encouraging engagement has increased by between 5% and 10% since July 2010 (figure 13). This may well be because of the stabilisation in the overall context and a reduction in security incidents, or simply because of the passage of time since the war in August 2008. The measures with the most support would involve protecting human rights (95% would 'support' or 'strongly support' this), ensuring security for agricultural work (90%), enabling trade with each other (85%) and creating conflict resolution mechanisms at the community level (78%).

The responses show that people living along the ABL in Shida Kartli are more likely to support those mechanisms which bring practical local benefit, such as increasing security or allowing people to earn money through trade, rather than externally driven initiatives, such as police liaison processes. Reservations about externally managed processes reflect the feeling that communities should take a leading role in reducing tensions and restoring trust. This suggests that rather than looking to create formal engagement measures, local and international actors should instead consider the steps that can be taken to allow communities to themselves develop informal engagement processes at their own pace.

**People in Nikozi-Mereti are less supportive of engagement measures, due to the psychological impact of the conflict and the feeling of being 'on the front line'.**

As in July 2010, respondents from Nikozi-Mereti are considerably less enthusiastic about most proposed engagement measures than the other groups. While their opinion on engagement measures is positive, they were more likely to simply 'support' a given activity than to 'strongly support' it. There was also relatively stronger opposition to all types of engagement. For example, 48% of respondents from this group are opposed to ensuring basic services (i.e. including to communities across the divide), 16% oppose travelling in order to visit friends and relatives on the other side of the boundary line, 15% oppose Police working with the community to combat criminal activities and insecurity and 11% oppose meeting in dialogue with former neighbours in order to re-establish trust and confidence (against respective averages of 17%, 7%, 8% and 5%).

This negative attitude can be explained by the fact that this region suffered most during the August war and that people living there continue to feel 'on the front line'. This suggests that more of a focus should be given to creating an enabling environment for engagement in the other three areas, and for the time being the focus in Nikozi-Mereti should be to provide psychological assistance and an increased sense of security.

**What are the human rights needs along the ABL (and how can they promote engagement)?**

**Low levels of social assistance and inadequate protection from attacks and/or kidnapping are the most pressing human rights issues, especially in Plavismani-Bershueti and Nikozi-Mereti.**

Those respondents that identified human rights protection as a measure to build trust and confidence across the ABL were asked to identify the precise initiatives which they thought would be most effective. Additional social assistance for people living in the conflict-affected area was thought to be the most effective measure, with 64% of respondents selecting this option (figure 14).

Respondents from Plavismani-Bershueti, followed by those from Nikozi-Mereti, were most focused on increased social assistance for communities living in conflict-affected areas – 71% and 62% respectively, compared to 56% in Atotsi-Dirbi and no respondents in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana. In addition, respondents from these groups were most in favour of greater protection from attacks and kidnapping – 58% and 46% respectively, compared with 31% in Atotsi-Dirbi and no respondents from Tsitelubani-Lamiskana.

It is also important to note that 32% of respondents from Nikozi-Mereti prioritised psychological assistance, underlining the impact of the August 2008 war and ongoing conflict on people living there.

**Figure 14: Most effective measures for protecting human rights**

Which measures would be the most effective to ensure protection of human rights?

	Overall	Of most importance for...
Social assistance/privileges to people living in the conflict area	64%	Plavismani-Bershueti – 71%
Better protection of people living in the conflict area from attacks/kidnappings	47%	Plavismani-Bershueti – 58%
Improved housing conditions	34%	Atotsi-Dirbi – 73%
Protecting property rights in the conflict area	29%	Nikozi-Mereti – 45%
Improved medical services	24%	Atotsi-Dirbi – 31%
Facilitating freedom of movement of persons across the ABL	22%	Tsitelubani-Lamiskana – 100%
Compensation for damaged/destroyed property in the conflict area	16%	Atotsi-Dirbi – 36%
Psychological assistance to people living in the conflict area	15%	Nikozi-Mereti – 32%
Improved quality of potable and irrigation water	15%	Plavismani-Bershueti – 18%
Protecting people from being taken away their livestock	14%	Atotsi-Dirbi – 17%
Protecting freedom of speech and expression	12%	Plavismani-Bershueti – 25%
Improved access to education	4%	Nikozi-Mereti – 10%

**Property and housing issues are most pressing in Atotsi-Dirbi, while freedom of movement is the most pressing human rights need in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana.**

People in Atotsi-Dirbi are especially interested in issues related to their property – 73% of respondents from this area prioritised improved housing conditions, while 36% prioritised compensation for damaged property. Given that 56% of respondents from this group also prioritised social services and 31% prioritised medical services, this underlines the isolation of communities living in this area and the fact that they struggle to access services and support that might be more readily available in the other areas.

Tsitelubani-Lamiskana stands out from the other groups, as 100% of respondents from this group prioritised facilitating freedom of movement across the ABL, and none of the other potential human rights issues were prioritised by respondents. This reflects the lack of security incidents in this area and underlines the desire of people from this group to maintain close relations with their friends and relatives living beyond the boundary line: “When someone makes a border inside your country, what rights can you talk about? If you cannot go to a church, which was left on the other side, what rights can be present there? The only way is if the Russians leave and our rights are restored.”<sup>29</sup> It also corresponds to the importance of access to pastures and firewood for this group at both the personal and community levels. Facilitating movement across the ABL was also prioritised by more than a quarter of respondents from Nikozi-Mereti (35%) and Plavismani-Bershueti (30%) – reflecting the desire to trade across the ABL. However, no respondents from Atotsi-Dirbi considered this an important issue reflecting the fact that basic security needs to be provided before people can start to think about movement across the ABL.

### What measures will be most effective?

Enabling trade is considered the most effective measure for building trust and confidence.

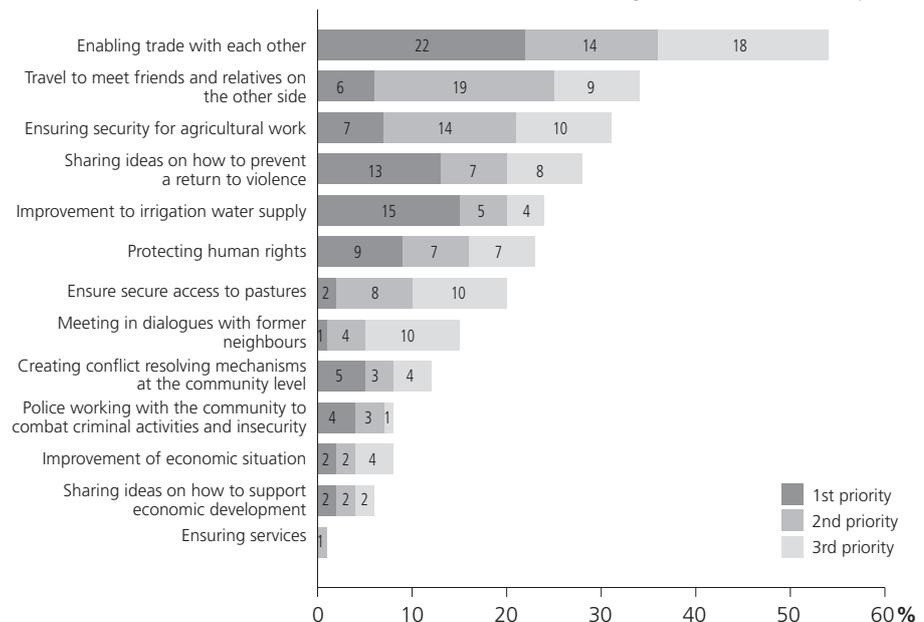
Although people were very supportive of almost all types of engagement, confidence

<sup>29</sup> Focus group participant, female, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana.

in their efficacy was less widespread. Enabling trade across the divide was considered the most effective measure, with 54% of respondents naming it as one of the three most likely to build trust and confidence (figure 15). The primacy of this mechanism for promoting relationships across the divide was confirmed in the Nikozi-Mereti focus group: “People can only be involved in conflict resolution through trade. The abolishment of the Ergneti market caused these problems [that we live with].”<sup>30</sup> Importantly, while the protection of human rights was the most supported measure for promoting engagement, it was considered only the fifth most effective measure (selected by 23%).

**Figure 15: Perceived effectiveness of engagement measures**

What measures would build trust and confidence with Ossetians living in South Ossetia at this point?



Other measures thought to be effective were: a) travelling to visit friends and relatives across the ABL (selected by 34%); b) ensuring security for agricultural works (30%); and c) sharing ideas on how to prevent war and violence (28%). All the other measures were identified by less than a fifth of respondents. Almost all respondents from Tsitelubani-Lamiskana region, where the population has a relatively reinforcing the point that people would prefer to themselves decide how and when to engage across the divide. It should be noted that the focus group discussions demonstrated that many feel local-measures to restore confidence will not be successful until they are supported by the Georgian Government: “Even if we think of something to do, they [the Georgian Government] should let us do it. What should I do? If I go there [across the ABL] and come back, I will be arrested. The community will not be able to do anything if the law does not permit it.”<sup>31</sup>

#### Measures restricting trade across the ABL

Respondents were asked to identify what they believe to be the factors restricting trade with communities living across the ABL in South Ossetia. Almost half of respondents (48%) think that trade across the ABL is prohibited by Georgian law, while over a quarter (26%) believes that trade is legal but that Russian and South Ossetian forces prevent it. A minority of respondents (5%) believe that trade is legal but that police restrict crossings or that the risks associated with such trade act as a restricting factor. Less than 3% believe that South Ossetians do not want to trade and no respondents thought that such trade would be unprofitable. Almost all respondents from Tsitelubani-Lamiskana region, where the population has a relatively high level of family and friendly contacts with communities across the ABL, believe that trade is prohibited. By contrast, people in the two regions which have traditionally been the centre of trade with South Ossetia, Nikozi-Mereti and Plavismani-Bershueti, attribute more importance to the actions of Russians and South Ossetians in blocking trade.

<sup>30</sup> Focus group participant, male, 50, married, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti.

<sup>31</sup> Focus group participant, male, Plavismani-Bershueti.

## Summary and conclusions

Contacts with Ossetians continue to be at very low levels, apart from in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana where more people maintain relationships with those across the divide. However, it is becoming more difficult to maintain relationships in Plavismani-Bershueti. Contacts are low, partly because people are worried that those that maintain contacts across the divide will be viewed with suspicion by the Georgian Government. There is increased support for all measures to encourage engagement across the divide, reflecting increased stability and the passage of time. People in Nikozi-Mereti are, however, less supportive due to the psychological impact of the war and the feeling that they live 'on the front line'. Human rights protection is the most supported measure. This means: a) increasing social assistance and protection from attacks/kidnapping in Plavismani-Bershueti and Nikozi-Mereti; b) addressing property and housing needs in Atotsi-Dirbi; and c) addressing freedom of movement in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana. As in the previous study, enabling trade is considered the most effective measure; and reflects the desire for practical measures that benefit the community and for people to decide on when and how to engage.

As such, all actors should look to de-stigmatise contacts across the divide, so that those people who wish to maintain relationships do not feel that this will lead to suspicions regarding their motives. In addition, a review should be conducted of human rights mechanisms and how they function along the ABL, so that they are more relevant to the needs expressed in the four research groups. In particular, psychological assistance should be provided to people living in Nikozi-Mereti. Finally, all actors should explore measures to encourage trade across the ABL, as well as other engagement measures focused on practical issues of benefit to communities on both sides. Measures should not be driven by the Georgian Government or the international community, but should be allowed to develop organically on the basis of local initiatives.

# 6

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## Conclusion

**THE RESULTS OF THE SURVEY** demonstrate that the time is right for the parties to the conflicts to develop processes for delivering sustainable security to those most in need of it. Such processes would provide information on security issues and clearer ‘rules of the game’ for communities living along the ABL, on issues from maintaining water sources to trading across the ABL. These processes would also provide opportunities for communities to raise issues of concern to them, not least for discussion in the IPRM. It is important that when designing such processes local and international actors properly take account of differences between communities situated along the ABL. This section outlines the main differences and needs of the four research groups.

It is important to note that the trends identified in each of the groups are indicative only, and that there will be a good deal of discrepancy between the situations in communities within the same group. As such, it is essential that local and international actors properly consult with local communities before undertaking initiatives focused on ensuring security and responding to conflict. A more community-based approach will not only help to transform security-related behaviours within communities, and between communities and security providers, but could also increase the potential for both groups to reduce tensions and avoid a return to violence – an essential condition for ensuring the future well-being and sustainability of communities along the ABL.

### **Atotsi-Dirbi**

Atotsi-Dirbi is the most isolated of the four groups and suffers from the highest rate of depopulation. This area is also the most volatile, with people from this group suffering most from security incidents and being most concerned by them – more than half of respondents from Atotsi-Dirbi report shooting incidents at least once a month, while a quarter of respondents have reported a detention incident since July 2010. Indeed people in this area feel the least secure and are also most worried about the potential for violent conflict over the ABL and its status. As such, people from this group were more likely to identify shooting incidents and potential trigger events. People in this group are also, along with Nikozi-Mereti, the least likely to maintain ties across the ABL. Property and housing issues are considered the most pressing human rights issue in this group.

### **Nikozi-Mereti**

People in Nikozi-Mereti feel like they are on the ‘front line’ of the conflict and are the most psychologically affected by the war. As a result, this group is the second most affected by depopulation. People in this group experience the second highest rate of security incidents and concern over them, after Atotsi-Dirbi. Nevertheless, in contrast with other communities, feelings of security have stabilised in Nikozi-Mereti. While

people feel more physically secure, they believe that the situation in their community has worsened, due to fewer opportunities to earn money. People in this group are most likely to think that a return to violence is likely in 2011, and are least supportive of engagement measures across the divide. Low levels of social assistance and inadequate protection from attacks/kidnapping are considered the most pressing human rights issues in this area.

### **Plavismani-Bershueti**

Plavismani-Bershueti, which is slightly more isolated and has received less assistance than Nikozi-Mereti, is the third most insecure area. People in this group are most likely to think that the situation in their community has gotten worse, and attribute this to fewer opportunities to earn money. Indeed, this is the only group which still identified lack of access to markets in South Ossetia as an urgent community problem. People in this group were also more likely to identify movement of the ABL as a potential trigger of violence, reflecting their concern over the impact of increased conflict over the ABL on their ability to trade. After Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, this area has the second highest rate of contact across the divide, but people are finding it more difficult to maintain relationships. Similar to Nikozi-Mereti, low levels of social assistance and inadequate protection from attacks and kidnappings are considered the most pressing human rights issues in this area.

### **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana**

The situation in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana differs substantially from that in the other groups. Communities in this region are least worried about proximity to the conflict and are least affected by depopulation. In addition, people in this region rarely experience physical security incidents and do not prioritise them as either urgent community problems or personal threats. Instead, people in this region are worried about access to water, pastures and firewood. Indeed, people in this area overwhelmingly feel safe. This is because the area did not previously border territories under the control of Tskhinval/i and only became affected by the conflict when South Ossetian and Russian security forces took control of the Akhagori region (which borders this village group) during the August 2008 war. In addition, communities in this area tend to be ethnically mixed and to maintain contacts with relatives and friends across the divide. Indeed, freedom of movement is considered the most pressing human rights concern in this region.

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## Annex 1: Methodology

This report is based on data collected in a tracker survey undertaken in December 2010 and January 2011. Each tracker survey comprises a household survey and a series of focus groups discussions. The next tracker survey is scheduled for the end of 2011.

Development of the methodology started in April 2010 with a set of baseline focus group discussions, designed to provide greater insight into how communities understand ‘community’, ‘security’ and ‘conflict’, and to explore ways of encouraging community participation in identifying community security priorities and developing appropriate responses, as well as greater engagement between communities and security providers.<sup>32</sup>

The household survey was conducted in December 2010. We surveyed 789 individuals from four target groups of villages (Atotsi-Dirbi – 9 villages, 3,040 households; Nikozi-Mereti – 13 villages, 3,435 households; Plavismani-Bershueti – 17 villages, 6,164 households; and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana – 16 villages, 2,272 households). Only communities living directly along the ABL that were deemed accessible to the research team were selected, as it was found that the situation had returned to normal for those communities situated even a few kilometres away from the divide.<sup>33</sup>

The sample included two levels of clustering. Each village comprised a first-level cluster, and each household within each village comprised a second-level cluster. Villages within each target group were selected with probability proportional to size. Households within each village were selected using systematic sampling beginning in the centre of the village and using a step size of four. Respondents within each household were selected using the most recent birthday method. In total, 39.4% of respondents were male and 60.6% were female (40.8% and 59.2% weighted). All were over 18 years old.

After an initial analysis of the survey results, an accompanying set of focus group discussions was conducted in August 2010 in order to provide further insight into some key issues: (1) sources of information and the role of the media; (2) effectiveness of service providers; (3) ways of increasing community security; and (4) level and types of contact across the ABL.

Four representative villages were selected, one from each of the target areas. 20 persons were recruited from each village. From each 20-person list, 10 were selected and 10 were placed on a reserve list. The participants were selected to ensure a ratio of 5 female and 5 male participants, and aged between 18–35 and 36 and over in each focus group.

In order to guarantee an acceptable level of anonymity for the participants, CRRC and Saferworld decided not to disclose the names of the recruiting villages. Due to the very small community sizes, the personal data included in this report might otherwise suffice to identify participants. During focus group sessions, the moderator asked questions according to a guide which included four main questions and a number of follow-up questions and prompts to stimulate debate and discussion. Further information on the methodology and full datasets can be found on the CRRC website.

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<sup>32</sup> See Tatum J, Viefhues M and Wood D, *Community, Security & Participation in Shida Kartli after the August War* (Saferworld, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

**Saferworld works to prevent and reduce violent conflict and promote co-operative approaches to security. We work with governments, international organisations and civil society to encourage and support effective policies and practices through advocacy, research and policy development and through supporting the actions of others.**

**COVER PHOTO:** Internally displaced persons in Karaleti, 2011  
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ISBN 978-1-904833-68-0