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## Security, Community & Participation in Shida Kartli after the August War

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## Preparation

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## Abstract

The August 2008 war over South Ossetia directly affected people and communities living along the administrative boundary line (ABL). To gain a better understanding of the problems facing these communities, the CRRC in cooperation with Saferworld carried out focus groups with residents of five villages located on the Georgian-controlled side of the ABL. This report summarises the main findings of the focus groups, and sheds light upon local views on safety and security, the conflict and how greater civic participation in security-related issues can be achieved.

The CRRC and Saferworld hope that revealing the voices of those most affected by the conflict over South Ossetia will help to centre public discourse on the most appropriate means for meeting their needs, and for ensuring future peace and stability.

# Executive Summary

## 1. Community Safety and Security

The focus groups conducted by the CRRC and Saferworld illuminated the changing ways that communities living along the ABL think about their 'safety' and 'security' after the August 2008 conflict, and their hopes and aspirations for the future. The research also demonstrated, however, that in many ways the situation in these communities and the causes of collective insecurity remain constant:

- Physical insecurity has increased following the August 2008 conflict and is more keenly felt in those communities positioned directly along the ABL, where people and communities continue to live with the consequences of conflict, including kidnappings and shootings.
- All communities are fearful over a return to violence as a result of the present conflict context and how it is being managed.
- Overall, the economic impacts of the conflicts cause greater concern than physical insecurity, especially in villages further away from the ABL, and are causing people to consider abandoning their villages.
- Communities living along the ABL have been deeply affected by reduced movement across the ABL following August 2008, as:
  - communities are very reliant on cross-boundary interaction, to access land, to trade, or because of shared resources such as water;
  - reduced ability to cross the ABL has negatively impacted on their personal relationships with friends and loved ones, as well as churches and graves, on the other side;
  - it is believed that reduced movement and cultural links increases tension and makes a return to violence more likely.
- At the same time, it is unclear 'who' and 'how' movement is restricted, and it may be the case that there are different causes along different areas of the ABL apart from Russian and South Ossetian military. Indeed, there is evidence that the Georgian authorities (and the police/special forces in particular) have on occasions stopped movement.
- The psychological impact of the August 2008 conflict still reverberates through the communities along the ABL. People feel that they have had to bear the burden of the conflict and live in an atmosphere of constant fear of new hostilities. This pressure is inhibiting communities' ability to think constructively about, and invest in, their futures and is also contributing to de-population of communities along the ABL.
- At the same time, the remote location of these communities means that some causes of economic and social predate August 2008 and are really failures to deliver basic services such as water, gas and medical services. Indeed, these communities feel isolated and abandoned, and that their needs are not properly taken into account by the authorities.

## **2. Understandings of Conflict**

The focus group discussions also provide the opportunity for community members to express their opinions on the nature of the August 2008 conflict and to analyse the best ways of reducing tension and preventing future conflict:

- While primary responsibility for the conflict is attributed to Russia, communities along the ABL think that the conflict is related to bigger international politics and some think that Georgian politicians also played a role.
- Indeed, the focus groups were critical of actions by Georgian politicians, feeling that they are not always in the interest of, or responsive to, local needs.
- All the communities are also very damning of media coverage of conflict issues, which is thought to be inaccurate, unbalanced and not to focus on local needs. It was also thought that the media exerts a negative influence, fuelling fears and hatred and increasing local tensions.
- Communities feel that they are better placed than national and international organisations to reduce tensions and restore relations with communities on the South-Ossetian side of the ABL, but they need to be given the space and opportunity to do so. Indeed, the discussions provided some specific examples of how local communities have directly engaged with Ossetian communities on sensitive topics and consequently reduced tensions.
- As such, communities feel they should be listened to by government and non-government agencies when analysing local needs and what should be done. This means that attempts to increase engagement across the ABL should be community-led rather than politically driven.
- While a reduction in Russian military along the ABL was thought to be essential for reducing tensions, communities were also interested in measures to increase freedom of movement. Although they were unclear on 'who' and 'how' movement is restricted, they thought that the Government plays an essential role enabling movement.
- Communities think that increased overall economic stability is essential for reducing tensions and preventing a return to violence.

## **3. Improving Community Engagement and Participation**

Finally, the focus group participants were asked their thoughts on the best ways of increasing civil involvement in responses to security issues, and of community engagement with those agencies and individuals who could play a role in addressing their safety and security concerns. The recommendations collected below should provide the starting point for any initiatives designed to better understand and respond to local security needs:

- Nearly all focus group participants thought that structured meetings between government authorities / NGOs and community representatives, to identify local priorities and appropriate responses, is the best way of increasing communities' involvement in addressing their own needs.
- In addition, it was thought that community involvement should go beyond formal meetings to having a role in implementing solutions. Indeed it was

thought that the authorities, NGOs and individuals should work together to tackle local priorities.

- Although there are diverging opinions over the precise role of communities (vis-à-vis the authorities and other providers), at the very least, communities felt that they should have some say in budgeting and implementation.
- At the same time, for community involvement to be successful, communities want to see that their concerns, ideas and initiatives are responded to; and that there are tangible outcomes from any process.
- While communities struggled to identify their 'security providers', there was a common perception that providers had to better understand the communities, be better at communicating with them, and be more transparent and accountable in their responses.
- The biggest challenge to civic-participation in safety and security issues identified was the fear that the authorities might react negatively and even punish those participating. Indeed, low level of trust in the authorities (and in NGOs) was a common theme throughout the discussions. As such, it would be important for security providers to think about how they can increase trust from communities and for them to demonstrate commitment to community processes.

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## Introduction

The events of August 2008 still resonate strongly for the people who live near the administrative boundary line (ABL) with South Ossetia. To understand the situation on the ground and to shift the focus of future research onto the needs of those citizens who are most affected by the conflict, CRRC-Georgia in cooperation with Saferworld carried out five focus groups with residents from villages near the ABL, each representing areas that were affected by the August war in a particular way.

The primary purpose of the focus groups, carried out in April 2010, was to get local perspectives on the best ways of better understanding and responding to the safety needs of conflict-affected communities, in advance of a series of activities funded by the EU through the joint Saferworld/Conciliation Resources project *Establishing Conditions for Effective Conflict Prevention and Transformation following the August 2008 Crisis*. In particular, the focus groups were designed to provide greater insight into:

- the way in which communities understand ‘security’ and ‘safety’;
- the way in which communities understand ‘conflict’; and
- the most appropriate ways of encouraging community participation and engagement with ‘security providers’, i.e. all bodies that play a role in meeting safety and security needs, including but not limited to the police, justice services, local authorities, health services and NGOs.

All groups were asked the same questions, with one exception. In the second part of the focus groups, different approaches to the issue of conflict prevention were tested through village-specific questions.

The report begins with a cross-village comparative summary, highlighting some of the major similarities and differences in people’s views. Second, a summary of the opinions in each focus group follows. Third, a more detailed analysis is undertaken for each focus group, based on direct quotes, with brief summarising paragraphs to contextualise the themes to which they relate. Finally, the methodology, the discussion guides and a detailed map of the region are provided.

This qualitative research will be complemented by a regional survey scheduled for June 2010. Together, they provide a fuller understanding of how citizens in the villages on the Georgian-controlled side of the ABL view their situation two years after the August war. The CRRC and Saferworld hope that revealing the voices of those most affected by the conflict over South Ossetia will help to centre public discourse on the most appropriate means for meeting their needs, and for ensuring future peace and stability.



## Geographic Scope

The focus group participants were recruited from five villages, representing four geographic areas that have been affected by the August 2008 war in different ways. This approach allowed us to understand how communities' perceptions of safety and security are influenced by their different contexts.

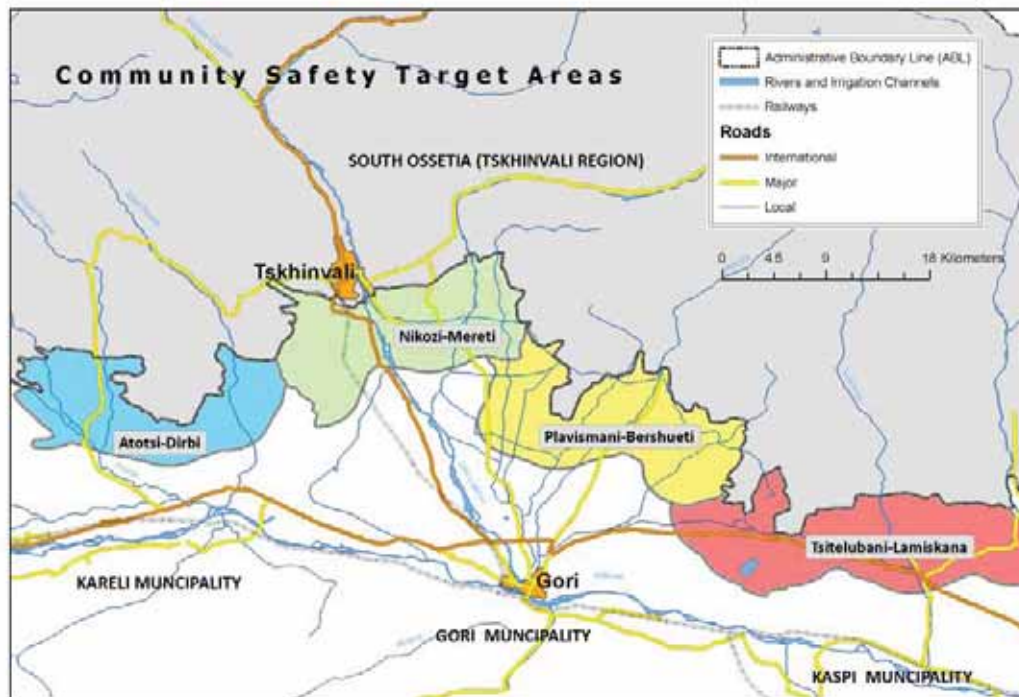


Figure 1: Recruitment Areas

The participants were recruited from one selected village in every of the first three areas, and from two villages in the case of the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana area.

The villages selected in the Atotsi-Dirbi, Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> areas lie in close proximity to the ABL, while the villages from the Nikozi-Mereti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> areas are several kilometres removed.

The four areas can be characterised as follows:

- In the **Atotsi-Dirbi area** (blue), villages were not as affected by the destruction of 2008, but suffer from their remote location and economic isolation. They retain today significant connections with the Ossetian side.
- Villages of the **Nikozi-Mereti area** (green) were at the centre of the 2008 hostilities and sustained greater physical damage than others. Villages in this area have subsequently received large amounts of international and governmental aid. The level of ongoing security incidents remains high.
- The **Plavismani-Bershueti area** (yellow) also suffers from security incidents, but has been only a secondary target for relief activities in the past and is more difficult to access. There appear to be varying levels of contact with Ossetians across the conflict divide.



- The villages of the **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana area** (red) were previously removed from the conflict. They only became affected with the occupation of the Akhagori region. From this area, which has mixed ethnic Georgian and ethnic Ossetian populations, two focus groups were recruited: one with ethnic Georgians (Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>), and one with ethnic Ossetian participants (Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>).

To guarantee the anonymity of the participants within their often small communities, the CRRC and Saferworld decided against disclosing the names of particular villages.

## Comparative Analysis

This section summarises the main findings that emerged from the focus group discussions on community safety and security, understandings of conflict and methods for improving community engagement and participation. Each finding is summarised and followed by a brief analysis of the similarities and differences in perceptions between the groups.

### *1. High levels of physical insecurity and fears over future violence*

Insecurity has increased for all communities since August 2008. The participants from all groups expressed significant feelings of physical insecurity and fears over a return to violence as a result of the present conflict context and how it is being managed. All groups agreed that the August war had had a negative impact on their security and many considered their community to be in a conflict zone.

While issues of physical security and fears of renewed conflict were discussed at length and were important to all groups, this was most notable in the villages from the Atotsi-Dirbi, Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> areas – all of which are close to the ABL. Participants from the other two villages, which are more removed, expressed a more general sense of fear and the possibility of new outbreaks of violence. This indicates that the nature of insecurity facing communities living on the ABL is more intense than that facing communities living only a few kilometres further away:

- The fear of new hostilities and concerns of physical safety were mentioned as the top concerns in the Plavismani-Bershueti, Atotsi-Dirbi and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> focus groups. The Atotsi-Dirbi and Plavismani-Bershueti focus groups said they were particularly insecure because of their proximity to the ABL.
- The close proximity of Russian troops in particular was cited as a source of insecurity, both by the Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> focus groups.
- The participants from Atotsi-Dirbi and Plavismani-Bershueti said that they feared the kidnapping of persons and cattle. The Plavismani-Bershueti group said that incidents of aggression, violence and theft are common.
- At present, the Nikozi-Mereti focus group felt relatively secure compared with the other villages, stating that they have effective police and emergency services. Participants from this group are well aware that they are more secure than communities on the ABL, but they acknowledged that their feeling of security is at best temporary.
- The Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> participants also said they do not fear aggression from either the Ossetians or the Russians. At the same time, some participants were fearful that a fresh outbreak of hostilities is possible.

## *2. Economic impact of the conflict*

While physical safety is an essential issue for the participants of all villages studied, overall the economic impact of the conflict provides the greatest source of community insecurity. In all groups, the participants agreed that making a living had become increasingly difficult after August 2008 and that many have or are considering leaving their communities in search of work. At the same time, it should be noted that greater emphasis was given to the economic impacts of conflict, rather than physical insecurity, in those villages more removed from the ABL:

- Less opportunity to find work was a particular topic of concern for all the focus groups, except in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>
- Increased economic concerns were the biggest causes of economic insecurity in the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> and Nikozi-Mereti focus groups, the participants for which were drawn from villages more removed from the ABL.
- The lack of potable and irrigation water was much discussed in each group, including in the Nikozi-Mereti group, which is more removed from the ABL and less dependent on cross-boundary resources.
- The people from Atotsi-Dirbi and Plavismana-Bershueti, villages inhabited by ethnic Georgians, suspected that the Ossetians were responsible for their irrigation problems, and feared that they might even poison the village's potable water.
- The participants from Nikozi-Mereti said that losing access to the Russian market further contributes to their difficult economic situation. They produce fruits, for example, but cannot sell them. In Nikozi-Mereti people also complained about plummeting real estate prices following the conflict.

## *3. Impact of the conflict on movement across the ABL*

Participants from all the villages focused on how reduced movement across the ABL had severely impacted on their communities' security, as (a) communities are very reliant on cross-boundary interaction, to access land, to trade, or because of shared resources such as water, (b) reduced ability to cross the ABL has negatively impacted on their personal relationships with friends and loved ones on the other side, and (c) because reduced movement and cultural links increases tension and makes a return to violence more likely.

However, the focus group participants were not clear on 'who' and 'how' movement across the boundary line is being restricted, and it may be the case that there are different causes, apart from the Russian and South Ossetia military, along different areas of the ABL. Indeed, there is evidence that the Georgian authorities (and the police/special forces in particular) have on occasion restricted movement:

- Participants from both the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> and Nikozi-Mereti focus groups thought that movement across the ABL is essential for their communities' livelihoods. Participants from Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> said they needed unrestricted access to Tsinagara, on the Ossetian-controlled side of the ABL, for pastureland. The participants from Nikozi-

Mereti said that losing access to the Russian market (through South Ossetia) meant that they could not sell the fruit and other produce being produced.

- The groups from Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>, villages with both ethnic Georgian and Ossetian inhabitants, and Plavismani-Bershueti, where only ethnic Georgians live, said that even today many mixed friendships continue, but that these friendships are being undermined by restrictions of movement. They said that the restrictions on moving freely and visiting each other could, in the long-term, gradually weaken ties between Ossetians and Georgians
- This was particularly important for the Plavismani-Bershueti group, whose access to churches and graveyards on the other sides has been restricted.
- Participants from these groups were hesitant to identify who specifically is actually restricting movement (and responsibility seemed to differ between the groups). That said, the Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> groups were able to identify a number of occasions when the Georgian authorities (and the police/special forces in particular) had prevented movement across the ABL.
- The participants from Nikozi-Mereti and Plavismani-Bershueti said that increased movement across the ABL would be needed to facilitate any reconciliation efforts and hence reduce tensions. Again, participants from Plavismani-Bershueti were able to identify a number of occasions when the Georgian authorities has undermined cultural exchanges.

#### *4. Psychological impact of the August 2008 conflict: local communities are living with the consequences*

According to the participants from all focus groups, ordinary people have had to bear the consequences of the conflict. Frequently the participants said that they lived in an atmosphere of constant fear of new hostilities. It is apparent that this fear is having a substantial psychological impact on communities, and is inhibiting their ability to think constructively about the future and is contributing to depopulation of communities along the ABL:

- The participants from Plavismani-Bershueti, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> said that the conflict's impact had been first and foremost psychological, followed by economic.
- Participants from Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti said the political instability caused by the conflict made it difficult to concentrate on economic, social or cultural issues, so that people don't want to work and have stopped investing in the future.
- The Plavismani-Bershueti group said that people are suffering from a high degree of stress and that young people no longer go out or look for entertainment. They said that the village is depopulating as a result of this impact.
- The conflict had reduced the trust of the Nikozi-Mereti focus group (which is further from the ABL) in assistance from outside, as they felt that NGO aid and assistance had been distributed unfairly and has increased community tensions. It should be noted that communities living

closer to the ABL generally had a more favourable assessment of the role of external assistance.

#### *5. Isolated and abandoned: the need for better services*

While the conflict has had a significant impact on local communities' security, the focus groups provided evidence that insecurity predates August 2008 and is to a large part due to their remote location and poor infrastructure. This remoteness impacts on basic needs, such as to access markets, access to gas, water and to medical care. Indeed, these communities feel isolated and abandoned, and that their needs are not properly taken into account by the authorities:

- Participants in Atotsi-Dirbi, Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> felt either abandoned by the authorities or that their needs are not being given sufficient attention.
- The Atotsi-Dirbi, Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana groups said that they needed improvements to basic services, including water, natural gas and road infrastructure.
- All groups highlighted the lack of drinking and irrigation water as a key concern in their community and something that could make them leave.
- The participants from Atotsi-Dirbi and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> said that their security was undermined by lack of access to medical care
- Medical care was most evidently a cause of concern in Atotsi-Dirbi, which has poor road connections. Participants from this group insisted that they lack affordable insurance policies and reported problems with the availability of their local doctors.

#### *6. Causes of tension and contributing factors to the conflict: the role of Russia, politicians & the media*

Overall primary responsibility for the conflict is attributed to Russia. However, some participants in all of the focus groups thought that the conflict over South Ossetia reflected bigger international politics and some thought that Georgian politicians also played a role. Overall, the focus group participants had a very negative attitude towards politicians, who they felt do not always act in the best interest of communities on the ground.

The media came in for especially strong criticism by many participants in all focus groups. Citing the staged war on Imedi TV in April 2010, as well as the inaccurate coverage of the August 2008 war, many said that Georgian journalists are unprofessional and imprecise, and do not try to be balanced when covering conflict issues. It was also felt that the media does not try to understand local concerns, rather focusing on political issues. As a result, the media were said to be fuelling fears and hatred rather than calming tensions:

- All the groups, apart from Atotsi-Dirbi and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>, focused on Russia as the principal cause of the conflict. In Nikozi-Mereti and Plavismani-Bershueti, participants blamed the Russians for instigating the tension and violence and. In Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>, many people blamed the Russians as the cause of the conflict, saying that they wanted to reclaim territory and influence over Georgia.

- That said, in Nikozi-Mereti and Plavismani-Bershueti, people also blamed international politics, bad political relations, economic difficulties and lack of education as factors that enable conflict.
- Two of the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> participants blamed the Georgian government for allowing the violence to occur, while two said that the Russians might have also been involved.
- In the Atotsi-Dirbi group, people were quick to point to all politicians' pride and desire for power as factors at the root of the conflict.
- All focus groups were extremely critical of media coverage of conflict issues. All participants from the Nikozi-Mereti and Plavismani-Bershueti groups shared the opinion that the media provides inaccurate information and neglects issues of concern in conflict-affected communities, such as the water supply problem.
- All of the participants from the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> group were critical of the media for its inaccuracy, especially when reporting on conflict issues. The 'fake war' broadcast on Imedi, which caused additional panic, was given as an example of insensitive and inflammatory reporting.

### *7. Role of different communities, governments and organisations in conflict prevention*

The participants from Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> were asked to comment on 'who' might be able to prevent violence and resolve the conflict. They felt that communities themselves are better placed than national and international organisations to reduce tensions and restore relations with communities in South Ossetia, as long as they are given the space and opportunity to do so.

As such, communities feel they should be listened to by government and non-government agencies when analysing local needs and what needs to be done. This means that attempts to increase engagement across the ABL should be community-led rather than politically driven:

- Both groups concluded that the communities themselves were best able to restore long-standing ties with Ossetians, and that ordinary people might help in the process, mainly by reinforcing their good relations with communities on the other side. The participants said that Ossetians and Georgians had a peaceful and friendly history and close social ties that could be capitalised on.
- In the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> and the Atotsi-Dirbi groups, there was much doubt over the capacity of national and international organisations to help. The participants from Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> specifically said that NGOs had lied to them and made promises that were not kept. They also said that community members should act as advisors, telling NGOs and the Government exactly what they need and how they need it to be done.
- The Nikozi-Mereti group went even further and mentioned how badly planned and distributed help from NGOs had increased tensions in local communities.



## *8. Steps for increasing security and reducing tensions*

The Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti groups were asked which steps might be most useful in increasing security and reducing tensions. While a reduction in Russian military along the ABL was thought to be essential for reducing tensions, communities were also interested in measures that would increase movement across the ABL:

- Both groups emphasised that a Russian withdrawal would be paramount to reducing tensions, and the participants from Atotsi-Dirbi talked about how the presence of Russian troops is intimidating many of the international organisations willing to help their community.
- The participants from Nikozi-Mereti said that the lifting of the harsh visa-like requirements to cross the ABL would be needed to facilitate any reconciliation efforts and hence reduce tensions, though they did not specify which authorities were enforcing the visa requirements.
- The Nikozi-Mereti group emphasised that Georgia had to strike a better balance in its approach to international politics, and that this means remaining independent both from the US and Russia.
- Some Atotsi-Dirbi participants wished for more unity and mutual understanding among Georgians, feeling that the present political environment is divisive. It was thought that a more collaborative approach to politics would help to create a more stable economic and social environment, in which it would be easier to reduce tensions.

## *9. Strengthening communities' capacity to resist violence*

Participants from the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> focus group were asked what could strengthen their community's capacity to resist violence or provocations to violence. The participants were able to give examples of local initiatives that reduced tension and resolved issues across the divide. They also focused on the need for economic stability and for freedom of movement across the ABL:

- This group was able to give a number of examples of how they had reduced tensions by engaging directly with Ossetian communities of sensitive issues, such as access to pastureland.
- The participants said that economic insecurity should be reduced to prevent further violence and provocations to violence, since in their view it is often poor people who resort to desperate measures in order to survive.
- They also said that efforts to achieve long-term stability had to be led by the Government, as there are some issues that communities cannot address. It was thought that the Government should pay particular attention to ways of enabling movement across the ABL. In Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> movement across the ABL is considered very important so that the community can access pastureland in Tsinagara.
- People emphasised that changes to their local economic situation will help, but can only go so far. In order to be able to resist violence in a more lasting fashion, they argued, the economic situation of the whole country has to be improved.



## *10. Increasing community involvement in addressing local safety & security concerns*

For nearly all focus group participants, structured meetings between government authorities / NGOs and village representatives to identify local needs and appropriate responses were considered the best way of increasing communities' involvement in addressing their own needs.

In addition, it was thought that community involvement should go beyond formal meetings to having a role in tackling local problems. Indeed it was thought that the authorities, NGOs and individuals should work together to tackle the most pressing issues. That said, different groups had different opinions on who should take primary responsibility for addressing local safety and security concerns, and the manner of community involvement. Overall, there was an agreement between the focus groups that for engagement to be successful, communities need to see that their priorities, ideas and initiatives are responded to:

- The Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti groups thought it is important to elect community representatives who would liaise with government and non-government actors to resolve local problems. In Atotsi-Dirbi, it was also thought that organisations should appoint representatives tasked with engaging with communities, so as to facilitate better cooperation.
- The Atotsi-Dirbi group called for their community leaders to take the initiative on starting dialogue. By contrast, the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> group participants said that the authorities should initiate such talks.
- In the Nikozi-Mereti, Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> groups, there was a particular emphasis on the need for discernable responses to the issues raised in public meetings. Public apathy, it was argued, could be overcome if the population saw that their concerns would actually be taken into consideration.
- While the participants from Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> took a more passive stance, and said that they would expect the authorities to solve the village's problems, they too demanded a say in the budgeting and implementation process.

## *11. Increasing community engagement with security providers*

As the questions on security providers were phrased differently in each focus group, the people had different ideas for the best format, incentives and subject for engagement with security providers. That said there was a common perception that providers had to better understand the communities, be better at communicating with them, and be more transparent and accountable in their responses:

- In Plavismani-Bershueti, people said that the police were their security providers, though one said that a 'good leader' would be the best provider. They said that while their relationships with the police were improving in the war's aftermath, it was still necessary for the police to familiarise themselves with the community on a deeper level.
- In the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> group, three people said NGOs would be best able to act as security providers. Without being specific, they said

that the NGOs with whom they had contact had fulfilled promises and provided assistance after the war.

- The participants from Nikozi-Mereti (which of the five villages is located the farthest from the ABL) said that the form of engagement should depend on the context in each community. They also said that the benefit from any engagement should be distributed fairly and evenly in the target communities (as noted above, participants from this group felt that past NGO assistance had not been distributed fairly).
- While Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> participants did not answer the 'security provider' question, the discussion made it clear that they are not provided with enough information about the security responses that are in place.
- People in Atotsi-Dirbi also did not name any security providers. They said they felt hopeless and unable to defend themselves. However, as noted above were more willing to proactively reach out to 'providers'.

## *12. Challenges for greater engagement on safety & security issues*

With the exception of Atotsi-Dirbi, all group believed that the authorities might react negatively to civic-engagement initiatives on safety and security issues. Indeed, low levels of trust in the authorities (and, indeed, in NGOs and the international community) was a common theme. As such, it would be important for security providers to think about how they can increase trust from communities and for them to demonstrate commitment to community processes. The groups also mentioned a range of other obstacles, negative consequences and risks:

- In the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>, Nikozi-Mereti, Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> groups, people said that they feared pressure from the authorities if the public becomes more involved on safety and security issues.
- In Nikozi-Mereti, for example, it was said that asking for access to the Russian market could be interpreted as oppositional activism. Other participants from Nikozi-Mereti, however, expected the authorities to welcome public initiatives, as they would reduce the number of problems they had to solve at the higher level.
- The participants from Plavismani-Bershueti listed a lack of general information on the safety/security situation; the poor economic condition and a low level of trust in the authorities as some additional challenges.
- The Atotsi-Dirbi group was sceptical about the utility of engagement on safety and security issues. Its participants said that they had no means of influencing their security situation, and did not believe big improvements could be made in other sectors either.

## Regional Summaries

The following summaries provide a more detailed analysis of the perceptions voiced in each focus group. Please note that the focus groups are identified by the name of the village group their participants live in. Participants were recruited from particular dwellings in these village groups. For the sake of anonymity, however, the concrete village names are not revealed. For more information please refer to the methodology section on Recruitment Areas.

### Summary Atotsi-Dirbi

The Atotsi-Dirbi group encompasses remote villages with problematic road access. Compared with villages in other groups, they were not as affected by the conflict in the 1990s and sustained less destruction during the August 2008 conflict, and received less international and government assistance in its aftermath. Although sporadic security incidents are known to happen, villages in the Atotsi-Dirbi group are considered relatively safe. Today, inhabitants in this area have good relations to and significant interaction with Ossetians.

### Community Safety and Security

The participants from Atotsi-Dirbi felt very insecure, and named three main contributing factors: political instability and the potential for future aggression, the lack of proper health care, and the dire economic situation of many households. Overall, they also felt insecure because their village is close to the ABL and the political situation is instable: 'We are very near and we are very afraid.' The village's water supply was a topic of great concern, with one person saying that the Ossetians 'may come and poison the source because it is out in the open.' Overall, participants said they felt less secure since the August conflict and were very afraid of new hostilities: 'Now we are more afraid, because we've seen what war is.'

Unemployment and bad infrastructure, especially for transportation, gas and irrigation, were the most pressing concerns in Atotsi-Dirbi. The difficult labour market and problems with irrigation were once again named, this time as issues that could lead people to leave their village. One participant suspected that 'the water is blocked on the Ossetian side.' Additionally, some mentioned Atotsi-Dirbi's proximity to the ABL with South Ossetia as a serious concern, although it was not mentioned as a reason to move away.

There were two major concerns that made the participants say their level of physical safety and security is worse than that of nearby communities. First, Atotsi-Dirbi is perceived to be 'in a conflict zone', and especially vulnerable after the August conflict. They are 'people with stamina,' one participant said, but 'one thing [they] are afraid of is war.' Second, the economic situation of the village is difficult. The bad conditions for farming, for example the lack of access to heavy ploughs due to unavailability or high rental fees, were a topic of much debate. Additionally, the participants discussed that a government programme supporting farmers in the region had recently ended. They were afraid that this could lead to even more difficult times since 'people were so poor that they sold the harvest that should have been used as seeds.'

## ***Understandings of Conflict***

The basic requirements for future stability and peace in the region are unity, cooperation and the ability to listen to each other. According to many of the participants, the culpability for starting the conflict lies with politicians and the authorities, although there was recognition that the Government had done a lot of good things. Indeed, confidence in politicians was overall very low. One person said that the politicians' 'pride and their struggle for power' had been at the heart of past conflicts. The authorities, it was argued, follow their own agendas and 'don't care about the people.' The media, most thought, play their role in escalation and 'want to frighten us' and the participants were generally convinced that the media exerted a negative influence on people, fuelling fears and hatred.

Many said the resulting political instability makes it difficult to tackle other economic, social and cultural problems. Ordinary people, most said, have little influence when it comes to conflicts: local outbursts of violence were explained by economic distress rather than political motives. 'If you don't have money, your child is ill and you can't help – you are stressed and automatically become aggressive.' One woman even drew a parallel between the Georgian situation and the 2010 revolution in Kyrgyzstan. Consequently, most participants called for the authorities, and not the population, to improve the situation by acting in the population's interests. However, some people expressed a general willingness to assist in those efforts.

While politicians were seen to be the instigators of the conflict, the participants said that ordinary people have to bear its consequences. Some added that they had felt abandoned by the authorities at the end of the conflict. They drew a dire image of life in their region since the war, saying, 'people don't want to work. They are not in the mood for it.' Some expressed a fear of kidnappings.

Others concentrated on a call for reconciliation with the Ossetians. The withdrawal of the Russian troops, however, was a condition to this step, as their presence was seen by most as the main obstacle to peace with the Ossetians with whom 'relations have always been friendly.' Russia, who, according to one woman, had 'conquered and frightened the whole world', had also intimidated national and international organisations, who were thus no longer able to help the people. General perception of international organisations was poor, with one participant saying that nobody would take high risks for 'small Georgia' and another commenting that 'I think they get high salaries and do nothing.'

People think that the provision of basic living conditions, including water, gas and a functioning road system are essential for increasing security: 'First of all, we are frightened, which is aggravated by the absence of water, natural gas and roads. One has to consider that geographically we are living in a terrible area,'

## ***Improving Community Engagement and Participation***

The participants said that their leaders should establish contacts with local, national and international organisations. Both sides should make an effort: the organisations 'must have their representatives in the communes themselves,' and the commune 'must choose its own representative to liaise' with them. When asked about the community's contribution and engagement with security

providers, the participants were less optimistic, and did not name anyone they perceive as a provider of security. No one believed that new forms of activities could help their community to solve the conflict and the village's problems. The main reason for this opinion was a general sense of powerlessness.

The participants did not say that there are specific obstacles or dangers that may arise if someone from their community actually decided to take initiative, but they thought that such engagement was unlikely. As one of the participants said, they 'are waiting for God's help.' Some discussed that they cannot even defend their own village. As one participant put it, '[the Ossetians] are armed, they will defend their houses, but we have nothing but clubs in our hands. We have no possibilities!'

## **Summary Nikozi-Mereti**

Villages in the Nikozi-Mereti group are easily accessible due to good road connections. This area was at the centre of the August conflict and its villages were subsequently high-priority targets for international and governmental relief activities. Villages in this group report ongoing high levels of security incidents such as shootings and kidnappings. Partly due to the concentration of international activities, civil society in this area is more developed than elsewhere along the ABL.

### **Community Safety and Security**

On a positive note, many people stated that the improvements to the police and emergency services, fewer burglaries and a more stable political situation have instilled in the community a greater sense of safety. Nevertheless, where Russia is involved, many said they were still afraid of new hostilities and the situation is volatile and people feel less safe than before August 2008. While recalling episodes from the past, a few voiced fears that they would not be able to escape from new hostilities as they had done in 2008, since they feel surrounded by Russian/Ossetian-controlled areas and 'physically cannot run anymore'. As such, it was commented that feelings of security are at best temporary: 'Yes, in my opinion at the moment we are safe. But there is fear that something could happen, so we are not feeling completely safe.' It was felt that this insecurity is inhibiting people from making plans about the future: 'I do not have plans for the future, because there is always some feeling of fear.'

The Nikozi-Mereti participants were eager to talk about economic issues and unemployment. It was felt that the economic situation had deteriorated substantially since the conflict. They said that the most serious problems were a lack of job opportunities and that they 'do not have access to the Russian market' to sell their products. 'Before,' one participant said, 'we did not even have to go to the market. The Ossetians came and exported our products.' The participants also complained about the impact of the conflict on local real estate values. Insufficient income, an unstable water supply, problems with access to medical care and the unfair distribution of aid were named as other problems for the community.

New hostilities, better job or education opportunities and a higher standard of living all make the participants think about leaving Nikozi-Mereti. However,



most participants said that they are more secure than other communities that are closer to the border, where 'bullets were hitting the roofs and Ossetians [soldiers] were moving freely.' Throughout the region, some said, people migrate out of fear, with one participant saying that in Ergneti 'there are only old people left.'

### ***Understandings of Conflict***

'We have ties with Ossetians and will reconcile with them. Russia is standing between us,' one participant said. Many people feared an outbreak of new hostilities. Most participants thought that the conflict is fuelled by bigger international politics, and that the villagers are 'sacrificed to imperial politics.' Many restated that 'the most important thing is that [Georgia] should be independent,' meaning both from the US and Russia. Russia's determination to keep Georgia from becoming a NATO member, and from developing in general, was seen as the major factor in the conflict.

On the question whether the violence could have been prevented, opinions were split. Some called for help from Western countries, especially from the US. It was mentioned that Georgia lacks the capacity to solve its problems by diplomatic means. Just as they were sceptical of politicians, the participants were unsatisfied with the media, which were said to be unprofessional and inaccurate. One person stated, 'Journalists are incompetent; they did not know which villages they [the Russians] were shooting at. They used the wrong name for them. Perhaps the government itself lacks information. Perhaps they are getting incorrect information from here [the region].'

According to the participants, the two major obstacles to reconciliation are the Russian troops and the need for visas to cross the ABL, which was called 'a Berlin wall.' (No one specified who was enforcing said visa requirements, however.) If these obstacles were removed, many thought that rebuilding the relationship between Ossetians and Georgians would be possible. To help reform the political situation, however, they said that the international community would have to intervene, for example by deploying 'UN police instead of our police officers, who get shot at every night.' They also said the government should push for Georgia's entry into NATO but that the country's current level of development and its involvement in internal conflicts are obstacles to integration. The ordinary people have little power, the participants said, but they could still contribute to stabilise the region by supporting democracy.

Another salient topic was once again the distribution of NGO assistance, which was perceived to be unfair: 'Some people wish the war would start all over again, for their houses to be rebuilt [like those of their neighbours]. Can you imagine that?' It was also said that the unequal distribution of aid had destroyed the culture of mutual solidarity that existed before and during the August conflict; the NGOs, one participant claimed, had 'created tensions in our social environment, as if it were done on purpose.'

### ***Improving Community Engagement and Participation***

To engage the community members in local safety and security concerns, the participants suggested that local elected representatives meet with people from

NGOs so that the community's concerns could be conveyed. Many participants, however, said that 'the most important thing is that there should be people who actually consider our input,' which would then motivate people to increase engagement with the authorities. In addition it was felt that the form of community engagement should be determined by each community's specific needs. Some said that they want community issues to be discussed as well as those of individuals, for example, the need for legal advice or medical services. The fair distribution of the benefits from such a programme, most said, should be a top priority, and that community members themselves should have the primary role in ensuring fairness: 'This depends on us. Just imagine we decide something, how can this be unfair?'

The Nikozi-Mereti participants were convinced that the authorities would welcome such increased civil engagement 'since some problems will be resolved without disturbing them [the authorities],' i.e. contributing to the village's self-sufficiency. On the other hand, many thought that there might be risks attached to seeking greater engagement, for example if the views expressed were in any way regarded as 'pro-Russian'. One person claimed that when saying 'that we want Russia and the Russian market,' the community might come under pressure from unspecified authorities. Some said that corruption and unfair distribution of benefits could hinder community participation. Other participants had rather low expectations overall and said that their needs would not be taken into account at all.

## **Summary Plavismani-Bershueti**

Access to the villages in the Plavismani-Bershueti group is decent, although some roads are blocked and require alternative routes. This area was a secondary target for relief activities. Today, people from the Plavismani-Bershueti area still witness numerous security incidents.

### **Community Safety and Security**

In Plavismani-Bershueti, the participants said that their close proximity to the ABL was enough to feel insecure. A few people mentioned incidents of kidnapping, both of persons and cattle, and general fear of violence. With all of this in mind, one participant said, 'Because we live on the border, we live in conditions in which we don't know what will happen tomorrow. We cannot feel safe because the Russians can do whatever they want. And we don't have any defence mechanisms.' One woman suggested that since their village was closer to the ABL, they were less secure than were villages farther from it. It was noted that incidents of aggression, violence and theft are very common.

The village's water supply was cited as a serious problem. Some people said that since the water runs through the area occupied by the Russians, the people in Plavismani-Bershueti could not be sure that it would not be tampered with, and thus safe to drink. Another woman said someone in the community had died after drinking water that was poisoned.

Nevertheless, the participants did not dwell solely on physical safety; instead, the deteriorating economic situation following the conflict weighed heavy on their minds. Difficulty in irrigating, and thus harvesting and selling their crops, and a



lack of employment opportunities were given as factors that contributed to the community's economic hardships. Most participants agreed that they did not have enough money due to the village's economic situation. This in turn has sparked a trend, summarised by one person, whereby 'Many people came to our village. We have a very beautiful village, with beautiful natural surroundings and good air. People came from Tbilisi, bought houses. Now everybody is selling them back.' Moreover, people said the village was now 'empty', with only one school, no mills or factories in operation and no irrigation system for the crops – all of which were given as reasons for leaving Plavismani-Bershueti.

The psychological impact of the August war in this community has been profound, with everyone feeling a high degree of stress and with young people no longer going out or seeking entertainment. The August war, most agreed, had resulted in a general sense within the community of feeling unsafe. As a result, people think about how they can 'run away.' In case of a new attack, people were afraid that they would be unable to flee. On the other hand, the war had not destroyed social ties, and they said that their community was still intact and something to be proud of.

People lamented that, after years of good-neighbourly relations with South Ossetians, a closed border makes it impossible to travel freely, to visit friends and family or to conduct business. Visiting churches or graveyards was named as another activity blocked by the closed ABL. In one participant's words, 'Our relations with the Ossetians go back centuries. We have many mixed families and this is a huge problem today. The relatives are practically losing touch with each other: we cannot go there, and they cannot come here. And this is a huge problem, especially after the August war.' Another person claimed that there were unspecified groups within both the Ossetian and Russian communities that try to weaken these social ties. It was also stated that the actions of the Georgian authorities, and the Special Forces in particular, also reduced contact across the divide: 'We had very close relations with the Ossetian people. They were coming here every week to sell products and to buy everything they needed. They came here after the war, but then our special forces made them leave and warned them never to come again.'

When the discussion turned to questions of relief and reinforcing security, the participants pointed out that Plavismani-Bershueti had received less aid than other villages. With more help from the government, they argued, they would feel more secure.

### ***Understandings of Conflict***

As regards the cause of the tensions and violence, the people were quick to blame 'the Russians' and 'political factors'. One person claimed, 'The Russians closed [the borders]; ordinary people cannot talk to each other anymore.' People also accused the media for reporting inaccurate and exaggerated information, with one man saying, 'They [the media] sow panic, and that's it.'

'Absolutely everyone's psyche is affected,' said one woman, discussing how people's lives had been affected, 'little children as well as adults.' Many participants said that the youth in particular had been depressed since the

conflict, stating that they went out with friends less often and were 'at home, lost in their thoughts [and] worrying.'

The group believe that cultural ties and dialogue can make up for all the problems, with both the community and unspecified authorities implied. Commenting on the roles of various authorities, organisations and individuals, some of the participants said, 'people have great power' and that 'good-neighbourly relations are possible here, if we have such an opportunity.'

The fall-out of the Soviet Union and people's inability to cope with the newfound freedoms, coupled with economic hardship and a volatile political situation, were identified as the main factors that had caused violence in the past. To stabilise the situation, the participants called upon a variety of actors. Some said that Georgia's president could make a difference, while others emphasised the 'power of the people'. The government, one person added, should mainly care about retaining the Georgian territories. International organisations, such as the European Union, were not held in the highest regard. Most participants seemed to think that they follow an own agenda and their own interests. Instead of relying on these organisations, according to some, the village should nominate leaders to assist in the stabilisation efforts, as 'the leaders must come from the people.'

### ***Improving Community Engagement and Participation***

The participants said that good social, cultural and political relations within their community and with the neighbouring Ossetian villages are key, and that efforts to normalise these ties should be prioritised immediately by all people concerned. The authorities and individuals alike, they said, should work together to create events 'for [all citizens & authorities concerned] to meet, listen to people's ideas and take them into consideration.' But this action should be taken soon since, according to one person, 'Our generation remembers good relations with [the S. Ossetians]. But I'm afraid that as time goes on, the Ossetians' hearts will become cooler as will the Georgians' – and restoring relations will be even harder.'

The stated challenges to improving community engagement and increasing citizen participation included economic hardship, low levels of trust in leaders and security providers and a lack of reliable information. However, many of these could be overcome if, as one participant put it, 'even one idea of the community is taken into consideration and put into effect. Then people will go along on every initiative.' Another person said, 'If we see today that something is done by our being here, and that we haven't wasted our time for nothing, then there will be some results. Next time, if you call me, I'll bring other people with me.' The community has a responsibility, some said, in that it should provide leaders who could initiate such efforts.

People said that the police were their 'security providers', though one said that a 'good leader' would best suited for such a role. They said that while their relationships with the police was improving in the war's aftermath, it was still necessary for the police to familiarise themselves with the community on a deeper level. In general, participants said that a good security provider would have to stay in continuous contact with the population and its community-

appointed representative to create trust, transfer knowledge and provide information. When asked about increased community participation in those efforts, however, people became sceptical. Some were afraid of being fired from their jobs, and some said unspecified authorities would not welcome such initiative: 'We are scared and cannot say fully what we want.'

## **Summary Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>**

The Tsitelubani-Lamiskana area was previously removed from the conflict, and has only later started to be affected due to the occupation of the Akhalkgori region. The security situation in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> is problematic due to frequent incidents. The rest of the area, including the second recruiting village is considered to be relatively safe. The population of Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> is ethnically mixed, but only ethnic Georgians were recruited for the focus group.

## **Community Safety and Security**

The Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> participants stated that losing family members and friends, the close proximity of Russian troops to their village and the fear that disorder could again break out contributed to a sense of insecurity. One participant, though, added that the 'villages near the road are safer', perhaps because, in the event of renewed violence, those people would be able to flee more quickly.

They said that their plans for the future have to be changed or even scrapped. Nevertheless, on why leaving the village was not high on anyone's agenda, one person's sentiment summarised the general feeling amongst the participants: 'If we are forced to go, we will have to go. Otherwise, we don't think of going. We are OK here.' Still, later in the discussions, some people mentioned that they would consider leaving Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> for 'better living conditions' or job opportunities in cities, for instance. They did say, however, they would retain their ties to Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> even if they left.

People said that the economic hardships they face add to the atmosphere of insecurity. The difficulty in farming, raising livestock and the inability to move freely across the ABL to get to Tsinagora (on the South Ossetian-controlled side of the ABL) were remarked upon: 'Our community is in a difficult situation as there is no irrigation water, and thus, no harvest. And the villagers cannot move freely to find work. Our work is not in the office, but in the field.' In addition, people were quick to point out that good personal relationships between Georgians and Ossetians have not changed, as one woman said, 'Neighbourly relations between us remain the same. You are Georgian, he or she is Ossetian – it does not matter.' An important distinction was made between the Ossetians and the Russians: one participant said that although he knew the Ossetians would not shoot at him, he expected no mercy from the Russian troops. Overall, most argued that Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> was not any safer than other villages in the region, which, they said, were all unsafe.

## **Understandings of Conflict**

The participants said that 'political factors' were behind the cause of the conflict, as was Russia who, in their words, was seeking to retain its 'influence over the countries around it.' However, some people also upheld that dialogue with

Russia, for which the Georgian government should be primarily responsible, was key for ensuring stability and peace in the region: 'Dialogue, clever dialogue with the neighbour that we fear. It can be a long-term programme, ten years or more, but it is always better to have normal relations.'

Additionally, the participants were dissatisfied with how the media reported on the conflict. According to one man, 'the media broadcasts [the news] very inaccurately. For example, the [staged] war reported on Imedi ... Ordinary people are to be pitied. Georgians become afraid of Ossetians and Ossetians of Georgians. They make the situation even tenser.' The participants said that journalists and politicians should be more careful with their words and cannot afford to make mistakes.

Some people said a heavy psychological trauma was brought about by the August war. Fear was still a feeling many experienced, although they were quick to say that their personal relations with the Ossetians had not suffered. Some added that in the face of war, nationality had become unimportant, creating a certain sense of unity among those involved.

People were keen to talk about the inability to access Tsinagara, especially for firewood and land for pasture. One man noted, 'I have no access to Tsinagara, though they [the Ossetians] have. They [the authorities] should talk to them. We are one people. They should explain to us and persuade us both that there should not be war between us.'

The participants called upon the Georgian government, saying that it would not be possible to improve the security situation of Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> unless changes in the whole of Georgia were made, though they were unclear on the specific kind of changes. The group said that greater access to gas and economic aid were concrete examples of what could be done to improve the overall situation in their village.

Extreme economic hardship, linked to destroyed pastures or cattle being kidnapped and slain, could lead the people to resort to violence. In the past, these kinds of desperate act were avoided by giving money to nearby Ossetian villages, which in turn would let the villagers from Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> use their pastures. The participants also discussed how, in the past, the community had been able to mitigate and settle many small disputes amongst its members, and between Georgians and Ossetians.

To prevent future outbreaks of violence, a range of measures should be taken by a variety of actors, according to the participants. The international community should support dialogue on both sides. The Russians would have to leave to allow for reconciliation amongst the villagers. Overall, the Georgian government was named as the entity responsible to start this process. Some participants added that Ossetians visiting Georgia should be treated with respect, and their security should be provided for, although they did not specify by whom. According to the group, the role of the civil society was more that of a mediator: it should enable dialogue by bringing people together and providing reliable information.

## **Improving Community Engagement and Participation**

In general, the people in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> were positive: if local and national authorities and international organisations hold structured meetings with the community and take the people's concerns into real consideration, normal relations between villages on both sides of the ABL can resume. One person noted, for example, that 'the NGOs and other [international organisations] should come to the village and hold meetings. Then they will take our problems and concerns into consideration.' Another said that 'We [as citizens] will show initiative as well, as it will be better for us. For example, the problem of land for pasture: the villagers will show initiative on these issues, as it benefits the village.'

The people named NGOs as specific security providers, and one person named the government. They were positive about the contact they had had with both, saying in particular that the NGOs had 'fulfilled' what they had promised. 'During the chaos after the war, they [unspecified NGOs] provided assistance and did all that they promised,' said one person. This also gave many a positive outlook on future cooperation with organisations.

A few people indicated that a general sense of fear of the authorities still exists, especially in terms of speaking in public. One woman said: 'A bomb fell in our village once and one woman who witnessed it spoke of it. After that she had big problems; she was not allowed to go to Tskhinvali ... You never know how the truth will be perceived.' Another participant even suspected that there were unspecified 'informants' in the village. Saying something in public in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> had become risky now, it was argued, as no one knew where the information would be taken.

## **Summary Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>**

The Tsitelubani-Lamiskana area was previously removed from the conflict, and has only later started to be affected due to the occupation of the Akhalkori region. The security situation in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> is considered to be relatively safe. Its population is ethnically mixed, but only ethnic Ossetians were recruited for the focus group.

## **Community Safety and Security**

Rather than dwelling on the fear for their physical safety, the focus group participants in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> named concrete economic and psychological reasons for feeling insecure in their community: difficulty in raising their livestock and in farming, and the psychological trauma of the August war. According to one person, 'We will only feel secure if we have jobs, salaries and the children have something.'

In economic terms, the participants linked community safety and security to the strain the war's aftermath has put on farming and raising livestock. Some people said, 'Our community is suffering from a lack of [drinking] water ... We don't have irrigation water, either. We don't have land for pasture.' People said that their livestock were their only means of subsistence and voiced concerns about the high tax on pastures and where they would take their cattle if the neighbouring villages should no longer allow them to do so. The lack of



affordable medical care and the absence of schools were other salient topics when discussing the community's current problems.

Most people said they did not fear for their physical safety nor were they afraid of their Ossetian neighbours or the Russians. There were, however, a few comments which expressed a fear of a renewed outbreak of hostilities: 'Just a minute ago, when a plane passed, I started shaking with fear. I thought they [the Russians] were coming.' Generally, the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> group felt fairly safe and saw no major differences between their situation and that of other villages. They said their community is distinguishable for its mixed population and the good ties between Ossetians and Georgians.

The participants also noted that being unable to cross the ABL to visit relatives and friends has worsened their physical and psychological conditions. They said that both the Russian troops and the Georgian police forces made crossing the ABL difficult. The participants pointed out that being prevented from travelling to neighbouring villages to visit their friends or relatives placed additional pressure on their psyches. Years of friendly ties between the two ethnicities are now at risk. Some participants said, 'We get along well; Georgians and Ossetians have a very good relationship ... If I were allowed, I would visit the village of Tsinagara where I have friends, and they would also come over here. But what can we do when we are not allowed to travel?'

The reasons that participants would leave Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> included the water problems and because there are no schools in the village. Others, however, said that nothing would make them leave. Still others spoke of the need for more places for entertainment: 'There are young people in our village. There are a lot of boys and girls, but they have nowhere to go in the evening – a club, for example, to have some fun. We are deprived of all entertainment; there is nothing in our village.'

### ***Understandings of Conflict***

On how the group understands conflict, one thing was clear: the opposing governments should accept the lion's share of the blame for igniting and perpetuating the conflict, not the citizens in the communities on either side of the border. 'It is the governments that are at each other's throats; we have nothing against one another,' said one person. While some participants blamed the Georgian government, others spoke vaguely about Georgia's 'enemies' fuelling the conflict. The media, most participants argued, played their role as well, being inaccurate and biased and reporting only what suits the government or the stations' interests.

The August war had caused economic hardship and fear among the population, most said. While recalling stories from the war about having to hide children, many emphasised that nowadays they were far more stressed out than before the conflict. One woman replied, 'The people have fallen ill, they have been frightened. Now the sound of a single bullet fired is enough to frighten people. We are stressed.'

The perspectives of the near to longer-term future were somewhat bleak. Many feel the government has let them down and they doubt the ability of international organisations or NGOs to help to address the people's concerns.

Many broken promises and outright lies, they said, had undermined their trust in these organisations. One participant suggested involving the government in the process, which would give the organisations 'direction'. In general, many regretted that the attention span of organisations was too short, and their village had now 'disappeared from the map.' Some participants said that it would be better to rely solely on oneself, while others counted on divine assistance. On a slightly more positive note, however, some remarked upon the idea that individuals should play a leading role, perhaps setting an example for governments and organisations: 'You should rely on yourself,' said one participant, 'neither the president nor anyone else will help you.' Current community leaders, however, were viewed with scepticism, and the emergence of new leaders was said to be necessary for improvement.

### ***Improving Community Engagement and Participation***

According to the participants, the authorities should by all means work to improve the community's infrastructure, including allowing the people to have a say in the budgeting and implementation process. Nowadays, one participant said, government spending in the community is opaque. In general, the group thought that it was only through more and better government action that the community could start to engage in issues of security and infrastructure.

Satisfaction with the government's current performance was low. One comment on the disrepair and poor service reflected many of the others: 'Last year ... they were going to repair the system for the tap water. But they just put a new hose in the ground and joined it to the spring, and now that hose is damaged in many places. It is decomposing and our drinking water mixes with the rainwater, and when it comes through the faucets, it's already muddy. Can't they do even this properly?' People also expressed a degree of fear of unspecified 'authorities', in terms of being outspoken and calling on the government to be held accountable for fixing the community's problems and involving them within a transparent, constructive framework. Some even saw significant risks attached to increased engagement. New and better leaders, most agreed, would be a necessary step in this process.

The participants did not answer the 'security provider' question. One person said, 'No one tells us anything, and no one helps us,' perhaps suggesting that the villagers lack information, in general. Only one person mentioned being afraid of reprisals for speaking out on community issues, though he did not specify which authorities would carry out such measures.



## Regional Analyses

### Analysis Atotsi-Dirbi

#### Community Safety and Security

##### Q1 – What makes you feel insecure in your life in general?

Most participants were afraid of war and aggression. Many also complained about the lack of quality health care, its high prices and the limited availability of medical staff. The economic situation of households, often aggravated by unemployment, was yet another important concern discussed.

- *'We feel insecure because of the political situation. We are very afraid of war and aggression.'* (Female, 56, married, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'Health care is the main problem. We don't have insurance policies.'* (Female, 56, married, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'There are insurance policies, but you face so many obstacles, you have to go so many places together with the patient that it's almost impossible to get treatment. It is better to pay money instead.'* (Female, 56, single, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'It doesn't matter whether we have insurance policies or not. There are problems between us and the doctors.'* (Female, 36, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'In my case, it was 3 a.m., and I didn't want to disturb anybody. I had spent all the money on gas for my car. I took my child to the local doctor, but he doesn't work every day. The local doctor has a day off twice a week. How can a patient wait for six hours for the doctor?'* (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)

##### [Q1 Follow-Up] – Do you feel safe in your community? If not, why not?

The participants felt very unsafe. A special concern was that the village's source of drinking water, which is located near the ABL with South Ossetia, could be poisoned.

- *'No, we are very near, and we are very afraid.'* (Female, 56, married, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'It is very dangerous to drink this water because they can poison it. We are very unsafe.'* (Female, 38, married, commodity expert, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'They may come and poison the source because it is open.'* (Male, 22, single, higher education, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)

## **Q2 – What do you think are the most serious concerns in your community?**

The primary concerns were unemployment, poor infrastructure for transportation and a lack of natural gas and irrigation. Other important concerns named were the proximity of the ABL with South Ossetia and politicians who have broken their promises.

- *‘Of course, we are very unsatisfied with unemployment.’ (Female, 38, married, commodity expert, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*
- *‘We have no irrigation canals; we don’t have any kind of income.’ (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*
- *‘Not only irrigation, we don’t have roads anymore.’ (Female, 34, married, secondary education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*
- *‘They promised us gas and water, but they haven’t done anything yet.’ (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*
- *‘We live near the ABL with South Ossetia.’ (Male, 53, secondary technical education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*

### **[Q2 Follow-Up] – What does ‘community’ mean to you?**

The participants thought that the word community describes two or more villages. Thus, they didn’t consider Atotsi-Dirbi a community.

- *‘A community means several villages taken together. But we are only one village, so we are not a community.’ (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*
- *‘We don’t have a community; we are a big village with 1,300 inhabitants.’ (Female, 56, married, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*

### **[Q2 Follow-Up] – What concerns make you think about leaving your community?**

Job opportunities outside the village were the main reason for which participants would consider leaving the village. Another concern forcing people from Atotsi-Dirbi to move to neighbouring villages was the lack of irrigation water, which was thought to be cut off by the Ossetians,

- *‘If you have an opportunity to start working somewhere, you may leave the village. It is very hard to find a job nowadays.’ (Female, 36, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*
- *‘The water has been cut off from the Ossetian side. The local government has promised to resolve this problem, but as far as I know, it [the problem of irrigation] is going to remain unresolved in our village.’ (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*

### **[Q2 Follow-Up] – Any changes after the August conflict?**

The participants said that they feel less secure since the conflict and were very afraid of new hostilities, especially because they had seen the face of war.

Although they were hardworking and enduring people, the participants concluded, a new war would be hard to handle.

- *'Before the war, we weren't so afraid.'* (Female, 36, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'Now we are more afraid, because we've seen what war is.'* (Female, 56, married, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'We are people with stamina. The only thing we are afraid of is war.'* (Female, 56, married, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'We are people with stamina, and we are very hardworking. You can't find as hardworking people as we are.'* (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)

### **Q3 – How do you assess the level of physical safety and security in your community compared to other neighbouring communities?**

The participants said that their physical safety and security was worse than that of the neighbouring communities. They considered that they lived in the middle of the conflict zone.

Another concern expressed was the lack of agricultural machinery to plough the land. Even if the machinery were available, some participants said, they would not be able to afford using them. Some even suspected that the local government had raised the prices for these machinery artificially, to be able to buy the farmers' land.

On the other hand, participants said that the government had helped them in the past with a programme that assisted them in cultivating their land. However, the programme had ended, and the peasants had to deal with agricultural problems on their own again.

- *'The situation of people is worse, there is much more fear.'* (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'No improvements.'* (Female, , 34, married, secondary education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'Having cultivating machinery in the region does not change anything for me. I would still have to pay money to the manager who is working for the government.'* (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'We are in the conflict zone. We border the Ossetian villages, and we are more insecure because of that.'* (Female, 56, married, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'They [the government] may be doing it [holding back the machinery or making its use expensive] on purpose to get hold of our land.'* (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'The government cultivated the land because we hadn't been able to harvest anything during the war.'* (Female, 56, single, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)

- *'What has changed is that in the year after the government had cultivated our lands at its expense, the people were so poor that they sold the harvest that should have been used as seeds.'* (Male, 22, single, higher education, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)

## Understandings of Conflict

### Q4 – What do you think are the key issues for ensuring future stability and peace in your region?

The participants said that if Georgians understood and listened to one another, many problems would be solved. Some participants argued that in Georgia, many people wanted to become president, but few really cared about pressing issues such as peace. General confidence in politicians was low, due to broken promises in the past. The participants thought that the main problem which caused fear was the current political situation.

- *'We [the Georgians] should understand one another; we should listen to one another.'* (Female, 56, married, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'When the entire Georgian nation stands together, it will be good for the country and for the regions.'* (Female, 56, married, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'Everyone wants to be the president. We want peace, and people want peace.'* (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'I'm always disappointed after elections.'* (Female, 38, married, commodity expert, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'There is no peace [in Georgia].'* (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'I don't like the present political situation, and I'm very afraid that the same thing [a war] may happen again.'* (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)

### [Q4 Follow-Up] – What types of factors, e.g. political, security, social and cultural contribute to conflict?

The participants thought that politicians were the major culprits in conflict escalation. They said that the conflict had escalated because of politicians' pride and struggle for power. The government had done a lot of good things, some admitted, but there was room for improvement.

It is only through political stability, the participants argued, that Georgia might solve its economic, social and cultural problems. They suggested that the people should think about the country and the government should care about and support the people. At the same time, some participants said that they themselves were willing to work hard and do everything necessary to help.

- *'The pride of the people who are in politics today. There are a lot of things to be done, no question about it. We like a lot of changes and a lot of things have been done, though we may not like many other changes, and many*

*things are yet to be done.’ (Female, 56, married, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*

- *‘Pride, I think it’s because of pride and their [politicians’] struggle for power.’ (Female, 56, married, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*
- *‘When Georgia achieves political stability, other economic, social and cultural problems will be solved automatically.’ (Female, 36, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*
- *‘They [government officials] only take care of themselves. They don’t care about the people.’ (Female, 56, married, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*
- *‘What can we [the people] do?’ (Female, 36, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*
- *‘The people who work for the government should take care of the people.’ (Female, 38, married, commodity expert, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*
- *‘They [the politicians] are struggling to gain power.’ (Female, 36, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*
- *‘We are doing everything we can. I’m bringing up my child, and others are taking care of their families. We don’t mind doing anything; we will work and do everything necessary.’ (Female, 36, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*

#### **[Q4 Follow-Up] – What has allowed violence to happen in the past or could enable it to happen in the future (e.g. events that can trigger violence)?**

When people are in a very difficult economic situation, the participants argued, they could become desperate. Thus, they might develop aggressive behaviour and do things they would not do otherwise. To support their arguments, some even compared their situation with the events that had unfolded in Kyrgyzstan.

- *‘In times of peace, nobody was robbing supermarkets in Kyrgyzstan, but at the time of the revolution, those poor people did this.’ (Female, 36, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*
- *‘I’m not saying this about everyone, but generally, economic problems make people do bad things. If you don’t have money, your child is ill and you can’t help him, you get stressed out and automatically become aggressive.’ (Female, 56, married, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*

#### **[Q4 Follow-Up] – How accurate do you think media is when it reports on conflict?**

The participants were critical of TV stations, referring to the panic they had caused in March 2010. They were generally convinced that the media exerted a negative influence on the people, fuelling fears and hatred.

- *‘They caused panic, they wanted to frighten us. They prepare reports that make people think that the war has started again and we should hate Russia.’ (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*

### **Q5 – What impact has the August 2008 had on people's lives in the region?**

The participants painted a dire picture of the life in their region, saying that apathy and fear kept people from working. Some participants expressed concerns about possible kidnappings in the region, saying that they felt abandoned by the authorities.

- *'People don't want to work. They are not in the mood for it.'* (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'Ossetians are a hundred meters away from us; we cannot work.'* (Male, 53, secondary technical education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'People are being kidnapped, we are very afraid.'* (Female, 56, married, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'If you don't work, you will end up in a very bad situation. Until now, we hoped that the authorities would continue to help, but now this help has stopped.'* (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)

### **Q6 - What steps would be most useful for increasing security?**

The participants argued that the improvement of living conditions should be the top priority. They had no water, no natural gas and no roads. The proximity of the Russian soldiers was also perceived as dangerous, and they thought that reconciliation of the Georgians and Ossetians was only possible after a Russians withdrawal.

- *'First of all, we are frightened, which is aggravated by the absence of water, natural gas and roads. One has to consider that even geographically we are living in a terrible area. But we are still enduring everything and staying here. One has to walk a few kilometres to bring water home. What are we talking about? A tired man cannot drink water after a long work from the vineyard. How can we endure so many things? Fear and a lack of water, gas and a road.'* (Female, 56, married, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'Road, natural gas and water.'* (Male, 22, single, higher education, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'Until the Russian army is off of our territory, our country will be consumed with fear.'* (Male, 22, single, higher education, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'The only way out is the withdrawal of the Russian troops. When the Russians leave Georgia, the conflict will be solved.'* (Female, 36, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'Our village borders the Ossetian villages, and before the war started, our relations had always been friendly.'* (Male, 23, single, higher education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'That's right. Before the war started, we were friends.'* (Female, 36, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'By the way, when the war ended, the Russian army demonstrated a lot of respect for our village. All of our leadership had gone away - the police ran*



*away, people remained without any attention, and the head of the village could do nothing... Ossetians and even Georgians started looting. They took away anything they wanted. It was only after the Russian soldiers had come and declared their peaceful intent that the people calmed down. We suffer more from the Ossetians than from the Russian army.' (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*

#### **[Q6 Follow-Up] – Is there anything else that national and international organisations could do to make your community more secure?**

The participants' attitudes to international organisations were very sceptical. They said that these organisations must be more active in order to resolve this conflict, and they should not let themselves be intimidated by Russia.

- *'I think that they came to get high salaries and do nothing. Perhaps at first they truly helped Georgia, but what happened then?' (Female, 36, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*
- *'I think that Russia indeed conquered the whole world and frightened it. Yes, they [the organisations] are trying to help us, but they cannot do anything because Russia has frightened them.' (Female, 56, married, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*
- *'Nobody will sacrifice himself because of small Georgia!' (Female, 36, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*
- *'Russia is a big country and everybody is afraid of it.' (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*

#### **Improving Community Engagement and Participation**

##### **Q7 - How do you think the community members can become more involved in understanding and addressing local safety and security concerns?**

The participants said that their leaders should establish close contacts with local, national and international organisations.

- *'To establish relations with people, the organisations must have their representatives in the communes themselves.' (Female, 36, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*
- *'The community leaders have to establish contacts with such organisations. And they must find the best way out for this community together.' (Female, 56, single, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*
- *'The community must choose its own representative to liaise with these organisations.' (Female, 36, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)*

##### **Q8 - How could the communities engage more with security providers?**

Participants generally felt hopeless that the conflict and their own problems could be solved through their engagement. One the participants said that their



only hope was God. Some argued that they couldn't defend their own village – they had no weapons, while the Ossetians were armed.

- *'I don't know what we can do. People cannot do much.'* (Female, 57, married, secondary education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'What can [village] people do?'* (Female, 56, single, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'We are waiting for God's help.'* (Female, 36, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)
- *'In the neighbouring Ossetian villages, people are armed, they can defend their houses, but we have nothing but clubs at hand. We cannot do anything.'* (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)

**Q9 - Now, still speaking about community engagement, what do you think are the challenges for greater engagement?**

The participants agreed that there were no further challenges for those who wanted to be more engaged.

- *'No, there will be no challenges for greater engagement.'* (Female, 36, married, secondary education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi)

**[Q9 Follow-Up] – Will there be any risks for community participants? What will cause these risks and how can they be managed?**

The participants did not expect any new barriers and dangers to arise.

- *'No, there are no such risks!'* (Female, 56, married, librarian, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi)

## Analysis Nikozi-Mereti

### Community Safety and Security

#### Q1 – What makes you feel insecure in your life, in general?

Most participants agreed that a lack of stable income is the major problem that renders their life difficult.

- *'We are working but still have nothing... We produce fruits but can't sell them. This is our problem.'* (Male, 59, married, radio technician, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)

#### [Q1 Follow-Up] – Do you feel safe in your community?

All participants said they now have police and emergency services which operate normally. Some also argued that they notice less crime nowadays; burglaries and robberies are not as common as before. Even with regard to the political situation, some argued, things are not as tense as they used to be. Nevertheless, the idea was expressed that any feelings of security are volatile when Russia is involved. In case of a repeated attack, they argued, their village would be abandoned.

- *'Now, the police functions.'* (Male, 36, single, higher education, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'The emergency service works as well.'* (Male, 59, married, radio technician, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'Now, there [in the village] are no more burglaries, which were common before. We used to lose everything.'* (Male, 59, married, radio technician, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'The political situation is not so tense at the moment that we would expect an act of aggression from the Russians.'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'If something [another act of aggression] happens now, it does not make sense to resist. The only right decision is to defend Tbilisi, but we would be deserted here. In my mind, the international community should not turn its attention away... You should be careful with Russia.'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)

#### [Q1 Follow-Up] – If not, why not?

The participants emphasised that they feel unsafe because of their difficult economic situation. Moreover, even though they are aware that at present hostilities no longer take place, they still have fear as they live in a conflict zone; thus, they understand that their feeling of security is at best temporary.

- *'The main concern is economic insecurity. People can earn their living by working, but we do not have access to the Russian market. We cannot sell to European markets, either. This would require a lot of money.'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)

- *'We live in a conflict zone, and that is why we are constantly afraid. When we hear gunshots we know that nothing [no war] is happening, but there is still fear.'* (Female, 27, married, biology and chemistry teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'Yes, in my opinion, at the moment we are safe. But there is fear that something could happen, so we are not feeling completely safe.'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)

### **[Q1 Follow-Up] – What types of incidents make you feel insecure?**

The participants did not discuss incidents that could make them feel insecure. Instead, they chose to continue speaking about the problems that unemployment and unstable income can generate, especially when it comes to a person's health problems. They even cited an example of someone who suffered a heart attack and died during the August war.

- *'For instance, a person needs surgery but has no money. I need surgery that costs 1500 lari. Where do I get this money? I have two retired people at home, but their pension is spent cost-effectively [completely] from month to month.'* (Male, 36, single, higher education, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'Several people even died [of stress]. For example, my neighbour, who was 47 years old at the time, died because of a heart attack during the August war.'* (Female, 54, married, economist, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)

### **[Q1 Follow-Up] – Any changes after the August war?**

The main change was that the people felt less secure. The fear was expressed that if a new war broke out they would not be able to escape from it again. However, not all of their fears became reality. As some said, when they returned after the war, they found that they had not been robbed.

- *'At that time [of the August war] we ran away because we had a place to go. But now we physically cannot run anymore. We are blocked from all sides [sc. Russian- or Ossetian-controlled areas]. With what has happened in our village – houses burnt, people killed – how we can feel secure?'* (Male, 36, single, higher education, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'During the August war we were in Tbilisi, and I was afraid that once we returned, the Ossetians would be raiding freely. I do not mean armed people. I thought that people would be looting or raiding homes. I didn't want to return under such circumstances, but they [the raids] didn't happen.'* (Female, 54, married, economist, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)

### **Q2 – What do you think the most serious concerns are in your community?**

Employment, access to markets and professional expertise were named as the most serious concerns in the community. The participants mentioned a problem with their water supply. Another issue they discussed was the distribution of NGO assistance, which was perceived to be unfair, causing jealousy and

hostilities within the population. One participant said peace was the most serious concern in their community.

- *'Unemployment and markets are main issues for the community.'* (Female, 27, married, biology and chemistry teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'When we want to use fertilizers for our fruits, we have to go to Tbilisi to ask which product to use, because of the lack of professionals [in the village]. This year we spent more than 1000 lari on fertilizers.'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'The water problem has not been resolved everywhere. I am speaking of potable water. And last year we did not have water for our crops, so the harvest was spoiled.'* (Female, 27, married, biology and chemistry teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'People from NGOs came and behaved in such a way that people started to hate each other. For example, one person got too much assistance, others got nothing... this is a very complicated issue.'* (Male, 36, single, higher education, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'The most important thing is peace.'* (Female, 27, married, biology and chemistry teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)

### **[Q2 Follow-Up] – What concerns make you think about leaving your community?**

People said that a chance to obtain higher standards of living as well as education and employment opportunities would make them think about leaving their community. They said that many people had left after the conflict, but concerns were raised as to where people from the village could possibly go.

- *'One might leave in order to improve his standard of living.'* (Female, 27, married, biology and chemistry teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'If someone is able to find a job [in the city] they may stay.'* (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'They [young people] should get an education, shouldn't they?'* (Male, 59, married, radio technician, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'They [people from the village] went away after the conflict.'* (Female, 27, married, biology and chemistry teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'Where should we go?'* (Male, 59, married, radio technician, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)

### **[Q2 Follow-Up] – Any changes after the August conflict?**

The participants said their economic situation has deteriorated after the conflict. They cannot sell their products anymore, and since sales of agricultural products is the main source of income for them, this is one of their greatest concerns. In addition, the participants said – apart from all prior concerns – they now had to worry whether war would break out again.

- *'Before, our products were exported to Ukraine or wherever, and that was OK.'* (Female, 30, married, music teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'Before, we did not even have to go to the market. The Ossetians came and exported our products. Now the situation is worse: if someone does not have a car he cannot bring his products to the market. And even if you have a car, how do you sell them?'* (Female, 54, married, economist, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'The issue [economic problems] will be resolved once the population is able to sell their products. We do not have factories, it is a village and we exist by producing tomatoes, apples, peaches. We need a market, and then we will work and won't have economic problems anymore.'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'In addition to the concerns we had before, now we are also concerned that the events of August might happen again. Of course, there is also a degree of fear.'* (Male, 20, married, student, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)

### **Q3 – How do you assess the level of physical safety and security in your community compared with other neighbouring communities?**

Most participants emphasised that they are more secure than other communities closer to the border. They also stated that fear of conflict makes the inhabitants of those other villages leave the area and that the whole local economy suffers from this emigration.

- *'We know that there are shootings. But it's further away from here than from the other villages, and that's why we are calm.'* (Female, 28, married, German-language and literature teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'We have young people who live in our village. But in Ergneti there are only old people, no children and youngsters, simply because they are afraid.'* (Male, 36, single, higher education, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'Those who stayed have big problems. There is no shop because there are only five households left – and that's why it does not make sense to have one. An ambulance may come, I don't know, but just for some medicine or some product they have to come out here to Nikozi-Mereti and come a very long way.'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)

### **[Q3 Follow-Up] – Why are there differences in the level of physical safety and security?**

The participants expressed that because of their location – the selected in Nikozi-Mereti is further away from the ABL than other villages – they do not feel as insecure as others.

- *'I do not know whether currently this is the case, but during the last years, in these villages close to the border, bullets were hitting the roofs and Ossetians were moving very freely. But here the situation is far better.'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)

- *'Just imagine, [in other villages] you can hear gunshots every day. You need strong nerves for this. We can also hear gunshots, but not so close.'* (Male, 36, single, higher education, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)

## Understandings of Conflict

### Q4 – What do you think are the key issues for ensuring future stability and peace in your region?

The presence of Russian troops in the area was perceived to be the main obstacle for reconciliation.

- *'The Russian troops should leave and then we will have stability. We have ties to the Ossetians and will reconcile with them. Russia is standing between us.'* (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)

### [Q4 Follow-Up] – What types of factors, e.g. political, security, social and cultural, contribute to conflict?

People thought that the conflict is fuelled by politics alone and people have no say in the conflict. The idea was expressed that resolution of the conflict largely depended on the redistribution of power among Russia and the USA, but what Georgia truly needed was independence.

- *'We have decided to be a democratic country, we want to be free. That is what is on our mind. We have never been an aggressive people. We want peace and want to develop peacefully. We are sacrificed to imperial politics.'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'I do not know. For the government the situation is already tense. Just look, after the war the opposition came and began negotiations... nothing will be decided in this way. We need a different way to resolve the issue. People should not die because of the government.'* (Male, 36, single, higher education, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'Who asks us?! Nobody. The authorities say what will be done.'* (Male, 36, single, higher education, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'We are saying, "We don't want Russia, the USA should help us." But the US is not willing to take care of us, and so we are crushed between them.'* (Female, 54, married, economist, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'The redistribution of spheres of influence among great powers.'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'We do not need either [Russia or the USA]; we must be separate from them. Our country must be called Georgia [and not the servant of someone else].'* (Male, 59, married, radio technician, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)



#### **[Q4 Follow-Up] – What has allowed the violence to happen in the past, or could enable it to happen in the future?**

The participants think that the key reasons that caused the violence in the past lie in Georgian-Russian relations, namely the determination of Russia to keep Georgia from becoming a NATO member and an independent actor. Some participants mentioned that Russia was envious of the progress Georgia has made in improving the police and military forces. However, it was also mentioned that Georgia lacks the capacity to solve its problems by diplomatic means.

- *'Russia does not want Georgia to become a member of NATO.'* (Male, 36, single, higher education, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'Russia does not want Georgia to be independent from it.'* (Female, 27, married, biology and chemistry teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'Russians do not want us to live well.'* (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'Russians are envious that Georgian police and military forces are better than their Russian counterparts, so they punish us for this.'* (Male, 36, single, higher education, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'We do not have the necessary diplomatic skills to solve problems diplomatically.'* (Female, 28, married, German-language and literature teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)

#### **[Q4 Follow-Up] – How accurate do you think the media is when it reports on conflict?**

The participants were critical towards the media; they said that Georgian journalists lack professionalism, and that the news often is inaccurate or even false. Some participants, however, said that there are good journalists as well. Some were concerned with the lack of freedom of speech in Georgia and believed journalists were serving the orders of someone else.

- *'Journalists are incompetent; they did not know which villages they [the Russians] were shooting at. They used the wrong name for them. Perhaps the government itself lacks information. Perhaps they are getting incorrect information from here [the region].'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'We have heard so many lies from journalists: we know what happened and they say different things. That's why you can't trust them anymore and have to come to the conclusion that more of the things they say are incorrect.'* (Female, 54, married, economist, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'There are also some brilliant journalists and cameramen.'* (Male, 59, married, radio technician, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'To my mind, nowadays talking about everything publicly may not be a good choice and perhaps... that is due to politics. I hope that someday Georgia will be like the countries in East Europe, where you feel protected and can*

*say anything.’ (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)*

- *‘They are obeying orders from someone. What else could it be?’ (Female, 28, married, German-language and literature teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)*

### **Q5 – What impact has the August 2008 had on people’s lives in the region?**

Most participants said that the impact of the August war had been dramatic. They are afraid that they cannot make plans for the future as war might break out again. Another issue raised was the loss in value of real estate in the area.

- *‘The war had an awful impact.’ (Female, 30, married, music teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)*
- *‘I do not have plans for my future, because there is always some feeling of fear.’ (Female, 27, married, biology and chemistry teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)*
- *‘We bought things for the family earlier. But now, even my husband is complaining and just wants to protect and preserve what we have. If something happens again and we have to run, where we should take our things? We can’t think of purchasing anything at the moment.’ (Female, 54, married, economist, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)*
- *‘For example, someone wanted to sell his house. It is situated very near to the conflict zone, and no one wants to buy a house in a conflict zone.’ (Male, 36, single, higher education, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)*

### **[Q5 Follow-Up] – What is the mood in the region since August 2008?**

The participants reiterated that they are afraid the war might start again.

- *‘We fear that the war might start again.’ (Female, 27, married, Female, 27, married, biology and chemistry teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)*

### **[Q5 Follow-Up] – How has the August 2008 conflict changed the political/economic/social landscape in the region?**

The main issues the participants mentioned were economic and social ones, they did not talk about politics in this context. A salient topic was the distribution of assistance, and the true intentions of NGOs involved in the area. It was often said that the outside help destroyed the social relations and culture of mutual solidarity that existed before and during the August conflict.

- *‘Everyone knows in what situation Nikozi-Mereti is. We had very good relations with each other. For instance, during the conflict we left our house, and we were calling our neighbours to go and take anything they needed, such as food. Old women were baking bread for everyone; they were feeding the whole region. But after the war, once we came back, the situation was very bad. In my opinion, these NGOs came and selected whom they would help; no one has properly registered his or her loss and damage. Everyone*

*will agree about this' (Female, 54, married, economist, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)*

- *'From the beginning, I had a feeling that these NGOs which came here are ruled by some religious sect. They created tensions in our social environment, as if it were done on purpose.' (Female, 28, married, German-language and literature teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)*
- *'They had no criteria when deciding which person to help.' (Female, 27, married, biology and chemistry teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)*
- *'All this happened in a very chaotic way, e.g. on-the-spot identification was not done thoroughly: who has what, who has burned what? That's why, now, influential people benefit most, rather than those who really need help.' (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)*
- *'If nobody gave us anything, neighbours would help each other to rebuild houses. But now, some people are wishing the war to start all over again, so that their houses can be rebuilt as well, can you imagine that!?' (Female, 54, married, economist, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)*

#### **Q6 – What steps would be most useful for reducing tensions and preventing a return of violence?**

The participants emphasised patriotism and unity of the population, which have always been lacking in Georgia, as ways of reducing the tension.

- *'The unity of our country and people – something Georgia always lacked could help.' (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)*

#### **[Q6 Follow-Up] – What has created tensions in the past?**

Suspensions were voiced that the August war was provoked artificially. Other participants saw Russia as the main culprit, following an aggressive and imperialistic agenda. The idea was expressed that Russia wanted to weaken Georgia and restore the Soviet Union.

- *'I think this war [August 2008] was artificial.' (Female, 27, married, teacher of biology and chemistry, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)*
- *'The reason is Russia. It is always aggressive, imperialistic. Moreover, they now have such people [aggressive and imperialistic] in the government.' (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)*
- *'Russia wants Georgia to be weak.' (Male, 36, single, higher education, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)*
- *'Russia wants to re-establish the Soviet Union.' (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)*

### **[Q6 Follow-Up] – How could violence have been prevented in the past?**

Different opinions were heard from participants on the prevention of violence. While some said that it had been impossible to prevent the war, others thought that it could have been avoided with well-timed diplomacy and international intervention. Most participants agreed that it was not a question of Georgian policy only, but that Western countries had played their part as well.

- *'We can do nothing about the "bear".'* (Male, 59, married, radio technician, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'If the war hadn't happened in 2008, it would happen in 2010 or 2011. The war was impossible to prevent. Russians had been writing about this for a long time.'* (Male, 61, married, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'I think it would have been possible to prevent the war. If the world and the USA had intervened in time, in a peaceful and diplomatic way.'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'If you are interested in the truth, you should go to the Kremlin and the White House. We are such a small country.'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'I think these countries are lying to us. No one wants to worsen their relationship with Russia. Germany and France do not want this, either.'* (Male, 36, single, higher education, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)

### **[Q6 Follow-Up] – What could government representatives do better?**

The focus group participants said that the government should try its best to guarantee Georgia's NATO membership. However, some said that Georgia's permanent engagement in conflicts and low democratic performance were obstacles to this effort.

- *'They should speed up the process of our joining NATO.'* (Male, 59, married, radio technician, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'In my opinion, the state should support democracy and freedom. We weren't accepted to NATO not because Germany and Russia, but because we were not democratic enough. I think that if we were truly democratic, France and Germany wouldn't prevent Georgia from entering. But we are constantly engaged in wars, and it's not really easy to become democratic.'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)

### **[Q6 Follow-Up] – What could you and other community members do by yourselves?**

The focus group participants felt that they are unable to contribute to the resolution of the conflict. They, however, mentioned that their community could help to improve the democratic standards in Georgia by holding good and fair elections.

- *'Our community can only stay in its village and carry out good and fair elections.'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)

**[Q6 Follow-Up] – What kind of engagements across the conflict divide (with communities in South Ossetia) would increase security and reduce tensions?**

The participants said that the presence of the Russian troops is a major problem, just as the need for visas to cross the ABL. Once these were gone, many thought that rebuilding the relationship between Ossetians and Georgians might be possible.

- *'The Russians must leave and we Georgians and Ossetians will be able to rebuild our relationship.'* (Male, 59, married, radio technician, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'You need a visa in order to go one meter, it's like a Berlin wall.'* (Female, 30, married, music teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'You need to apply for a visa 3 months in advance in order to go in Tskhinvali.'* (Male, 59, married, radio technician, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'Some kids, who have done no harm, just crossed the border. I do not know why, but they were arrested.'* (Female, 28, married, German-language and literature teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)

**[Q6 Follow-Up] – Is there anything else that national and international society could do to make your community more secure?**

Most thought that the key to a safer community lies in international help, but they specifically disapproved of the Russian presence.

- *'Isn't it possible to deploy the UN police instead of our police officers who get shot at every night?'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'Personally I think that the Russians must leave!'* (Male, 59, married, radio technician, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)

**Improving Community Engagement and Participation**

**Q7 – How do you think community members can become more involved in understanding and addressing local safety and security concerns?**

The main idea that focus group participants emphasised was to choose representatives. These active people who could meet NGO actors and solve the problems facing the community. They also mentioned petitions, which are already carried out in Nikozi-Mereti, as a means of increasing civil involvement.

- *'There should be elected representatives from each district in the village, who would be well informed about the people's needs and solve those issues'*



*together with the local authorities.’ (Female, 30, married, music teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)*

- *‘About 20 people representing the village should gather and speak with those who can solve the problems facing the community.’ (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)*
- *‘For instance, there are people starting petitions about different issues in our village. Some sign for road repairs, some for a new kindergarten. I think the issue the most people sign for will be tackled.’ (Female, 28, married, German-language and literature teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)*

### **[Q7 Follow-Up] – What kind of local concerns would community members be willing to exchange information on via SMS/telephones?**

The focus group participants prefer to exchange their information face to face rather than using phones for that purpose.

- *‘It’s better to exchange information face to face, not via phones.’ (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)*

### **[Q7 Follow-Up] – What kind of incentives would encourage involvement?**

Some participants emphasised that a remuneration would be the best incentive, while others said that a sufficient motivation for involvement would be the responses to problems the community reports on.

- *‘Elementary motivation – one must have some remuneration.’ (Female, 28, married, German-language and literature teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)*
- *‘The most important thing is that there should be people who actually consider our input. At the local level, everyone would be willing to cooperate without payment. There will be a person selected who will report about our problems here.’ (Female, 54, married, economist, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)*
- *‘If there’s a response on information we provide, it will be easy to find a person willing to provide the information on the problems without payment.’ (Male, 20, married, student, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)*

### **Q8 – How could the communities engage more with security providers?**

The focus group participants said that the form of engagement should be determined by the community’s needs. They also emphasised that the engagement should not only be aimed at community issues, but also at the individual problems of community members, including legal and medical services.

- *‘According to the need [of the community].’ (Female, 27, married, teacher of biology and chemistry, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)*



- *'During the meeting [with NGOs] there should not only be talks about community issues, but also about individual needs of community members, for example need for legal consultations, medical care, human rights issues, etc. Then we could help such people.'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)

#### **[Q8 Follow-Up] – What outcomes would you like from the engagement?**

The focus group participants underlined that they wish their demands to be satisfied and every benefit to be fairly shared. One participant, however, said that the responsibility for this fairness lies with the villagers themselves.

- *'Our demands should be satisfied.'* (Female, 27, married, teacher of biology and chemistry, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'This [the collaboration between villagers and NGOs] should be done fairly.'* (Female, 30, married, music teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'This depends on us. Just imagine we decide something, how can this be unfair? This already depends on us, not on them [the NGOs].'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)

#### **Q9 – Now, still speaking about engagement, what do you think are the challenges for greater engagement?**

The group had no clear opinions about this issue, but the idea was expressed that development should come from the population itself and not from the outside.

- *'We do not want assistance from others. We want the population to work and do everything by themselves. We need help with this.'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)

#### **[Q9 Follow-Up] – What would stop the community from getting involved?**

The participants said that if people that are involved will be fair, clever and impartial than there won't be any problem. Bias and corruption could disengage the public. Some said that it would be impossible to satisfy everyone, leaving some bitter.

- *'Obstacles will arise once they [representatives] give priority to their private concerns.'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'Some will be satisfied, but others not.'* (Female, 44, married, nurse, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)

#### **[Q9 Follow-Up] – How would greater community mobilization on security and safety issues be understood by local and national authorities (both in negative and positive ways)?**

Most focus group participants were convinced that the authorities would welcome such a mobilization, as it would make their work easier. Some,

however, argued that there might be problems the authorities do not want to be resolved at all. They would then see the new initiative as an attempt to create an opposition.

- *'Authorities will have a positive attitude since some problems will be resolved without disturbing them.'* (Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'If we would resolve some issues that the authorities do not want to be resolved, then we may become like an opposition to them.'* (Female, 28, married, German-language and literature teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'There may be some obstacles, they may not react to all that.'* (Male, 20, married, student, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)

**[Q9 Follow-Up] – Will there be any risks to community participants?  
What will cause these risks and how can be managed?**

Most of the participants think that there might be a risk of pressure on community members to refrain from participation, especially if the needs that are expressed are interpreted as pro-Russian. On the other hand, it was said that the government is interested in solving issues at the local level and could thus be willing to support community engagement. However, some participants expressed doubts whether their needs would be addressed at all.

- *'If we would talk about that there is no access to the Russian market, it's a problem. It could be a great risk to say that we want Russia and the Russian market.'* (Female, 28, married, German-language and literature teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'Maybe there is a risk of fear, of pressure on community participants to refrain from engagement.'* (Female, 44, married, nurse, employed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'The government does not want people to be dissatisfied because of their problems, so they would be glad if even two issues out of ten were solved.'* (Male, 20, married, student, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)
- *'There may be a risk that our concerns would remain unheard.'* (Male, 20, married, student, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti)

## Analysis Plavismani-Bershueti

### Community Safety and Security

#### Q1 – What makes you feel insecure in your life in general?

The main problem that makes people in this community feel insecure is their place of residence, the fact that the village is very close to the Ossetian villages and the presence of Russian troops.

- *'Our community's place of residence, in general.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'The Ossetia factor, first of all, because we live on the border. We live in conditions in which we don't know what will happen tomorrow. We cannot feel safe because the Russians can do whatever they want. And we don't have any defence mechanisms.'* (Male, 48, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'Kidnapping people.'* (Female, 24, single, business administrator, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'The drinkable water. The water that we use today runs through the territories populated by Ossetians and occupied by Russians. This does not give us the guarantee that we will get that water clean and that we can use it for drinking.'* (Female, 36, married, history teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

#### [Q1 Follow-Up] – What type of incidents make you feel insecure?

The kidnapping of people and of cattle were the other problematic issues which made people feel unsafe and insecure. One woman said someone died from drinking water that had been poisoned.

- *'Very often last year they took the cattle, and whoever went after them were also captured.'* (Male, 48, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'Several days ago a man went there to check the water system. They captured him and beat him before they let him go.'* (Female, 45, married, teacher, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'We had a sad case where the water was poisoned and it ended in [someone's] death.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

#### Q2 – What do you think the most serious concerns are in your community?

Problems related to economic factors, unemployment and producing crops were named as the most serious concerns in the village. Most of the people do not work and they said that everything is related to finances.

- *'The economic factor. Almost the majority of the population is unemployed today. Now everybody is considered to be a private owner. But this is not enough to sustain yourself. Only the school functions and is where one can*

*find a job, though it is still very hard. There is one ambulatory that works, and part of our village is employed there, and rest of them are chained to the land. But the land does not give much, especially in these conditions. We mentioned that a big part of the land will be on the other side where the border will be drawn very soon.’ (Female, 36, married, history teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)*

- *‘To cultivate the land and produce crops, everything is related to finances. If you don’t spend money you won’t get anything, which is more difficult now.’ (Female, 36, married, history teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)*
- *‘They filled the country with Turkish products. What products can we sell? If we sell, then what price would it be? Everybody knows what our problem is. Everybody in Georgia knows that a Georgian apple is tastier than an Iranian one, but it [the Iranian one] is better in quality. Because the pesticide is so expensive, we cannot use it all the time. They import the apple at very low prices and our products aren’t exported anywhere. In Azerbaijan it is forbidden to import our products.’ (Male, 48, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti)*
- *‘The crops were sown. But then they cut off the water [from its natural source] and all the crops died.’ (Male, 22, married, energy specialist, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti)*

### **[Q2 Follow-Up] – What concerns make you think about leaving your community?**

Difficulties with the irrigation system and a lack of money and places to work make people consider leaving their houses and moving to cities. But the main reason, according to them, is the irrigation system; it is very hard to look after the land and to water it. As there are no other opportunities for people, they move to other places.

- *‘The whole village is empty. Only one school functions. Before, there were industries and factories in our village. Mills were in operation. Now nothing is functioning anymore, and people run to the cities.’ (Male, 58, married, Plavismani-Bershueti)*
- *‘The main reason is that there is no irrigation system. How can a farmer harvest his crops?’ (Female, 45, married, teacher, Plavismani-Bershueti)*

### **[Q2 Follow-Up] – Changes after the August conflict**

After the conflict, the economic situation has worsened in terms of producing and selling agricultural products. In addition, people are afraid of the Ossetians and Russians living near their village. Incidents of aggression, violence and theft are very common. Many people are now selling their houses and moving to the cities.

- *‘Many people came to our village. We have a very beautiful village, with beautiful natural surroundings and good air. People came from Tbilisi, bought houses. Now everybody is selling them back.’ (Male, 48, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti)*

- *'The churches are also left on that side [of the ABL]. People from Plavismani-Bershueti cannot go there, even to light a candle.'* (Male, 29, single, secondary education, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'Not only churches but the graves are also on the other side.'* (Female, 36, married, history teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'People can be divided into categories. There are people in Ossetia who you can contact and connect with. This process should not be lost. But it is a fact that some groups do not want Ossetians and Georgians to get along.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

### **Q3 – How do you assess the level of physical safety and security in your community compared with other neighbouring communities?**

People who live in Plavismani-Bershueti see themselves to be in a slightly different situation from other communities. As it is the first village right next to the border, they feel much more insecure and unsafe. They feel that if something happens, they will not have enough time to react.

- *'Those villages close to the border are more or less in the same situation. But whoever is farther from [the border] is in a bit better situation, probably. Before something happens, they will have more time to run. We do not have this chance; we are so close. We feel really insecure... We sleep with fear – if we sleep.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

### **[Q3 Follow-Up] – What distinguishes your community from neighbouring ones?**

People spoke of their community very positively. They said that people in Plavismani-Bershueti are educated and proud of their village.

- *'The people themselves are different from other communities.'* (Female, 24, single, business administrator, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'Everyone loves their village but we especially are proud of our village.'* (Male, 48, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'When someone from the neighbouring village goes somewhere unfamiliar, they often say they are from Plavismani-Bershueti, even though they really aren't.'* (Male, 58, married, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'During the war, the villages were empty; everybody ran. But the people from Plavismani-Bershueti went nowhere. Both women and men stayed; everyone was protecting their houses.'* (Female, 45, married, teacher, Plavismani-Bershueti)

### **[Q3 Follow-Up] – What differences are there in the key issues affecting physical safety and security in other neighbouring communities?**

Two reasons why people may feel different degrees of safety and security are help from the authorities and good relations with the Ossetians themselves. It



was said that Plavismani-Bershueti did not receive as much economic aid as did the surrounding villages.

- *'We had better relations with people on the other side of the border. There were even moments when we thought that they were protecting us.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'The safety in other villages was ensured through economic aid. This was absolutely the case in every village around us.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'There are children in the school to whom we gave shoes and clothes, and they are not on the socially disadvantaged list. I don't know by what criteria they choose who is eligible to be on the list.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

### **[Q3 Follow-Up] – Why are there differences in the level of physical safety and security?**

Instead of answering this question in a direct manner, the participants took the opportunity to discuss how the actual size of the village was plausible as a reason for the authorities' type of approach to helping their community. Other smaller villages received help from the authorities, but residents in Plavismani-Bershueti said they did not.

- *'When we went somewhere and talked about this issue, they said that Plavismani-Bershueti is a big village. We made the conclusion that it is probably easier to make smaller communities thankful.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'Yes, definitely there is not a consistent approach'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'There are many poor people in the village who remain only on the single hope of the land. They are looking at the sky to see if there is rain or hail, whether or not they will have crops [to harvest]. And meanwhile, they are helping the small communities who already have everything; for example, the authorities gave them water.'* (Male, 48, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'Before the war, when there was an incident or clash, we defended those Ossetians during those conflicts and that is probably why it is such situation today. This is why our village is different from other villages; others [people from other villages on the Georgian side] were raiding Ossetian villages.'* (Male, 58, married, Plavismani-Bershueti)

### **[Q3 Follow-Up] – Changes after the August conflict**

After the August conflict, the situation has changed in terms of relations between the people in Plavismani-Bershueti and those in the Ossetian villages. The ABL is now closed and people cannot move freely between villages. Families and friends have been separated, making the closed border even more of a problem.

- *'We had very close relations with Ossetian people. They were coming here every week to sell products and to buy everything they needed. They came*



*after the war, but then our special forces [from the Georgian side] made them leave and warned them never to come again. We cannot go there either; that's why the relationship has worsened.'* (Male, 48, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

- *'They made people, who came to buy bread, for example, go back.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'Our relations with Ossetians go back centuries. We have very many mixed families and this is a huge problem today. The relatives are practically losing touch with each other: we cannot go there, and they cannot come here. And this is a huge problem, especially after the August war.'* (Female, 36, married, history teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

## Understandings of Conflict

### Q4 – What do you think are the key issues for ensuring future stability and peace in your region?

The participants said that the key issue for future stability and peace in the region is good state politics. In short, dialogue between the authorities from both sides is very important.

- *'Normal state politics. The conversation must be held between the authorities of both sides.'* (Female, 45, married, teacher, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'Good relations. And this is the opinion of the whole of Plavismani-Bershueti.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

### [Q4 Follow-Up] – What are the longer-term or underlying causes of tension and violence?

The one and only cause of tension and violence in the region was said to be the Russians. Before they came to the region, according to the participants, everything was good. Relations between the people have since become strained.

- *'I see Russians as the reason for all of this.'* (Male, 48, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'The Russians should let us be on our own; we know what to do. Before them, we had great relations with the Ossetians.'* (Male, 58, married, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'The Ossetians were coming and going whenever they wanted to.'* (Female, 25, married, teacher, Plavismani-Bershueti)

### [Q4 Follow-Up] – What types of factors – e.g. political, security, social and cultural – contribute to conflict?

Mainly political factors were named to contribute to the conflict. Closed borders and the impossibility of crossing them – even when it is necessary, e.g. when a family member or friend is dying – make the situation even worse. People think that cultural relations and dialogue can make up for everything.

- *'Mainly political'* (Female, 45, married, teacher, Plavismani-Bershueti)

- *'The Russians closed them [the borders], so that nothing exists for them now. Ordinary people cannot talk to each other anymore.'* (Male, 48, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'The Sukhishvili dance ensemble was here in Plavismani-Bershueti. Some Ossetians were watching with binoculars, they wanted to come to the performance and then did, and the Russians did as well. They did not bother anyone. So if cultural relations are good and political dialogue is calm I think everything can be restored.'* (Female, 45, married, teacher, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'Several days ago, a boy died due to heart problems. Our authorities did not give them the right to come here. Why is it not possible to allow doctors to cross [the border] and treat people? On the Ossetian side, they do not have doctors and we have.'* (Male, 48, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

#### **[Q4 Follow-Up] – What has led to violence in the past or could enable it to happen in the future (e.g. events that trigger violence)?**

The people said that the fall-out from the Soviet Union's collapse was the main reason behind the violence. People were not ready for 'freedom' and did not know what to do next. As regards the future, potential factors that could lead to violence include the economic situation, unemployment, a lack of education and a political course which is not constructive in nature. One person said that it would depend on the way in which future leaders govern.

- *'I mean the collapse of the Soviet Union. Nobody knew what would happen next, what they should do or how they should do it.'* (Male, 48, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'The lack of education may cause the violence.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'The economic difficulties.'* (Male, 48, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'Incorrect politics. Relations with other countries.'* (Male, 30, single, higher education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'We don't know what forces will come to power. It may be an ambitious leader who governs these uneducated masses in an incorrect way.'* (Female, 58, married, high education, works at the school, Plavismani-Bershueti)

#### **[Q4 Follow-Up] – How accurate do you think the media is when reports on conflict?**

The first and the most important issue in case of media are unqualified journalists. People said that very often the information reported is inaccurate. According to the participants, sometimes the media exaggerate the real situation, and things that are important to them are left out.

- *'This is for everybody, right? The population is not only one city. The population is not interested how people are entertained in the clubs, who eats or drinks what. The journalists must report on the issues that are*

*painful for everybody. Very often, the political news, in my opinion, is much exaggerated. It is not true and not exact.'* (Female, 36, married, history teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

- *'It may happen that different news stations give different interpretations of the same issue and you don't know which one to believe.'* (Female, 36, married, history teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'They sow panic and that's it.'* (Male, 29, single, secondary education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti.)
- *'They report inaccurate information.'* (Female, 24, single, business administrator, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'They do whatever is best for them.'* (Female, 45, married, teacher, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'There is no water. They say here is a well. Why they don't show what comes from that well? Why don't they show that mud comes out of it?'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

#### **Q5 – What impact has the August 2008 had on people's lives in the region? [+ Follow-Up] – How has August 2008 affected people's perceptions of security?**

The participants said that after August 2008 their psychological condition has worsened. Absolutely everybody, including young children and adults, feel a high degree of stress. People lost interest in everything; they are waiting for what will happen next.

- *'This had impact on people's mental development. Absolutely everybody's psyche is affected – little children as well as adults. We are half of what we were.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'We have lost interest in everything. Nobody knows what will happen or when.'* (Female, 24, single, business administrator, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'When they were bombing us, we ran away... Now we don't want to run, we don't even know where to run, or if the same thing will happen.'* (Female, 25, married, teacher, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'Children at school protested against drawing or writing anything about the war again. They want to forget everything.'* (Female, 36, married, history teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

#### **[Q5 Follow-Up] – What is the mood in the region since August 2008?**

The mood in the region after the August war has worsened. The youth no longer go out or seek to entertain themselves the way they did before the war. No more music is heard outside; everybody is at home, worried. But slowly, there are some glimpses of people's mood lightening.

- *'The youth used to gather at the stadium in the evenings. They were having a good time, creating makeshift discotheques, playing music. After the war, when everybody returned home, [you'd think] they would come out again,*

*right? No. Everybody was at home, lost in their thoughts, worrying.'*  
(Female, 24, single, business administrator, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

- *'Now, slowly, the youth is revitalised and returning to their normal life rhythms, though the fear factor still remains.'* (Female, 45, married, teacher, Plavismani-Bershueti)

#### **[Q5 Follow-Up] – How has the August 2008 conflict changed the political/economic/social landscape in the region?**

The participants did not have much to say about this issue, they are waiting for the elections. One person said that the social condition has worsened, though.

- *'The elections will show us [what will happen].'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'The social condition has worsened.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

#### **[Q5 Follow-Up] – How do people feel about their future? Why?**

The only thing that came to people's mind about their future is to 'run away'. Abroad, to Tbilisi – anywhere they think would give them better life. Some of them are allowing their children go abroad.

- *'To run away.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'Some are going abroad, some to Tbilisi, where life will be good.'* (Male, 58, married, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'If they can afford it, they send their children abroad. When those children go abroad and study, they won't come back, for sure.'* (Female, 36, married, history teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

#### **Q6 – Who do you think can resolve the underlying issues and prevent tension and violence, and how?**

The participants thought that Mikhail Saakashvili could decide how to resolve the tension. The people, too, were said to have great power.

- *'First of all, Saakashvili. He has to decide.'* (Male, 58, married, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'People'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'People have great power.'* (Female, 45, married, teacher, Plavismani-Bershueti)

#### **[Q6 Follow-Up] – What do you think is the role of international organisations?**

People do not believe in international organisations. They think that Europe and the European Union will behave according to their needs and their own welfare. A concerned attitude, one participant said, would not be enough to help them.

- *'Everybody knows that the war happened because of the Nabucco project. While they were discussing this project, Russia took the territories.'* (Male, 48, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'They are not behaving the way they should.'* (Female, 45, married, teacher, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'We want them to act concretely. A concerned attitude is not enough; this will not help us.'* (Female, 36, married, history teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

#### **[Q6 Follow-Up] – What do you think is the role of civil society?**

Only one participant answered this question, and it did not relate directly to civil society.

- *'Good-neighbourly relations are possible here, if we will have such opportunity.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

#### **[Q6 Follow-Up] – What do you think is the role of government?**

The participants noted that the government should play a key role in retaining Georgia's territory.

- *'In this situation, the government is key.'* (Male, 30, single, higher education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'They can do something, for sure. With war we can do nothing; this is a fact. We cannot struggle with them.'* (Female, 36, married, history teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'We don't have territories that we can afford to lose.'* (Female, 45, married, teacher, Plavismani-Bershueti)

#### **[Q6 Follow-Up] – What do you think is the role of the communities themselves?**

The community is trying not to be involved in the provocations and not to engage in the conflict. They felt that this is the only thing they can do.

- *'The community is trying its best not to get caught in situations of any provocations. This is the only thing that the community can do, i.e. not to get in the middle of the conflict.'* (Female, 36, married, history teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

#### **[Q6 Follow-Up] – What do you think is the role of the community leaders?**

The participants said that leaders must come from the ordinary people and not the government. Two suggested that there are no leaders.

- *'The leaders must come from the people.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

- *‘There are people who can be our leaders, and who can really talk normally with Russians and Ossetians. But now they are not leaders of the community.’ (Female, 45, married, teacher, Plavismani-Bershueti)*
- *‘What leaders?’ (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)*
- *‘We don’t have leaders.’ (Male, 48, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti)*

## Improving Community Engagement and Participation

### **Q7– How do you think community members can become more involved in understanding and addressing local safety and security concerns?**

According to the participants, the only way the community members can be involved in local safety and security concerns is to form some kind of alliance, in which people can meet, talk and listen to each other. Its leader should be chosen by the people.

- *‘Some kind of an alliance could be formed.’ (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)*
- *‘There shouldn’t be one leader. People should decide on that.’ (Male, 29, single, secondary education, employed)*
- *‘Yes, where it will be possible for them to meet, listen to people’s ideas and take them into consideration.’ (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)*

### **[Q7 Follow-Up] – Which parts of the community in particular should be more involved?**

People who are intelligent, educated and are good at communicating should be involved.

- *‘The part of intelligentsia, educated, erudite, who are more capable and better communicators.’ (Female, 36, married, history teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)*

### **[Q7 Follow-Up] – Which types of concerns should they concentrate or work on, or would they be more interested in?**

Social, cultural and political concerns were named as the most important issues on which to concentrate. For this community, good relations with the Ossetians are the most important. And the only way the participants see this happening is by arranging cultural and other kinds of events that will aid to improve the relations between people.

- *‘Social issues probably, cultural issues.’ (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)*
- *‘Political also.’ (Male, 58, married, Plavismani-Bershueti)*



- *'Less political, probably.'* (Female, 45, married, teacher, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'Conversation is necessary and finding a common language with them.'* (Female, 36, married, history teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'Our generation remembers good relations with them. We had friends, relatives, in-laws, here and there – we remember such facts. But I'm afraid that as time goes on, the Ossetians' hearts will become cooler as will Georgians'. And restoring the relations will be even harder. That's why we need some kind of events that will help warming the relations.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

#### **[Q7 Follow-Up] – What kind of incentives would encourage involvement?**

People should be more interested in being involved in community problem-solving. If they see that their ideas and opinions are taken into full consideration, they will be eager to participate in all initiatives.

- *'If even one idea of the community is taken into the consideration and put into effect, then people will come along on every initiative.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'They should be interested with being involved in the community.'* (Female, 36, married, history teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

#### **Q8 – How could the communities engage more with security providers?**

The participants think that the only way their community could engage more with the security providers is through frequent contact with them. But, of course, they'd have to trust these providers.

- *'With frequent contacts. But there should be a trust factor. If we see today that something is done with our being here, and haven't wasted our time for nothing, then there will be some results. Next time, if you call me, I'll bring other people with me.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'We agree.'* (Male, 48, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

#### **[Q8 Follow-Up] – Which providers would community members most like to engage with?**

The local police was named as the main security provider. The only problem is that the people who work there are not familiar with the population, and this is sometimes the reason for conflicts and misunderstanding. In addition, a leader in the population is very important.

- *'Here we have the police department, who is responsible for our security. Today the relationship with the police is better, and people have faith in them. But when this police [officer] comes to my village for his duty, he or she is obliged to know the population very well.'* (Female, 36, married, history teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

- *'Who are employed in this police department? How many of them are representatives of the village? One or two. The rest of them are refugees. Of course, they should be there, but they are not familiar with the village population.'* (Male, 58, married, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'A normal leader who is right-thinking can solve the problems in right way. A leader is more powerful than the police.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

#### **[Q8 Follow-Up] – What would be the best format for engagement with the relevant organisations and institutions?**

A person said that different events could be held in which people can talk with each other.

- *'For example, if the organisation can arrange some kind of an event in this community, to come and talk with the people.'* (Female, 36, married, history teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

#### **[Q8 Follow-Up] – What would encourage communities to participate – and how?**

According to the people, the community should have representatives tasked with meeting community residents directly.

- *'The community must have his representative.'* (Male, 58, married, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'Most of the people don't have phones in here. This prevents the participation so it would be better if someone could come personally to ask the questions personally.'* (Female, 36, married, history teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'It is not necessary to go to 3,000 different families. They can go to every tenth or every twentieth.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'There can be some research done on this issue.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

#### **Q9– Now, still speaking about engagement, what are the challenges for greater engagement?**

The participants named several challenges that could prevent their engagement: the economic situation and a lack of knowledge, of trust or of information.

- *'One's economic condition. It may happen that somebody won't be active because of the other problems.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'Lack of knowledge.'* (Male, 58, married, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'Lack of trust.'* (Female, 25, married, teacher, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'Lack of information.'* (Male, 30, single, higher education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

- *'Incorrect information.'* (Female, 24, single, business administrator, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

**[Q9 Follow-Up] – What would stop the community from getting involved?**

A different kind of pressure is the main reason why people from the community would not be able to be involved: they are afraid that they would be fired.

- *'Psychological and economic. If you are fired, it is an economic pressure, of course.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'Maybe they won't fire you but you will get a warning. It will mostly be psychological pressure.'* (Female, 36, married, history teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'Pressure.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

**[Q9 Follow-Up] – How would greater community mobilization on security and safety issues be understood by local and national authorities (both in negative and positive ways)?**

One person thought that the authorities would not like the community to be more involved in these issues.

- *'They won't like it. Because, as we said before, we needed water and they made gravel. Who needed that?'* (Male, 48, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti)

**[Q9 Follow-Up] – Are there any concerns that cannot be discussed (because people may not want to discuss them or because of the risks associated with them)?**

Some of the people said that sometimes they could not fully say what they want.

- *'We are still scared and cannot say fully what we want.'* (Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti)
- *'It is governed from above. Nobody asks you anything.'* (Male, 58, married, Plavismani-Bershueti)

## Analysis Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>

### Community Safety and Security

#### Q1 - What makes you feel insecure in your life, in general?

The absence of peace and stability in the country were named as the main factors for feelings of insecurity among the focus group participants. Unemployment, the loss of family members and the absence of people around also made participants feel insecure in their life.

- *'You feel the most insecure when there is disorder in the country and there is no peace.'* (Female, 48, widow, accountant, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'When you are unemployed, you feel insecure as you have no income.'* (Male, 21, single, student of economics, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'Family members mean a lot. I lost my husband, for example, and I feel insecure because of that.'* (Female, 48, widow, accountant, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'When there are no people around and you are alone, you feel insecure.'* (Male, 21, single, student of economics, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)

#### [Q1 Follow-Up] - Do you feel safe in your community? Are there any changes after the August conflict?

The participants expressed that they could not afford to feel safe as they were under constant psychological stress because of the proximity of the Russian troops and the instability in the country. Otherwise, the situation in their village was normal and relations between people within their village and with neighbouring villages had not changed after the August war.

- *'We cannot say that we are safe; troops are located within 200 meters and you never know when they will [carry out manoeuvres]. There is a lot of psychological pressure and stress on us.'* (Male, 46, married, teacher, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'Neighbourly relations between us remain the same. You are Georgian, he or she is Ossetian – it does not matter.'* (Female, 45, married, lawyer, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'Nothing is different within the village itself. Georgians marry Ossetians, and vice versa.'* (Female, 48, widow, accountant, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)

#### Q2 - What do you think the most serious concerns are in your community?

An absence of irrigation water, gas, pastures and continuous insecurity were identified by the focus group participants as the most serious concerns for the community in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>.

- *'Our community is in a difficult situation as there is no irrigation water, and thus, [there can be] no harvest. And the villagers cannot move freely to find work. Our work is not in the office, but in the field.'* (Male, 50, married, economist, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GE0</sup>)
- *'If you have no livestock in the village, how can you get by? And after the war we are afraid to send them to pasture. There is no secure place left for that. The pasture is located next to the Tsinagara village. No Tsinagara resident will touch your cow, but what if people come from Tskhinvali and drive the cattle away?'* (Female, 45, married, lawyer, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GE0</sup>)
- *'Gas, water and roads are serious concerns. Our Sakrebulo is entirely linked to pipeline gas, but our village is not.'* (Female, 48, widow, accountant, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GE0</sup>)
- *'Gas is the most serious concern. We used to cut plane trees but nothing is left now. We received many promises on gas, but none of them were fulfilled.'* (Female, 46, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GE0</sup>)

#### **[Q2 Follow-Up] - What concerns make you think about leaving your community?**

The participants said they would not consider leaving their community unless they were forced to. They recalled that during the August war women and children had left the area, though the men stayed.

- *'During the war, about 200 tanks entered the area; we sent our wives and children away, but we men stayed.'* (Male, 46, married, teacher, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GE0</sup>)
- *'We did not think of leaving. Where would we go? The country does not need more IDPs.'* (Male, 46, married, teacher, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GE0</sup>)
- *'Where I was born, where I grew up, started walking and talking, how can I leave that place?'* (Male, 21, single, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GE0</sup>)
- *'I have nowhere to go. If someone breaks in, like in the August war, I will flee, but otherwise I will stay home.'* (Female, 45, married, lawyer, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GE0</sup>)
- *'If we are forced to go, we will have to go. Otherwise, we don't think of going. We are OK here.'* (Male, 50, married, economist, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GE0</sup>)

#### **[Q2 Follow-Up] - Which concerns would you prioritise for a resolution to the community's problems?**

Instead of answering this question directly, the participants said they would decide to leave the place if they could find a job, or for better living conditions and a house in the city. However, they would not cut ties entirely from the village.

- *'If I have a house and carefree life, I would go to the city, of course.'* (Female, 48, widow, accountant, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'If I have better living conditions.'* (Female, 48, widow, accountant, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'If I find a well-paid job.'* (Female, 45, married, lawyer, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'If I have a place to live in the city and good conditions, I will go, but I will never forget the village and will visit it often.'* (Male, 21, single, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)

### **[Q2 Follow-Up] - Changes after the August conflict**

The August war seems to have changed people's plans for the future. The participants said their thoughts were different now; they do not know what might come next and feel very insecure.

- *'I was planning to repair my house, but I stopped. It is better to have some money, if they come, you will be able to flee more easily.'* (Male, 46, married, teacher, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'People had many plans but now our concerns are different.'* (Male, 21, single, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'During the war I had a moment when I thought: "Ok, I will go. But what will happen to everything I had been building all my life? Someone will come and destroy everything; how can I start anew?" Thank God our village survived; troops came but did not ransack the houses. We survived then, but anything can happen any minute.'* (Male, 50, married, economist, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)

### **Q3 - How do you assess the level of physical safety and security in your community compared with other neighbouring communities?**

The participants said their village and the neighbouring villages were all in bad condition and insecure. Villages along the road had slightly better chances to flee if the enemy invaded. Participants also said that Ossetians from neighbouring villages would not come to shoot them, but that they expect no mercy from Russian troops.

- *'It is not safe either in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> or Mkhurvaleti.'* (Female, 48, widow, accountant, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'Villages near the road are a little more secure. If troops come, they may manage to flee, but we will probably not even manage to get out of our beds.'* (Male, 46, married, teacher, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'We Adjarians settled in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> 20 years ago. During Soviet times, our Adjarian village was considered a borderline zone and we thought it was enough for our ancestors to protect the border and we would live in the centre of the country. But it is an irony of fate as we are now in the borderline zone again and it is even worse.'* (Male, 50, married, economist, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)



- *'Ossetians from Tsinagara will not come to Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>, Mkhurvaleti or Nitrata and shoot at us.'* (Female, 48, widow, accountant, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'They are peasants just like us.'* (Male, 46, married, teacher, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'The Russian army will have no mercy.'* (Female, 48, widow, accountant, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)

## Understandings of Conflict

### Q4 - What do you think are the key issues for ensuring future stability and peace in your region?

People recognised dialogue as key for ensuring stability and peace in the region.

- *'Dialogue, clever dialogue with the neighbour that we fear. It can be a long-term programme, 10 years or more, but it is always better to have normal relations.'* (Male, 46, married, teacher, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)

### [Q4 Follow-Up] - What are the longer-term or underlying causes of tension and violence?

Competition for power in and influence over the Caucasus as well as the Russian wish to restore the Soviet Union were named as the causes of tension and violence. Some also mentioned Russia's perceived insatiability for territory. The idea was expressed that people-to-people negotiations could resolve the situation provided there was no interference from the authorities.

- *'There are two countries in the world interested in power: the United States and Russia. Russia does not want to lose influence over the countries around it. And it is looking for spots it can rely on. Ossetians and Abkhazians – it uses them against us. The United States is interested in the Caucasus region, it has special interests in the region and the US is using us.'* (Male, 50, married, economist, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'The cause of the current situation is that they want to restore the Soviet Union.'* (Male, 46, married, teacher, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'The division of territories and the drive to regain the lost territories.'* (Female, 29, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'The insatiability of Russians.'* (Male, 46, married, teacher, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'What are our negotiations, our relations? We have no say in those decisions. If we take a human and "Orthodox" approach to the Ossetians and Abkhazians, if both sides think and behave taking each other into consideration, everything will be resolved. If only the government did not interfere.'* (Male, 50, married, economist, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)

#### **[Q4 Follow-Up] - What types of factors, e.g. political, security, social and cultural, contribute to conflict?**

The participants stated that mainly political factors contributed to the conflict.

- *'Political factors are more important; everyone thinks of his or her own "chair" [position]. What do we villagers have to divide? Nothing. If our governments talk and hold dialogue, something will happen. Otherwise, the villagers have no power.'* (Female, 46, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)

#### **[Q4 Follow-Up] - How accurate do you think the media is when it reports on conflict?**

The participants were not satisfied with the way media reported the conflict. They found many inaccuracies and cited examples of the recent staged war on Imedi TV and the coverage during the August war. The participants said that both the journalists and the government representatives appearing on television were not careful with their words. They also stated that those people had no right to make mistakes as it could lead to bad consequences.

- *'There are many inaccuracies and the television should not allow itself to broadcast them.'* (Female, 48, widow, accountant, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'Media broadcasts are very inaccurately. For example, the [staged] war reported on Imedi that day. Ordinary people are to be pitied. Georgians become afraid of Ossetians and Ossetians of Georgians. They make the situation even tenser.'* (Female, 45, married, lawyer, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'People live in fear and they caused more panic through Imedi that day. I was receiving calls from Batumi on what was happening and if troops were truly there.'* (Male, 24, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'During the war when the Russian army left Sachkhere, the TV broadcasted that we had frightened them and made them withdraw. But within five minutes they returned.'* (Male, 46, married, teacher, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'Shota Rustaveli's aphorism states that sometimes it is better to speak than to be silent, but that sometimes speaking does more harm than silence [does]. When you are a journalist and appear on TV, you must be careful and adopt a neutral tone so as not to irritate and offend people.'* (Male, 50, married, economist, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'I observe and I am very disappointed. For example, I may give an interview on TV and make a mistake, as I am an ordinary person. But when government officials make mistakes on TV, it's wrong. When Zviad Gamsakhurdia came to Adjara and told people: "Brother Adjarians, you are also Georgians!", people were mad at that and kicked him off. The biggest mistake and crime was committed then and government should have been more careful. He said similar things to the Ossetians, then to other people,*

*and this is where the conflict started.’ (Male, 50, married, economist, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)*

### **Q5 - What impact has the August 2008 had on people’s lives in the region?**

The participants said that the war had mainly had a psychological impact on people’s lives. Vivid pictures of war were recalled during the discussion. It was also mentioned that fear of war made nationality unimportant and brought a certain unity to people.

- *‘People were shocked. Some went crazy.’ (Female, 48, widow, accountant, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)*
- *‘I was not afraid of bullets and troops, but when fire started, real hot blazing fire and I thought we could all die, choked like mice in the smoke, it was the biggest psychological stress and trauma.’ (Male, 46, married, teacher, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)*
- *‘It did not matter if you were Georgian or not, when we fled to a high mountainous village of Kaspi, nationality had no importance. Everyone fled because it was war, not because the Ossetians were coming.’ (Male, 50, married, economist, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)*

### **[Q5 Follow-Up] - How has the 2008 August war affected people’s perceptions of security?**

The war left the participants in fear, and they were only gradually returning to their normal life.

- *‘We are gradually returning to our normal lives, but we still have fear.’ (Male, 21, single, student of economics, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)*

### **[Q5 Follow-Up] - What is the mood in the region since August 2008?**

People said that relations with the Ossetians had not changed since the August war. In their village, Ossetians and Georgians were closely intertwined with each other. There were many mixed marriages, godfather-godchild relations and friendships, and the August 2008 conflict did not change that.

- *‘The relations between Ossetians and Georgians are the same in our village.’ (Female, 48, widow, accountant, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)*
- *‘In our village we are all very close. We are friends, many people are godfathers of other families’ children, relatives, and many Georgians are married to Ossetians, and vice versa.’ (Male, 21, single, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)*

### **[Q5 Follow-Up] - How has the August 2008 conflict changed the political/economic/social landscape in the region?**

The focus group participants said that after the August 2008 conflict their village experienced economic hardship. Problems, such as absence of firewood in winter

or a reluctance to return to agricultural activities due to insecurity in the area became more acute than before.

- *'The village is economically in a very difficult situation. The winter was very cold this year and many people had no firewood for heating. The promised gas never came.'* (Female, 46, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'We used to go to Tsinagara for wood before, now we cannot go there. We cannot go anywhere.'* (Male, 24, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'There was a moment when people said they would not plant anything as it was pointless, as the Russians would come and seize everything.'* (Male, 21, single, student of economics, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)

#### **Q6 - What can be done to strengthen your community's capacity to resist violence or provocations to violence?**

The participants said it was up to the government to make changes, not their village, and that security should be restored in all of Georgia, not only Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>. In addition, the participants pointed out that it would help them greatly if they had gas and were in a better economic situation.

- *'It does not depend on our village. It depends on the government. If the government makes changes in all parts of Georgia, it will be felt in our village as well. You cannot only protect our village [without protecting the rest of Georgia].'* (Male, 21, single, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'We can do nothing in terms of security, the only help would be if we had gas and were in a better economic situation.'* (Female, 45, married, lawyer, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)

#### **[Q6 Follow-Up] - What events or processes could lead to your community resorting to violence?**

The focus group participants cited the example of a lack of pastures for the cattle, which is the main source of living there. If someone took their livestock away, they said they would fight to get it back, which could spark small conflicts.

- *'The pasture [issue] can lead to violence. If you drive cattle to a pasture and someone takes it away, what can you then live on? People have few cattle left. God save us, but if they come over and take our cattle, who will let it happen? There will be a clash or something and it will start from little sparks.'* (Male, 46, married, teacher, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)

#### **[Q6 Follow-Up] - How has your community avoided resorting to violence in the past?**

The participants recalled collecting money and giving it to the Ossetians in order to let their cattle graze on their pastures. However, such things do not happen anymore. They also cited the example of how the community used to resolve minor disputes between villagers, including Georgians and Ossetians, about cattle, pastures or agricultural land.

- *'We used to gather money and pay the Tsinagara villagers for the pastures.'* (Female, 46, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'We would gather about 200 lari and take our cattle there.'* (Male, 46, married, teacher, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'What can the Sakrebulo do? There can be conflict between him and me over the land, cattle or something, and he or I can complain to the community. But the community can never distinguish if I am Georgian or Ossetian in order to reconcile the issue without taking the case to the police.'* (Male, 50, married, economist, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)

**[Q6 Follow-Up] - What do you think the international organisations can do to strengthen your community's capacity to resist violence or provocations to violence?**

The participants said the main thing the international community could do was to support dialogue between the two sides. They also mentioned that if the Russian troops withdrew, the neighbouring villages would take care of their relations. However, people saw it more as the Georgian government's responsibility than the international organisations'. Another important factor for discouraging violence was to treat the Ossetians normally and provide security for them to visit Georgian villages and cities.

- *'Dialogue is the only thing they can do.'* (Female, 48, widow, accountant, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'I have no access to Tsinagara, though they [the Ossetians] have. They should talk to them. We are one people. They should explain and persuade us both that there should not be war between us.'* (Male, 50, married, economist, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'The troops should withdraw and we will manage our neighbourly relations.'* (Female, 46, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'It is up to our government.'* (Female, 45, married, lawyer, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'Before the war, people from Tsinagara used to visit Gori, now they are not allowed to. I think if they are free to go to Gori, we will not longer have problems.'* (Female, 46, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'I know a case when someone came from Tsinagara to buy some food as their relative had died, and the Georgians took everything away from him. So, after that if you go there [to S. Ossetia] and get caught, it is not surprising.'* (Female, 45, married, lawyer, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)

**[Q6 Follow-Up] - What do you think civil society can do to strengthen your community's capacity to resist violence or provocations to violence?**

The participants saw civil society's role in bringing people together and supporting communication between Georgians and Ossetians, providing reliable information to both.



- *'If international or civil organisations manage to bring people together for dialogue, this would be good.'* (Male, 46, married, teacher, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'In our village there are Georgians and Ossetians. Our Sakrebulo is half-Georgian, half-Ossetian. Is anyone discriminated against for being Georgian or Ossetian? No. We should understand this. And they should understand this. Here we live under the same jurisdiction and the same conditions. If we cannot reach them to explain all this, those international and non-governmental organisations should do this.'* (Male, 50, married, economist, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)

**[Q6 Follow-Up] - What do you think the community leaders can do to strengthen your community's capacity to resist violence or provocations to violence?**

People did not identify any particular things community leaders could do apart from what they – i.e. the *gamgebeli* and *rtsmunebuli* [the local authorities] – were currently doing, for example, resolving minor issues between villagers. People seemed quite satisfied with the performance of their *gamgebeli*.

- *'He [the community leader] resolves problems himself, without any violence or punishment.'* (Male, 50, married, economist, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'Whether it is our gamgebeli or rtsmunebuli, when some little things happen, they never distinguish if a person is Georgian, Ossetian, Armenian or other.'* (Male, 46, married, teacher, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'We have a very good gamgebeli, by the way.'* (Female, 48, widow, accountant, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)

**Improving Community Engagement and Participation**

**Q7 - How do you think the community members can become more involved in understanding and addressing local safety and security concerns?**

Using their village as an example, the participants said they welcomed their involvement in negotiations as they had normal relations with the neighbouring village. If necessary, they would show initiative themselves; however, they needed to be sure that their words and actions would be heard and taken into consideration. They expressed that NGOs and international organisations should come to their village, hold meetings and listen to their concerns, but interact with more than just a couple of men in the street, but with women and other members of the community.

- *'Our involvement will be supporting them [the organisations] and participating in negotiations.'* (Male, 21, single, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'We will show initiative as well, as it will be better for us. For example, the pasture problem: peasants will show initiative in that kind of issues, as it is*



*better for the village.’ (Male, 21, single, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)*

- *‘I think the village community will be actively involved if our talk is not in vain and is taken into consideration.’ (Female, 45, married, lawyer, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)*
- *‘The NGOs and others [the international organisations] should come to the village and hold meetings. Then they will take our problems and concerns into consideration.’ (Female, 48, widow, accountant, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)*
- *‘We should hold meetings. There will be many people on the ground, and we will all participate.’ (Male, 50, married, economist, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)*
- *‘The government and NGOs should hear us.’ (Male, 21, single, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)*
- *‘Sometimes it happens that they [the organisations] come to the “birja” [a place outdoors where villagers hang out], talk to about three men or so, take their words [as representative of the community’s views] and go back. This is not right. I am a woman and have no time to go to the “birja”. We should know in advance that they are coming and we will prepare what to say. Everyone will go.’ (Female, 45, married, lawyer, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)*

#### **[Q7 Follow-Up] - What kind of incentives would encourage community involvement?**

The participants expressed that the best encouragement for them would be to see the results of their talks, to see that their concerns are addressed.

- *‘If even some results arose from our talks, we would feel more encouraged. We speak about our problems, but we need to see a little result in terms of our economic conditions or security.’ (Female, 46, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)*

#### **Q8 - How could the communities engage more with security providers?**

People said they had spoken with government representatives about their problems, but were more hopeful that NGOs would be helpful. And they preferred meetings and discussions as the form of engagement and communication with any organisations.

- *‘We have spoken with the government about our concerns and they tell us to be hopeful.’ (Female, 46, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)*
- *‘But non-governmental organisations more often fulfil what they say.’ (Female, 45, married, lawyer, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)*
- *‘During the chaos after the war, they [unspecified NGOs] provided assistance and did all that they promised.’ (Female, 46, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)*

- *'Conversations and meetings are best to tell them [the organisations] about our concerns and priorities.'* (Female, 46, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)

**Q9 - Now, still speaking about engagement, what do you think are the challenges for greater engagement?**

People mostly spoke about the fear they had to speak the truth aloud or on television due to previous incidents and the possibility of being threatened again.

- *'A bomb fell in our village once and one woman who witnessed it spoke of it. After that she had big problems, she was not allowed to go to Tskhinvali.'* (Male, 46, married, teacher, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'When my husband was working in Tsinagara, I tried to avoid journalists and television. The bomb fell behind my house, but I did not come out and say it. When they ask where it came from you have to say the truth, but in that case my husband would have problems at work. You never know how the truth is perceived.'* (Male, 50, married, economist, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)
- *'The troops are so close. I am afraid that there may be several informers in our village and bring our kindly meant words differently to them.'* (Male, 46, married, teacher, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>)

## Analysis Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>

All participants from Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> are ethnic Ossetians.

### Community Safety and Security

#### Q1 – What makes you feel insecure in your life, in general?

The focus group participants mainly named economic and psychological reasons for feeling insecure. They were most concerned about unemployment, poverty, the lack of access to medical treatment and the psychological stress left by the August war.

#### [Q1 Follow-Up] – Do you feel safe in your community?

The focus group participants pointed out that the Georgians and Ossetians had a good relationship. However, it was also mentioned that they would only feel safe if there were peace.

- *'We are not afraid of anyone. We get along well; both Georgians and Ossetians have a very good relationship. We are not afraid of anyone.'* (Female, 57, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'Can I say something? I will feel safe if there is peace and there is no disturbance.'* (Female, 65, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)

#### [Q1 Follow-Up] – If not, why not?

Although the participants did not have any complaints about physical safety, they pointed out that they would only feel secure if they had jobs and salaries and when they no longer had to worry about how to take care of their families. They also felt insecure when they had no money to buy medicine.

*'We will only be secure if we have jobs, salaries and the children have something.'* (Female, 48, married, secondary education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)

- *'Those who have children rear them without having the means to do so.'* (Female, 48, married, secondary education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'I feel insecure when we have an illness and there is no way out to buy medicine or something. We have no income, and we are leading a miserable life in every way.'* (Female, 65, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)

#### [Q1 Follow-Up] – Changes after the August conflict

People noted that the war had aggravated the physical and psychological condition of the people, and that they had no money for medical treatment. The participants pointed out that since the August war both the Russian troops and the Georgian police have prevented them from travelling to neighbouring villages to visit their friends. They also mentioned the growing economic crisis and hardship.

- *'When we faced the tanks during the war, we were so frightened. My husband has suffered from stress since then. He needs treatment, but we have no money for his treatment. When we watched that programme on TV recently [Imelda's staged invasion], his stressful condition deteriorated.'* (Female, 65, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'There are the neighbouring villages of Orchosani and Tsinagara. We were friends with the residents of the villages, but after the August war, we have been prohibited from visiting one another.'* (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'We [Georgians and Ossetians] don't have a bad relationship, but we cannot visit, phone and enquire about one another. The relationship between us hasn't been bad, even on April 9 or August 8, and we have never differentiated between ourselves, or between Georgian and Ossetian villages, in terms of ethnicity. Quite simply, our [Georgian] police don't allow us to travel to their villages. That's all. We don't cross to their [Ossetian] side, and neither do they come over here.'* (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'The people have fallen ill, they have been frightened. Now the sound of a single bullet fired is enough to frighten people. People are already frightened, we are stressed.'* (Female, 65, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'There is a crisis, and we are poorer.'* (Male, 34, single, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)

## **Q2 – What do you think are the most serious concerns in your community?**

The participants named a lack of clean drinkable water as one of the most serious concerns in the community, adding that they also lacked irrigation water and pastures, and that they had to take their cattle to graze in other villages. They said that their cattle were the only means of subsistence and voiced concerns on the high tax on pastures and on where they would take their cattle if the neighbouring villages no longer allowed them to do so. The participants also said that their children had to go to school to a neighbouring village because the school in their village had closed down.

- *'Our community is suffering from a lack of water. If someone tasted our water, really, sorry to say, but even cattle wouldn't drink it. But we drink it; we have no other way out. Where can we go? When it rains hard, the rainwater mixes with the drinking water and we drink the rainwater.'* (Female, 57, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'In winter, when it snows and rains, if you pour water into a glass, it's black and muddy. We don't have irrigation water either. We don't have land for pasture.'* (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'Where can we go when they no longer allow our cattle to graze? How can we subsist? Cattle are the only means of subsistence left for us.'* (Female, 57, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)

- *'There is a tax for allowing cattle to graze on pastures. Otherwise, they won't allow them.'* (Female, 48, married, secondary education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'We don't have a pasture; we have arable land. And we use the lots that are useless for pasture. The rest of the land is cultivated. But we pay for it as for arable land, though... This is the problem.'* (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'We don't have a school either, and it's very hard for us.'* (Female, 29, married, ninth-grade education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'We don't have a school... In winter, the children are at home all the time. How can a six-year-old child travel to a neighbouring village in the mud and snowstorms? There was a school and it was closed down because there were few children. There are 5-6 children, not more.'* (Female, 48, married, secondary education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'These schools were reduced in number and the big schools were united, which caused restrictions.'* (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)

### **[Q2 Follow-Up] – What concerns make you think about leaving your community?**

Some of the participants declared that there was no concern that could make them leave their community. Others declared that if the water problem was not solved, in the summer the water would dry up and this would force them leave their homes. They also said that all of the young people, especially those with small children, were considering leaving the village because of a lack of educational and cultural institutions, such as a school, a kindergarten and a club.

- *'There is no [concern] that would make me leave my home.'* (Female, 48, married, secondary education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'It was [only] on August 8 that we left our homes.'* (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'If the water problem isn't solved, it will dry up this summer and we will be forced to leave.'* (Male, 33, married, secondary education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'Now we – all the young people – are considering running away from here to save ourselves. Because I have children. There is no school here, and no road; when there is a little snow, the road is blocked. We have no one to clear it. There is no club and no kindergarten... There is nothing here, and whether I want it or not, I have to consider taking my son somewhere else to a decent village where there is water or a kindergarten.'* (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)

### **[Q2 Follow-Up] – What concerns would you prioritise for finding a resolution?**

The participants did not explicitly state a demand to solve any problems, but they expressed quite a lot of complaints about their living conditions and a wish

to have places of entertainment in the village, drinking and irrigation water, and land for pasture.

- *‘There are young people in our village. There are a lot of boys and girls, but they have nowhere to go in the evening – a club, for example, to have some fun. We are deprived of all entertainment; there is nothing in our village.’ (Female, 57, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘For me, it would be good to have basic places of entertainment in order to go out and have some fun.’ (Female, 19, single, pharmacist, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘When you live in a village, you should have, at least, a pasture and water to maintain your own garden and grow something, right? We don’t have even that. What are we talking about when we don’t even have drinking water?’ (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘We are like shepherds in the mountains, just like that. But shepherds at least have a pasture. We are locked up like that.’ (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘The only advantage is that we are not living in a railway carriage.’ (Female, 30, married, economist, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*

### **Q3 – How do you assess the level of physical safety and security in your community compared with other neighbouring communities?**

Some of the participants stated that they feel fairly safe, in terms of physical security.

- *‘We are safer than they are. We have nothing to be afraid of.’ (Female, 48, married, secondary education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘We have no problem about that.’ (Female, 57, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘Not safer than they are [the Ossetians], but safe from them.’ (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*

### **[Q3 Follow-Up] – What distinguishes your community from neighbouring ones?**

The participants pointed out that there were only mixed Georgian-Ossetian families in their village. They added that the Georgian and Ossetians coexisted peacefully there and had friendly relationships with one another.

- *‘There are no pure Georgian and Ossetian families. The families are all mixed – Ossetians and Georgians. We are very well in this respect.’ (Female, 65, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘We are together both in times of grief and happiness.’ (Female, 48, married, secondary education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*



### **[Q3 Follow-Up] – What differences are there in the key issues affecting physical safety and security in other neighbouring communities?**

The participants noted that there was no big difference in the level of safety and security between their community and the neighbouring ones.

- *‘Everybody in our vicinity [feels safe].’ (Female, 57, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*

### **[Q3 Follow-Up] – Why are there differences in the level of physical safety and security?**

The participants reported no big differences in the level of safety, but they still observed that they had good relationship – both with Georgians and Ossetians, and that they were not afraid of either of them.

- *‘We fear neither Ossetians nor Georgians.’ (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*

### **[Q3 Follow-Up] – Changes after the August conflict**

The participants said that they were more stressed and scared now than before the war. They also stated that it was the Georgian government that aggravated the situation and that they were afraid of the government starting another war. Otherwise, they were afraid of neither Ossetians nor Georgians. They added that they had good personal relationships with both ethnic groups, but they were not able to travel to nearby villages and meet their friends there.

- *‘We are more strained now.’ (Female, 29, married, secondary education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘The war has scared us very much, and we are very afraid. When we watch TV, for instance, we are afraid that they will broadcast something bad.’ (Female, 65, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘It is our government that aggravates the situation; we are concerned that our government may start a war and there may be shootings again. Otherwise, we are afraid of neither Ossetians nor Georgians. We are not afraid of anyone.’ (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘We are not afraid of the Russians, and the Georgians and Ossetians will do us no harm.’ (Female, 57, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘We are not afraid of the Russians either. The Russians also used to come to our village, but everything was OK. But we are afraid that our government may start another war. We are afraid that they will start shooting from there and something will happen again. We are afraid of nothing else.’ (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘If I were allowed, I could visit the village of Tsinagara, where I have friends, and meet them; they would also come over here, but what can we do when we are not allowed to travel?’ (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*

## Understandings of Conflict

### **Q4 – What do you think are the key issues for ensuring future stability and peace in your region?**

The participants did not address this question directly.

### **[Q4 Follow-Up] – What are the longer-term or underlying causes of tension and violence?**

The participants did not delve into a deep analysis of the causes of the war, but they noted that the conflict was caused by the Georgian and Russian governments' hatred toward each other.

- *'It is the governments that are at each other's throats; we have nothing against one another.'* (Female, 48, married, secondary education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)

### **[Q4 Follow-Up] – What types of factors – e.g. political, security, social and cultural – contribute to conflict?**

The participants said that the conflicts were caused by political factors because they happened between governments and nothing depended on common people.

- *'Because all this happens between governments. Nothing depends on the people.'* (Female, 30, married, economist, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'When there is pressure, it comes from the government. It is the government that puts pressure on the people here. I have never seen a son of a government official in the army.'* (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)

### **[Q4 Follow-Up] – What has allowed the violence to happen in the past or could enable it to happen in the future (e.g. events that trigger violence)?**

This question caused an argument between two participants, with one of them arguing that the Georgian government was to blame for the conflict and another suggesting that the conflict was caused by Georgia's 'enemies'.

- *'Our reckless government... What right do I have to make you fight with your neighbour?'* (Male, 34, secondary education, married, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'Maybe our government isn't to blame and this happened because of the interference of enemies? Those who came in and brought us to this state of affairs, those who raided us with tanks.'* (Female, 65, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'That's because our [government] had irritated them.'* (Male, 34, secondary education, married, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'I don't know. The fact remains that they were Russians.'* (Female, 65, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)

#### **[Q4 Follow-Up] – How accurate do you think the media is when it reports on conflict?**

The participants were critical of the TV stations, saying that they reported the events as it suited them and the government. It was pointed out that the TV reports were not accurate enough.

- *‘They report as it suits their interests. They are not reporting everything. They are not doing what they should be doing.’ (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘[The TV is] less realistic.’ (Female, 30, married, economist, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘They are reporting on and doing what suits the government.’ (Female, 29, married, secondary education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘If we take a simple example, when the Gori highway was made, I was working there the year before the last, and when they were showing it on TV, I saw the Tserovani bridge in the TV footage and the journalists were saying how good the bridge in Gori was. Is it good to show Tserovani and tell the viewers that it’s Gori?’ (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*

#### **Q5 – What impact has August 2008 had on people’s lives in the region?**

The participants named fear and the economic crisis as consequences of the conflict.

- *‘It has left us in fear.’ (Female, 48, married, secondary education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘And the economic crisis.’ (Female, 30, married, economist, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*

#### **[Q5 Follow-Up] – How has August 2008 affected people’s perception of security?**

The participants talked about how stressed out they were after having undergone the war. They also recounted how they were evacuating children at the time of the Russian invasion, hiding them from the marauding soldiers.

- *‘Just a minute ago, when a plane passed, I started shaking with fear. I thought they were coming.’ (Female, 65, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘We travelled from Kaspi to my house, through the forest. When the Russians approached, we ran away, leaving the cattle tied. And then we went back through the forest. Kaspi and our village are quite far from each other, but we went through the forest to untie the cattle and... We have sent the children to Kakheti, but my husband and I have stayed at home. We are in a miserable state with no money for medicine, nothing. That’s how we are – in constant fear, even right now.’ (Female, 65, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*

- *'There were not similar incidents [of marauding] in our village, but we were frightened of that. That's why we took the children away. We were afraid. There were all sorts of rumours that they were killing people and raping girls. People said that they were capable of doing anything. We were scared and took the children away from home.'* (Female, 57, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)

#### **[Q5 Follow-Up] – What is the mood in the region since August 2008?**

Again, the participants talked about the general sense of fear caused by the war experience.

- *'I would say that everyone is living in fear, having seen what we underwent. God save us from it being repeated!'* (Female, 65, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)

#### **[Q5 Follow-Up] – How do people feel about their future? Why?**

The general mood expressed by the participants was pessimistic. They complained about the government's carelessness, poverty and the lack of employment opportunities in their village. Some of the participants also emphasised self-reliance, while others put their faith in a higher power.

- *'What we expect is a change of the government and starting a new life.'* (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'However hard you try, if the government isn't good enough...'* (Female, 48, married, secondary education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'You should rely on yourself; neither the president nor anyone else will help you.'* (Female, 30, married, economist, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'A person should have the ability to overcome. The government might also be good, but there are such governments and such times that it's not enough to have education and intellect; you should also be able to struggle in order to survive.'* (Female, 30, married, economist, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'What I would say is that I believe in God and hope that He will establish justice in life.'* (Female, 65, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)

#### **Q6 – Who has the ability to cool tensions and prevent increasing violence?**

The participants named the government and the local population as the only entities that could play a positive role, but they did not talk specifically about cooling tensions.

- *'The government and local population. You [as a member of the population] can stand by the government to help them do what should be done for the village.'* (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)

### **[Q6 Follow-Up] – What do you think is the role of international organisations?**

The participants' awareness of and trust in international organisations was low.

- *'None of them has done anything for us, and we don't even know what they are supposed to do.'* (Female, 65, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'They do nothing but make promises. So our village has nothing to be grateful for, to anybody.'* (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'They are always lying to us. They make promises but do nothing.'* (Female, 57, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'I don't know. Maybe it is the government that should give directions to the international organisations as well.'* (Female, 30, married, economist, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'We are no longer on the map. Who will reach out to us?'* (Female, 48, married, secondary education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)

### **[Q6 Follow-Up] – What do you think are the roles of civil society, the government, the communities themselves and the community leaders?**

The participants did not mention NGOs, civil society or the government. They were sceptical of their community leaders.

- *'Where is our community leader?'* (Male, 33, married, secondary education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)

### **[Q6 Follow-Up] – Why do you think the community leaders play a negative role?**

The participants said they did not even know their community leader since he has never come to meet with them.

- *'We know that we have one [the community leader], but we don't know who he is.'* (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)
- *'Nobody reaches out to us.'* (Female, 19, single, pharmacist, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)

## **Improving Community Engagement and Participation**

### **Q7 – How do you think the community members can become more involved in understanding and addressing local safety and security concerns?**

The participants did not answer this question directly. Instead, they pointed out that the government should treat the village community fairly in order to have their support and involvement.

- *'The villagers don't require much, just good treatment. Let the government treat them right, and they will follow it. Let it show the village a little*



*favour; let it assist the village in something.’ (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*

- *‘Now I would like to talk about the war again. We didn’t know anything until the tanks had approached the village. We saw people being transferred to Vladikavkaz from other villages, from the Ossetian villages. We saw children and women being taken from our village, and we didn’t know anything about what was going on until the tanks had come to the village. If you looked toward the fields, you would see people lying down and hiding. People were running about in the fields without a direction because they were scared. We didn’t know anything. No one tells us anything, and no one helps us.’ (Female, 65, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*

### **[Q7 Follow-Up] – Which type of concerns should they concentrate or work on, or be more interested in?**

The participants lamented that infrastructure projects were of poor quality, especially the water supply system.

- *‘Last year or the year before that, they were going to repair the system for drinking water. They just put a new hose in the ground and joined it to the spring, but the hose is damaged in many places. It is decomposing. And the drinking water mixes with the rainwater, and when it comes through the faucets, it’s already muddy. Can’t they do even this properly?’ (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘They didn’t finish it. They were in a hurry.’ (Female, 57, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘The winter came; it became muddy and difficult for a tractor to work.’ (Female, 48, married, secondary education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘If they had done it in time, it wouldn’t have happened like that. They would have done it properly, and we wouldn’t be drinking muddy water.’ (Female, 57, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*
- *‘If they had done it properly, it would have cost them more, and they didn’t want to spend money. They just brought our workers a hose and that was it. We dug the ground ourselves and put the hose in.’ (Male, 33, married, secondary education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*

### **Q8 – How could the communities engage more with security providers?**

There was no discussion on this question.

### **Q9 – Now, still speaking about engagement, what do you think are the challenges for greater engagement?**

The discussion went straight into specifics on challenges to community engagement. Money, mobilization and a fear of government reprisals for speaking one’s mind were expressed (see the Q9 follow-ups below).



### **[Q9 Follow-Up] – What would stop the community from getting involved?**

The participants noted that government spending in the village was opaque.

- *'As for obstacles, there is a sum allotted for our village, but where is it? No one gives it [money] to you. The government does it itself. They don't allow the village to elect [a representative]. The head of our village council and the government do it. The year before the last they made the road. They brought a little soil, put it on the road and put the money into their pockets. This year, they are going to do the same thing, but we won't allow it. (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*

### **[Q9 Follow-Up] – How would greater community mobilization on security and safety issues be understood by local and national authorities (both in positive and negative ways)?**

It was pointed out that if the community members were active, government representatives might interpret it in a negative light.

- *'Perhaps you shouldn't tell the truth either. If you tell the truth, you are considered a bad person. Because they will say that you have a sharp tongue. I told them [the government representatives] that the government lied to us, that they gave us promises and did nothing. They asked me why I spoke like that, what I wanted. Several of them asked me that. What I wanted is that when [one] gives a promise, [one] should honour it. And when you [the government] give us promises and lie to us, do you think we are idiots.' (Female, 57, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*

### **[Q9 Follow-Up] – Will there be any risks to community participants? What will cause these risks and how can they be managed?**

The participants said that too much activity on the part of community members could bring significant risks.

- *'They will send you to jail. I'm one hundred per cent sure. They will imprison you based on a completely different pretext. They will plant weapons or drugs on you. If you say something, they will arrest you.' (Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*

### **[Q9 Follow-Up] – Are there any concerns that can't be discussed (because people may not want to discuss them or because of risks associated with them)?**

It was pointed out that everything could be discussed if the village had a good leader.

- *'Nothing is impossible if the village has a good leader and a good supervisor...' (Female, 65, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>)*

## Methodology

### Recruitment Areas

Saferworld has divided the Georgian-controlled southern part of the ABL in four major groups of villages, each representing dwellings that were affected by the August war in similar ways. Their approximate locations can be found in Annex II – Recruitment Areas.

The focus group participants were recruited from one selected village in every of the first three groups, and from two villages in the case of the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana group. All recruiting villages are located within five kilometres distance to the Ossetian-controlled side of the administrative boundary line.

#### *Group 1: Atotsi and Dirbi*

The Atotsi-Dirbi group encompasses remote villages with problematic road access. Compared with villages in other groups, they sustained less destruction during the August conflict, and received less international and government assistance in its aftermath. Although sporadic security incidents are known to happen, villages in the Atotsi-Dirbi group are considered relatively safe. Today, inhabitants in this area have good relations to and significant interaction with Ossetians.

Assumptions about the villages in the Atotsi-Dirbi group were that they suffer more from economic hardship and isolation than from the direct effects of the conflict, but have fewer difficulties to come to terms with the new after-war realities.

#### *Group 2: Nikozi, Tirdznisi, Ergneti, Ditsi and Mereti*

Villages in the Nikozi-Mereti group are easily accessible due to good road connections. This area was at the centre of the August conflict and its villages were subsequently high-priority targets for international and governmental relief activities. Villages in this group report ongoing high levels of security incidents such as shootings and kidnappings. Partly due to the concentration of international activities, civil society in this area is more developed than elsewhere along the ABL.

Assumptions about the Nikozi-Mereti group were that its inhabitants suffer today from a greater psychological trauma and a greater sense of insecurity than people from neighbouring areas.

#### *Group 3: Plainsman, Kveshi, Akhrisi, Mejvriskhevi, Zerti and Bershueti*

Access to the villages in the Plavismani-Bershueti group is decent, although some roads are blocked and require alternative routes. This area was a secondary target for relief activities. Today, people from the Plavismani-Bershueti area still witness numerous security incidents.

The Plavismani-Bershueti villages were assumed to suffer from a greater sense of insecurity due to the high level of security incidents, and Saferworld was

especially interested in potential ongoing interactions with the South Ossetian side.

#### *Group 4: Tsitelubani, Samtavisi and Lamiskana*

Two villages were selected for recruiting from the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana group. The area was previously removed from the conflict, and has only later started to be affected due to the occupation of the Akhalkalaki region. The security situation in the first village (Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>) is problematic due to frequent incidents. The rest of the area, including the second recruiting village is considered to be relatively safe.

The two villages selected from the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana group have ethnically mixed populations. To represent both perspectives, participants recruited from the first village (Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>) were ethnic Georgians, while participants from the second village (Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>) were ethnic Ossetians.

### **Participant Recruitment**

To recruit participants for the focus groups, four recruiters and one supervisor were trained on selection methods and criteria. To guarantee that each group would consist of 10 people, 20 persons were recruited in each village. Ten were selected for the focus group and 10 were placed on a reserve list in the event that any of the initially selected participants were unavailable for the focus group discussions.

Participants were recruited in accordance with the following criteria:

#### *Demographics*

The participants were selected so that a ratio of 5 female and 5 male participants could be kept in every focus group. Furthermore, an age balance between those aged between 18-35 years and those between 36-65 was established. These criteria were strictly adhered to throughout all five focus groups, with one exception. In the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> focus group the gender balance could not be kept, as one recruited person decided not to participate on extremely short notice.

#### *Village*

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 very small community sizes, the personal data included in this report might otherwise suffice to identify participants.

#### *Ethnicity (Georgian or Ossetian)*

The recruiting villages from the Atotsi-Dirbi, Nikozi-Mereti and Plavismiani-Bersheteti groups all have an ethnic Georgian population. Consequently, the participants recruited there were ethnic Georgians. By contrast, the two villages selected from the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana group have both ethnic Georgian and Ossetian residents. To represent their mixed population, one focus group

consisted of ethnic Georgians (Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>), and the other focus group was made up of ethnic Ossetians (Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>).

### ***Modalities of the Discussions***

The language of all five focus groups was Georgian. Although the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> focus group was made up of ethnic Ossetians, the CRRC had been informed that all people living in that village spoke fluent Georgian.

All the focus groups were held in Gori. Those with participants from Plavismani-Bershueti, Nikozi-Mereti and Atotsi-Dirbi were conducted on April 9, 2010, and the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> discussions on April 10, 2010. The CRRC provided shuttle busses to and from Gori for the focus group participants.

The focus group discussions lasted between 41 and 105 minutes. The moderator asked questions according to the focus group guide in Annex I – Focus Group Guide. The discussions touched upon (i) community safety and security, (ii) understandings of conflict and (iii) possible ways to improve community engagement and participation. The guide included 9 questions for each focus group, out of which one was village-specific. The moderator used follow-up questions and prompts to stimulate debate or get the discussion ‘back on track’.

Before starting the discussion, the moderator introduced the overall purpose of the focus groups and asked whether the participants felt comfortable being recorded with a video camera. In the case of participants refusing to be filmed, the moderator was given the option of using a voice recorder or asking CRRC staff to take notes. However, none of the participants in any of the focus groups expressed concerns over being recorded on video.



# Annexes

## **Annex I – Focus Group Guide**

### ***Community safety and security***

We are interested in understanding what issues are important for your sense of safety and security – that is, elements in the general environment in your community, or those events or incidents that make you and your community feel unsafe. Rather than give you examples of what this would mean, I would first like to hear your perspectives on what safety and security means to you.

By ‘community’ we mean the group of people at the local level that you have close connections with and on which you depend for your livelihood and sense of identity. Your ‘community’ could include those living in the same village as you or in a wider geographic area.

#### ***1. What makes you feel insecure in your life in general?***

##### **Guidance for question 1:**

This question should encourage people to discuss the full range of issues that cause insecurity – it is important not to restrict the discussion to ‘harder’ security issues such as criminality or violence, but also allow the participants to discuss ‘softer’ issues such as communication, transport and the economy. The following prompts can be used to stimulate discussion:

- Do you feel safe in your community?
- If not why not?
- What types of incidents make you feel insecure?
- Any changes in after the August conflict?

#### ***2. What do you think the most serious concerns are in your community?***

##### **Guidance for question 2:**

This question should encourage people to prioritise the key causes of insecurity within their community – rather than for them personally. As such, it will be important to get a sense of what ‘community’ means for the participants. In addition, responses to this question should provide a sense of the relative importance of ‘harder’ issues and ‘softer’ issues (e.g. are people more worried about work or being robbed). The following prompts can be used to stimulate discussion:

- What does ‘community’ mean to you?
- What concerns make you think about leaving your community?
- Which concerns would you prioritise for resolution?
- Any changes in after the August conflict?

#### ***3. How do you assess the level of physical safety and security in your community compared to other neighbouring communities?***

##### **Guidance for question 3:**

This question is useful for exploring potential differences between the physical safety and security concerns expressed by the group, and the concerns in other



communities that the participants may be aware of but would not immediately discuss. It is also useful for analysing how participants perceive their own situation compared to others'. The following prompts can be used to stimulate discussion:

- What distinguishes your 'community' for neighbouring ones?
- What differences are there in the key issues affecting physical safety and security in other neighbouring communities?
- Why are there differences in the level of physical safety and security?
- Any changes in after the August conflict?

### ***Understandings of conflict***

We are also interested your understandings of the bigger dynamics and processes that are important for ensuring future stability and peace in your region. This means those longer term issues that cause instability or insecurity.

#### ***4. What do you think are the key issues for ensuring future stability and peace in your region?***

##### **Guidance for question 4:**

This question is designed to encourage participants to express their understanding of 'conflict' and the impact it has on their daily lives. This discussion will need to be managed with a good deal of sensitivity and should not be forced. The following prompts can be used to stimulate discussion:

- What are the longer-term or underlying causes of tension and violence?
- What types of factors, e.g. political, security, social and cultural contribute to conflict?
- What has allowed violence to happen in the past or could enable it to happen in the future (e.g. events that can trigger violence)?
- How accurate do you think the media is when it reports on conflict?

#### ***5. What impact has the August 2008 had on people's lives in the region?***

##### **Guidance for question 5:**

This question should allow participants to explore how the local context has changed since August 2008. The following prompts can be used to stimulate discussion:

- How has August 2008 impacted on people's perceptions of security?
- What is the mood in the region since August 2008?
- How has the August 2008 conflict changed the political/economic/social landscape in the region?
- How do people feel about their future, why?

## 6. Village-specific Questions

- a. *Who do you think can resolve the underlying issues and prevent tension and violence, and how? (this question is used in the Plavismani-Bershueti focus group)*

### Guidance for question 6 (Plavismani-Bershueti):

The purpose of this question is to get the participants to explore the role of different actors, and think proactively about how these actors can play a more positive role. The following prompts can be used to stimulate discussion:

- What do you think is the role of internationals?
- What do you think is the role of civil society?
- What do you think is the role of government?
- What do you think is the role of communities themselves?
- What do you think is the role of community leaders? (if negative, prompt: Why do you think they play negative role?)

- b. *Who has the ability to cool tensions / prevent increasing violence? (this question is used in the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup> focus group)*

### Guidance for question 6 (Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>):

The purpose of this question is to get the participants to explore the role of different actors, and think proactively about how these actors can play a more positive role. The following prompts can be used to stimulate discussion:

- What do you think is the role of internationals?
- What do you think is the role of civil society?
- What do you think is the role of government?
- What do you think is the role of communities themselves?
- What do you think is the role of community leaders? (if negative, prompt: Why do you think they play negative role?)

- c. *What steps would be most useful for increasing security? (this question is used in the Atotsi-Dirbi focus group)*

### Guidance for question 6 (Atotsi-Dirbi):

The purpose of this question is to get the participants explore and articulate the actions and processes that would make them feel more secure. Please encourage them to think creatively and to describe the responses in detail, rather than to focus exclusively on who is responsible. The following prompts can be used to stimulate discussion:

- What could government representatives do better?
- What could you and other community members do by yourselves?
- What kind of engagements across the conflict divide (with communities in South Ossetia) would increase security and reduce tensions?
- Is there anything else that national and international society could to make your community more secure?

- d. *What steps would be most useful for reducing tensions and preventing a return to violence? (this question is used in the Nikozi-Mereti focus group)*

**Guidance for question 6 (Nikozi-Mereti):**

The purpose of this question is to get the participants to explore and articulate the actions and processes that could help reduce tensions and prevent violence. Please encourage them to think creatively and to describe the responses in detail, rather than to focus exclusively on who is responsible. The following prompts can be used to stimulate discussion:

- What has created tensions in the past?
- How could violence have been prevented in the past?
- What could government representatives do better?
- What could you and other community members do by yourselves?
- What kind of engagements across the conflict divide (with communities in South Ossetia) would increase security and reduce tensions?
- Is there anything else that national and international society could to make your community more secure?

- e. *What can be done to strengthen your community's capacity to resist violence or provocations to violence? (this question is used in the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup> focus group)*

**Guidance for question 6 (Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>):**

The purpose of this question is to get the participants to think about the actions that they would provoke violence, and how they can be resisted. The following prompts can be used to stimulate discussion:

- What events or processes could lead to your community resorting to violence?
- How have your community avoided resorting to violence in the past?
- What do you think internationals can do to strengthen your community's capacity to resist violence or provocations to violence?
- What do you think civil society can do to strengthen your community's capacity to resist violence or provocations to violence?
- What do you think community leaders can do to strengthen your community's capacity to resist violence or provocations to violence?

***Improving community engagement and participation***

A key objective of the programme we are designing is to encourage communities to have more of a role identifying safety priorities and in developing solutions for them together with responsible institutions and organisations. We would really like to get your advice on how to encourage community members to get involved, and how they would most like to work with different institutions and organisations.

**7. *How do you think community members can become more involved in understanding and addressing local safety and security concerns?***

**Guidance for question 7:**

The purpose of this question is to get participants' thoughts on the most appropriate way of setting up a process that empowers communities to be more involved in identifying safety priorities and developing solutions for them together with responsible institutions and agencies. The following prompts can be used to stimulate discussion:

- Which parts of the community in particular should/could/would be more involved (more interested)?
- Which types of concerns should they concentrate/work on or would they be more interested in?
- What kind of activities would community members want to be involved in?
- What kind of local concerns would community members be willing to exchange information on via SMS/telephones?
- What kind of information and support would community members want / need to be more involved?
- What kind of incentives would encourage involvement?

**8. *How could the communities engage more with security providers?***

**Guidance for question 8:**

The purpose of this question is to inform our thinking on how to develop more positive relations between communities and those agencies and institutions that are responsible for responding to their safety and security concerns. It is important to emphasize that we are not focusing on individuals, but institutions and organisations. This can for example, include the law enforcement agencies, local authorities, legal services, health services, but also non-governmental agencies (local and international) that assist local services. The following prompts can be used to stimulate discussion:

- Which providers would community members most like to engage with?
- What would be the best format for engagement with relevant organisations and institutions?
- What would encourage communities to participate – and how?
- What topics or information would you like shared in the engagement?
- What outcomes would you like from the engagement?

**Instruction to moderator:**

Summarise the ideas of engaging with the security providers that you heard from the participants.

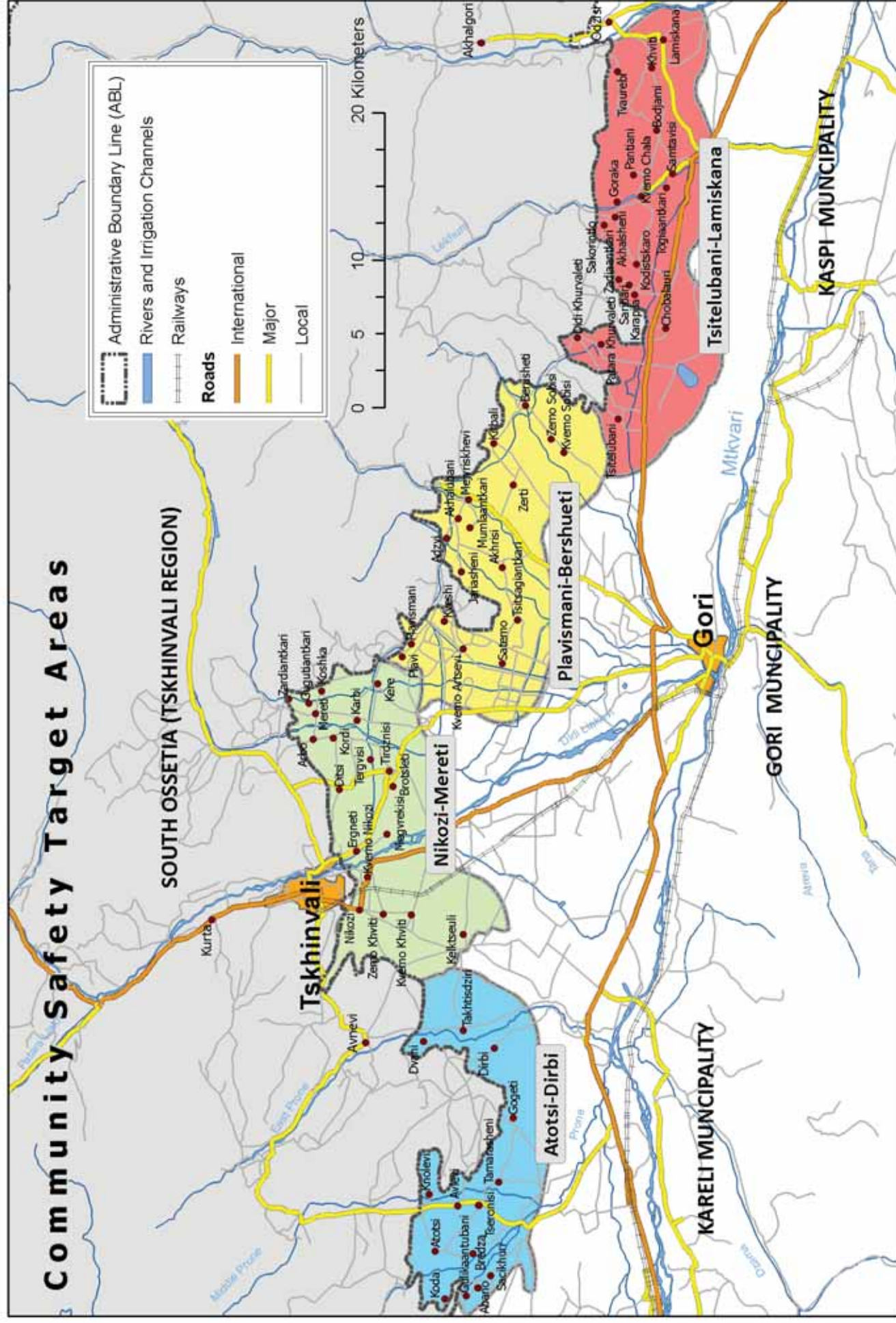
**9. *Now, still speaking about engagement, what do you think are the challenges for greater engagement?***

**Guidance for question 9:**

The purpose of this question is to draw out potential risks to the process and participants that the programme partners should plan for. The following prompts can be used to stimulate discussion:

- What would stop the community from getting involved?
- How would greater community mobilization on security and safety issues be understood by local and national authorities (both in a negative and positive ways)?
- Will there be any risks to community participants? What will cause these risks and how can they be managed?
- Are there any concerns that can't be discussed (because people may not want to discuss them or because of risks associated with them)?







## **Annex III – Focus Group Composition**

### ***Focus Group 1: Atotsi-Dirbi***

1. Female, 36 married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi
2. Female, 38 married, commodity expert, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi
3. Female, 34, married, secondary education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi
4. Female, 57, married, secondary education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi
5. Female, 56, married, librarian, Atotsi-Dirbi
6. Male, 22, single, higher education working in the city council, employed, Atotsi-Dirbi
7. Male, 53, secondary technical education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi
8. Male, 21, single, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi
9. Male, 23, single, higher education, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi
10. Male, 61, married, unemployed, Atotsi-Dirbi

### ***Focus Group 2: Nikozi-Mereti***

1. Male, 59, married, radio technician, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti
2. Male, 61, married, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti
3. Female, 54, married, economist, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti
4. Female, 44, married, nurse, employed, Nikozi-Mereti
5. Female, 28, married, German-language and literature teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti
6. Female, 27, married, teacher of biology and chemistry, employed, Nikozi-Mereti
7. Female, 30, married, music teacher, employed, Nikozi-Mereti
8. Male, 37, married, secondary education, unemployed, refugee from Tskhinvali, Nikozi-Mereti
9. Male, 20, married, student, Nikozi-Mereti
10. Male, single, higher education, unemployed, Nikozi-Mereti

### ***Focus Group 3: Plavismani-Bershueti***

1. Male, 22, married, energy specialist, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti
2. Female, 36, married, history teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti
3. Female, 45, married, teacher, Plavismani-Bershueti
4. Male, 58, married, Plavismani-Bershueti
5. Male, 48, married, secondary technical education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti

6. Female, 25, married, teacher, Plavismani-Bershueti
7. Female, 24, single, business administrator, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti
8. Female, 58, married, teacher, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti
9. Male, 29, single, secondary education, employed, Plavismani-Bershueti
10. Male, 30, single, higher education, unemployed, Plavismani-Bershueti

#### **Focus Group 4: Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>**

1. Male, 21, single, student of economics, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>
2. Male, 50, married, economist, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>
3. Female, 45, married, lawyer, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>
4. Female, 48, widow, accountant, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>
5. Female, 29, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>
6. Female, 48, married, housewife, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>
7. Female, 46, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>
8. Male, 46, married, teacher, employed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>
9. Male, 21, single, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>
10. Male, 24, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>GEO</sup>

#### **Focus Group 5: Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>**

1. Female, 57, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>
2. Female, 48, married, secondary education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>
3. Female, 65, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>
4. Female, 30, married, economist, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>
5. Female, 19, single, pharmacist, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>
6. Female, 29, married, secondary education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>
7. Male, 34, single, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>
8. Male, 33, married, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>
9. Male, 33, married, secondary education, unemployed, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>
10. Male, 34, married, secondary education, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana<sup>OSS</sup>