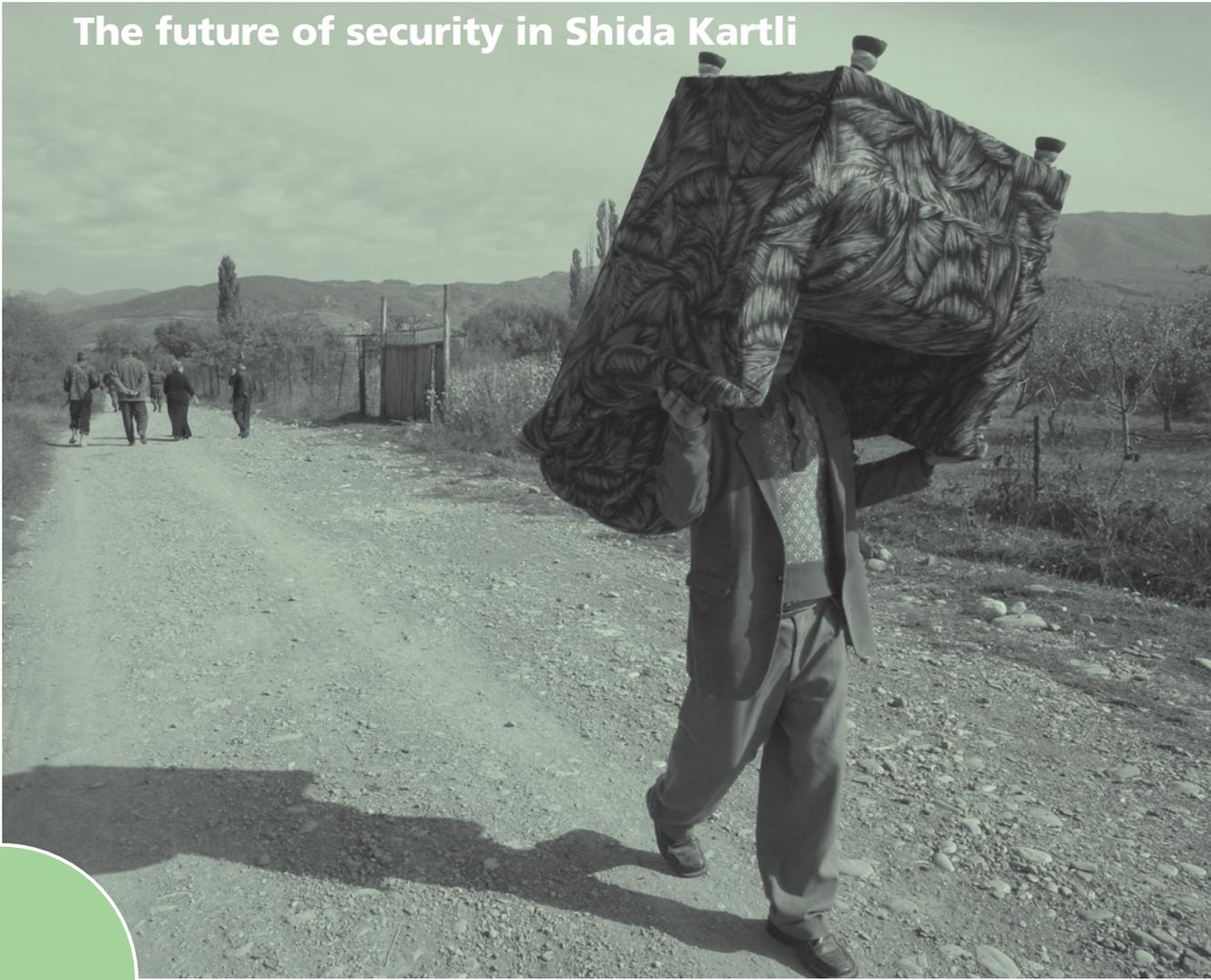




# Life on the boundary line

The future of security in Shida Kartli



**Malte Viefhues** and **David Wood**

**October 2010**



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## **Acknowledgements**

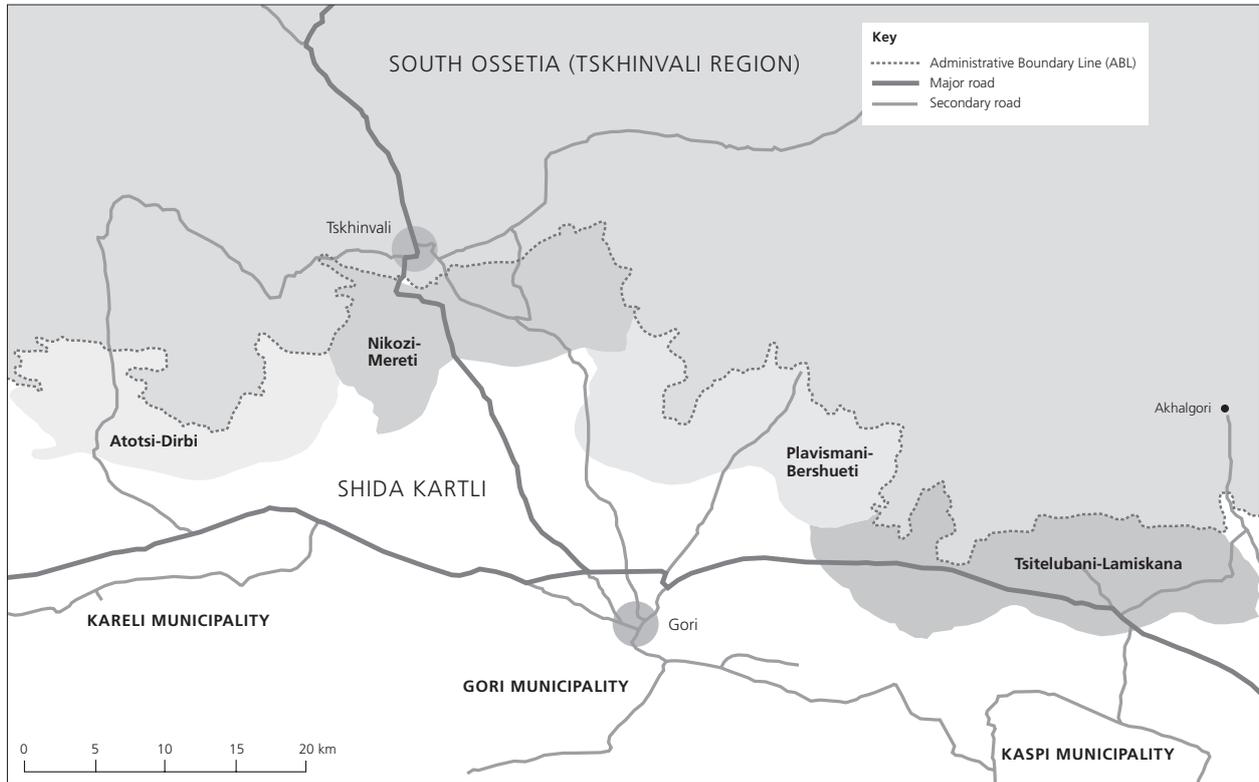
This report was written by Malte Viefhues and David Wood. It is based on quantitative and qualitative data gathered by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) in July and August 2010 as part of Saferworld's regional programme to increase understanding of, and responsiveness to, the safety and security needs of conflict-affected communities. In Shida Kartli, Saferworld is working in partnership with the Caucasus Institute for Peace Democracy and Development (CIPDD). Activities in Shida Kartli, including this report, have been funded by the European Union through the Instrument for Stability. This report was copy-edited by Emily Speers Mears.

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## Map of the four research areas in Shida Kartli



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# Executive summary

**TWO YEARS AFTER THE AUGUST WAR**, the consequences of the violence and subsequent failures to progress resolution of the conflict still affect communities living along the administrative boundary line (ABL) between Shida Kartli and South Ossetia/the Tskhinvali region. No major incidents of violence have occurred since 2008 and the level of humanitarian assistance provided to communities in Shida Kartli has been impressive. However, the crisis response is coming to an end and contact and movement across the ABL have become increasingly difficult, badly affecting those dependent on cross-border interaction for their personal wellbeing and that of their communities. As a result, a range of vulnerabilities are more likely to come to the surface and undermine the future sustainability of communities living along the ABL.

At the same time, the level and nature of insecurity varies greatly along the ABL, depending on geography, local experiences of the conflict, relationships with Ossetian communities across the ABL, and access to pastures, water and markets. There are different potentials for increased tension in the future, and for local-level measures to increase trust and confidence across the conflict divide. As such, it is essential that local and international actors are better able to distinguish between the varied needs of communities living along the ABL, in order to develop appropriate strategies for responding to them.

To help with such thinking, this report analyses the needs of communities living directly along the ABL according to four different research areas – Atotsi-Dirbi, Nikozi-Mereti, Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana (see map).

## The needs of conflict-affected communities

The impact of the ongoing conflict on communities differs substantially, as do their priorities. While all areas have suffered from depopulation, this is greatest in **Atotsi-Dirbi** and is driven by physical insecurity, and shootings in particular. Life in communities in **Nikozi-Mereti** has improved, partly as a result of a reduction in security incidents, but poor access to water because of the conflict continues to cause concern. In **Plavismani-Bershueti** economic insecurity is on the increase and is driven by reduced ability to trade across the ABL. Communities in **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana** are less affected by the conflict, instead prioritising longer-term infrastructure problems. Overall, communities along the ABL suffer more from poverty than those in other parts of Georgia, and their vulnerability is likely to increase as post-crisis assistance into the region ends, greatly increasing the risk of further depopulation.

### Recommendations for responding to community priorities

- Carefully monitor community vulnerabilities as the crisis response ends, and look to respond to the needs of those communities where further depopulation is likely. Priority should be given to reducing the levels of physical insecurity in communities living in **Atotsi-Dirbi**, primarily through measures to reduce the occurrence of shooting incidents.
- Carefully monitor economic security in **Plavismani-Bershueti**, and explore ways of increasing opportunities for communities in this area to trade and earn money, including across the ABL. Such measures should be handled carefully so as not to provoke negative reactions from other communities living along the ABL.

### Personal safety and the role of security providers

Physical security incidents are rare in Shida Kartli: the security environment is stable or improving and more people feel safe than unsafe. That said, communities in **Atotsi-Dirbi** suffer from a higher level of insecurity than in the other areas, mostly because of shooting incidents, while people in **Nikozi-Mereti** still feel as if they are living on the 'front line' of the conflict, in spite of having witnessed the greatest positive trend in feelings of security. The police are the main 'coalface' security provider, delivering an accessible service that is understood and appreciated by communities. Nevertheless, some communities feel abandoned, some are frustrated that police operations are having a negative impact on relationships and trade across the ABL, and many feel that responsiveness by the police to community concerns could be improved by strengthening communication and relationships with them.

### Recommendations for improving security providers' responsiveness to local needs

- As much as possible, look to deliver sensitive policing that takes a varied approach along the ABL, for example by reinforcing physical security in some communities (especially in **Atotsi-Dirbi** and **Nikozi-Mereti**) but by taking a more permissive approach in others (especially in **Plavismani-Bershueti** and **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana**), so as to enable these communities to increase relations and trade across the ABL.
- Look to strengthen communication and relationships between communities and security providers by establishing mechanisms for them to inform communities about the local security situation, and for community members to voice their concerns directly to security providers and to play a role in developing security responses. Discussions with communities should also provide the evidence for deciding where more protective or permissive measures are appropriate.

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

Concerns over the future are widespread, with roughly half of communities, and an even greater number in **Nikozi-Mereti** and **Atotsi-Dirbi**, expecting increased tensions before the end of 2010. Overall, political escalations, shootings and Russians or South Ossetians moving the ABL are thought to carry the greatest risk of triggering increased tensions, but reduced access to irrigation water is thought especially likely to trigger increased tensions in **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana**. Communities think that all trigger events, apart from moving the ABL, are likely to happen in 2010. Negative perceptions of the potential for trigger events are biased by past experiences of insecurity, rather than their real likelihood of events occurring (apart from shootings). Fears of crisis scenarios are further fuelled by inaccurate reporting by the media.

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

- Establish processes for monitoring the link between shooting incidents and increased community tensions, with a focus on **Nikozi-Mereti** and **Atotsi-Dirbi**, and for providing information on the causes and effects of shooting incidents to communities, so that they do not create excessive concern. At the same time, access to water in the **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana** area should be monitored closely.
- Establish mechanisms for ensuring that analysis and comment by the media on the local conflict situation in Shida Kartli is well informed and conflict-sensitive – that is, that coverage does not increase fears and tensions at the local level.

### **Contact, trust and confidence across the divide**

Overall contact with Ossetians across the ABL has reduced since the August 2008 war and is now at very low levels, apart from in **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana**. People are also finding it even more difficult to maintain relationships across the divide, especially in **Plavismani-Bershueti**. This is likely to have a knock-on effect on future reconciliation. On the whole, people are willing to reinvigorate contacts across the divide and prefer community-led approaches that focus on local needs (e.g. enabling trade) and are less supportive of externally driven measures (e.g. police co-operation). People in **Nikozi-Mereti** are, however, more hesitant than others towards any engagement measures. Overall, measures to enable trade are considered the most effective for building trust and confidence.

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

- Explore measures to encourage informal trade across the ABL, as well as other engagement measures focused on practical issues of benefit to communities on both sides. Measures should not be driven by the Georgian Government or the international community, but should be allowed to develop organically on the basis of local initiative.
- For the time being, focus on creating an enabling environment for engagement across the divide in the **Atotsi-Dirbi**, **Plavismani-Bershueti** and **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana** areas, while providing more 'protective' measures in some communities in **Nikozi-Mereti**.

# 1

## Introduction

**THE COMMUNITIES OF SHIDA KARTLI** were at the centre of hostilities during the August 2008 war,<sup>1</sup> and for much of the local population living along the administrative boundary line (ABL) with South Ossetia/the Tskhinvali Region<sup>2</sup> its consequences still influence everyday life. While most people displaced by the war returned to their homes and no major incidents have occurred since the end of 2008, a sense of general insecurity and disquiet pervades everyday life and many find it difficult to think about or invest in the future. The substantial humanitarian, shelter and livelihoods assistance that supported the return of communities has reduced significantly and will further reduce as the crisis-response comes to an end in 2011.<sup>3</sup> In addition, interaction across the ABL has become more difficult over time, badly affecting those dependent on such cross-border interaction for their personal wellbeing and that of their communities. This means that underlying vulnerabilities are more likely to come to the surface and undermine communities' future sustainability.

The situation varies greatly along the length of the ABL, depending on geography, local experiences of the conflict, relationships with Ossetian communities across the ABL, and access to pastures, water and markets. For some communities, shooting incidents are a regular occurrence, theft of agricultural goods by South Ossetians still takes place and community members are occasionally seized and detained trying to cross the ABL. In a number of communities people find their lives so untenable that they are leaving, further depopulating the area. Yet for others, the most pressing concerns relate to job opportunities and poor infrastructure. One of the purposes of this study is to provide a better understanding of the different experiences of security and the varied needs of the communities living along the ABL.

No substantive peacekeeping or security mechanism has yet been agreed by the parties to the conflict. While the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) patrols along the ABL, its monitors can do little more than record incidents after they have occurred. The only formal discussions on security issues between the parties to the conflict are facilitated through the EUMM's liaison officers and the meetings of an Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM). However, at the time of going to print the IPRM had not met for a number of months. As a result, security is provided to communities along the ABL through a mix of normal national policing and justice services and more military-style approaches.

<sup>1</sup> While the period of violence was relatively short, lasting from the 7th of August until the ceasefire agreement on the 8th of September, the conflict has been ongoing since the initial violence in the early 1990s and has not yet been resolved as there remains disagreement over the status of South Ossetia/the Tskhinvali region. As such, references to the 'conflict' throughout this report, refers to the longer-term and still existent dynamics.

<sup>2</sup> For the rest of this report 'South Ossetia' will be used to describe South Ossetia/the Tskhinvali region.

<sup>3</sup> At a donor conference in Brussels on 22 October 2008, the international community pledged a total of \$4,536 million to be spent over three years on the crisis response: \$1,743 million in the 1st year; \$1,680 million in the 2nd; and \$1,111 million in the 3rd.

Indeed, the Georgian Government faces difficult decisions regarding how to balance ensuring national security with responding to the security needs of conflict-affected communities. This report is intended to provide additional evidence to help inform these decisions, by soliciting local perceptions on the causes of insecurity and community priorities, and on the effectiveness of security providers<sup>4</sup> in meeting them.

Within any given context, security and conflict dynamics can change rapidly, both for better and for worse, and within a relatively small geographical area different communities can experience different trends in security. It is often the case that small negative trends in one area can end up having a wider impact and even trigger a return to violence. At the same time, communities can play a pivotal role in reducing tensions and preventing a return to violence through local-level engagement and reconciliation across conflict divides. To help local and international planning, the report also provides community perspectives on likely trends, the types of incidents and events that could have a negative impact, and potential measures for reducing tensions.

Finally, it is important to note that the picture of security needs provided by this report is incomplete, as it does not capture the experiences of communities living on the other side of the ABL in South Ossetia. While little public information is available on the situation in South Ossetia, it is clear that communities living there suffered greatly during the events of August 2008 and continue to live precariously. It is hoped that ways of mapping and responding to the security-related needs of these communities will be found in the future.

## Community-based approaches to security

This study is part of Saferworld's programme to promote community-based approaches to security in conflict-affected communities across the Caucasus region. A community-based approach places a greater emphasis on understanding what makes people and communities feel insecure and finding locally appropriate ways of responding to the causes of insecurity. This means paying as much attention to local perceptions of insecurity and local priorities as to incidents themselves – indeed, in many contexts the number of security or criminal incidents may be decreasing on paper, but people continue to feel the same or worsening levels of security. It also means measuring how 'physical' security issues are viewed against a wider range of issues such as employment, access to basic services or the protection of cultural values.

Promoting community-based security entails developing an approach, a skill set, and a range of tools that allows national and international security providers to both measure perceptions (as much as incidents) and respond to perceived causes of insecurity – and, importantly, be seen to respond to local priorities. It also entails increasing the capacity of people and communities to better articulate their concerns, to have more confidence in requesting responses to what makes them feel insecure, and to play a role in developing solutions. Hence, it is not enough to improve the capacities of government and international agencies alone – communities should be given equal focus and treated as partners.<sup>5</sup>

As such, community-based approaches to security can have a transformative impact on security-related behaviours and relationships, within communities as well as between communities and those responsible for ensuring their security.<sup>6</sup> Within communities, this approach empowers communities to identify local drivers of tension and insecurity, and to play a positive role in responding to them. This approach also builds trust between communities and security providers by improving the capacities

<sup>4</sup> We use the term 'security providers' to cover any actor that could play a role in responding to the causes of insecurity, including for example police services, local courts, local authorities, locally stationed armed forces, peacekeeping and peace-support operations, and monitors.

<sup>5</sup> For examples of past Saferworld community-based security projects see *Creating Safer Communities: Lessons from South Eastern Europe*, (Saferworld, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> *Making Community Security Programmes more Effective: Synthesis Report*, (Saferworld, 2010). Research paper produced for the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID).

of both to work together to deliver relevant and sustainable solutions to security threats. This approach can be especially relevant in conflict contexts, as by transforming security-related behaviours within communities and between communities and security providers, the potential of both groups to reduce tensions and thereby to reduce the likelihood of violence is reinforced.

In line with this approach, we used both a household survey and focus group discussions with communities to measure their perceptions of local priorities, levels and causes of insecurity, potential triggers of future tensions and violence, and the potential for increasing contact, trust and confidence across the divide. When assessing changes in the situation over time, we focused on the six months preceding the household survey, which took place in July 2010. More information on the research methodology used for this report can be found in annex 1.

## Research areas

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

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

Villages in the **Nikozi-Mereti** area were at the centre of the 2008 hostilities and sustained greater casualties and physical damage than villages in the other research areas. They are also closest to the most populated areas in South Ossetia and were reportedly regularly affected by security incidents. The area has received large amounts of international and government aid post-August 2008.

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

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

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

# 2

## The needs of conflict-affected communities

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

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

**Communities along the ABL have depopulated, especially in the Atotsi-Dirbi area.**

The return of displaced people to Shida Kartli following the August 2008 war was on the whole well managed, with a sense of security provided by national agencies and the EUMM's presence, and the provision of shelter and livelihood relief. However, communities are not at pre-war levels, with over half of those surveyed stating that there are now less people living in their community than before the August war and only 10% suggesting that their communities have grown. It is important to note that depopulation has occurred across all age groups equally, and that the ratio of old to young people living along the boundary line is the same as in other rural parts of Georgia.

Depopulation has not occurred uniformly. In the isolated Atotsi-Dirbi area, 86% think that their community has shrunk since August 2008, and 60% think the same in Nikozi-Mereti, the area most directly affected by the physical impacts of the war. By contrast, 37% of respondents in Plavismani-Bershueti and 15% of respondents in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana have noticed a reduction in the size of their community.

**Physical insecurity caused by the conflict is the main driver of depopulation.**

There is a strong correlation between those that report shrinking communities and anxiety of the physical security impacts of conflict, such as the threat of renewed violence and shootings (see figure 1).<sup>7</sup> For example, a significant number of people in Atotsi-Dirbi expressed concern both about close proximity to the conflict zone and about the threat of renewed violence and ongoing shootings. On the other hand, people in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana do not feel threatened by proximity to the conflict zone, renewed violence or shootings – demonstrating that the conflict does not continue to have an impact on perceptions of physical security in this area. Communities

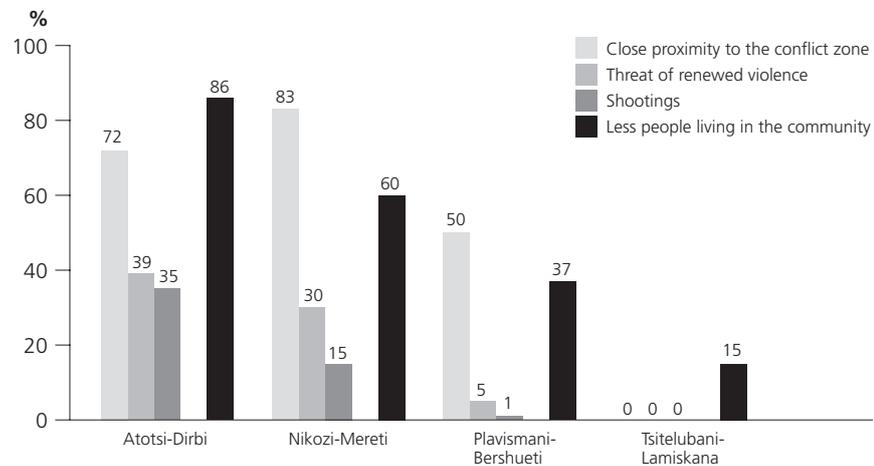
<sup>7</sup> 'Shootings' refers to hearing or witnessing gunfire, either from Ossetian and Russian forces or from Georgian forces, or exchanges of fire between the two sides.

in this area have also witnessed the lowest level of depopulation, in spite of the widespread poverty there. This would suggest that depopulation is largely caused by perceptions of physical insecurity linked to the conflict.

**Figure 1: Comparison of security-related community priorities and depopulation**

What are the three most urgent problems facing your community/village?

Are there more, less or the same number of people living in the community/village than before August 2008?



Indeed, those directly experiencing physical security incidents are more apprehensive about the conflict and its implications for their communities. For instance, of those who stated that shootings occur several times per month, 73% classified close proximity to the conflict zone and 26% the threat of renewed violence as urgent problems for their community (compared to 55% and 18% overall). This suggests that investments in shelter and livelihood are unlikely to be successful in stemming depopulation, if people feel insecure or fear that improvements in the security environment are only temporary.

#### **High levels of poverty in the region are likely to fuel additional depopulation, given the limited opportunities for trade across the ABL and the reduction in external aid.**

The general level of income in Shida Kartli is very low and many are suffering from severe poverty. Four out of five respondents (81%) spent less than 200 lari (approx 80 euro) in the month prior to the survey and 49% spent less than 100 lari (approx 40 euro). The share of relatively poor people in Shida Kartli is thus significantly higher than the average for other rural areas of Georgia, where only 13% spend less than 90 lari.<sup>8</sup> Tsitelubani-Lamiskana stands out as experiencing especially high levels of poverty, with three quarters of households from this area having spent less than 100 lari.

Communities living along the ABL have traditionally been dependent on small-scale agricultural trade, especially across the ABL, for their economic livelihoods. For example, agriculture provides the main source of income in communities surveyed (82%), followed by the public sector (17%), while income from private sector employment or irregular work is negligible. Agricultural trade has reduced since August 2008 as it has become harder to cross the ABL. This is demonstrated by the fact that communities rated lack of access to markets for agricultural products and less opportunity to earn money as respectively the 3rd and 4th most urgent problems they face, and the 4th and 2nd greatest personal threats (see below). As a result of this reduction in trade, more than half of the population surveyed is dependent on pensions or state social payments (60%) and in Atotsi-Dirbi area the figure is as high as 81%.

Shida Kartli's economy is thus not only very weak, but structured in a way that makes significant growth unlikely. Without private businesses and with an overwhelming

<sup>8</sup> *The Caucasus Barometer*, (CRRC, 2009), from which this figure is taken, records values in USD. The closest equivalent to Saferworld's category of 'less than 100 lari' was 'less than 50 USD', approximately 90 lari as of August 2010.

majority of the local population at least partly dependent on state transfers, it lacks dynamic elements. In addition, two years after the August 2008 war, the amount of internationally funded social and economic assistance to the region has dramatically reduced. This reduction in support means that underlying vulnerabilities may become more evident in the coming six months. As such, there seem to be few opportunities for communities to improve their economic situation or reverse the high levels of poverty – adding to the risk of further depopulation: “If you have an opportunity to start working somewhere, you may leave the village. It is very hard to find a job nowadays.”<sup>9</sup>

**Impact of reduced movement across the ABL on communities**

The overall evidence from the survey and focus groups indicates that restrictions on crossing the ABL have had a significant impact on communities in Shida Kartli, because:

- they are very reliant on resources located on the other side of the ABL or in insecure areas close to the ABL, such as water and land.
- in many cases their livelihoods have traditionally depended on small-scale agricultural trade with communities across the ABL.
- maintaining personal relationships with family and friends who live on the other side of the ABL has become more difficult – undermining a resource for future reconciliation.

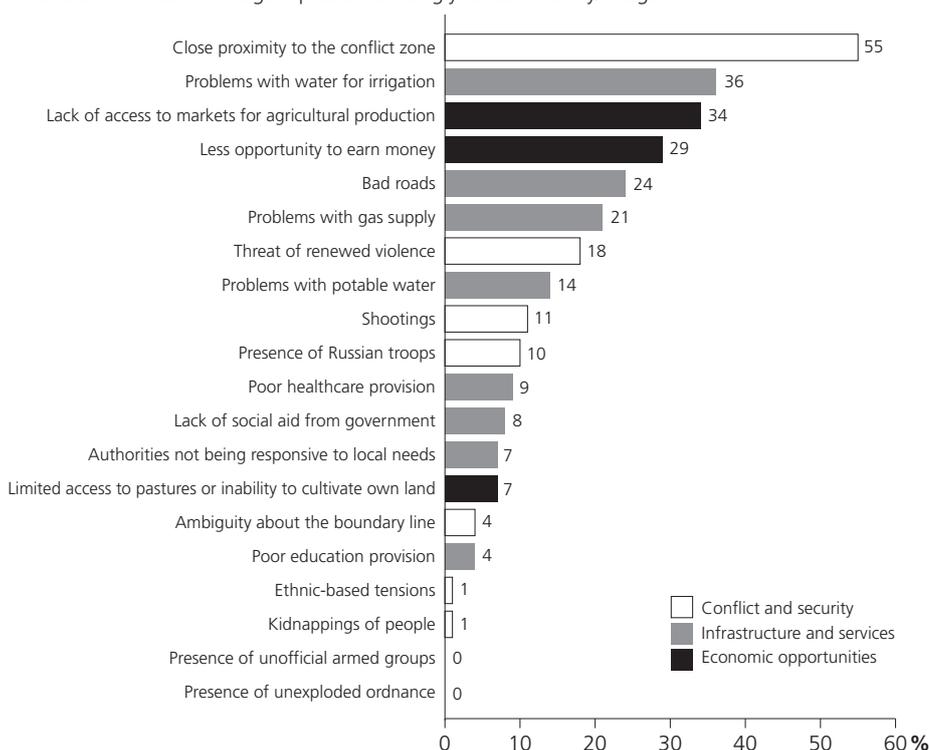
**What are the critical needs facing communities?**

The conflict is the most urgent issue for communities and its consequences for physical security are most keenly felt in Atotsi-Dirbi.

People living close to the ABL see the conflict as the most urgent problem for their communities, with 55% of respondents naming close proximity to the conflict zone as one of the most urgent problems for their community (figure 2).

**Figure 2: The most urgent problems facing communities in Shida Kartli**

What are the three most urgent problems facing your community/village?



<sup>9</sup> Focus group participant, female, 36 years old, Atotsi-Dirbi.

The conflict is perceived to have most impact on communities in Nikozi-Mereti (83%) followed by Atotsi-Dirbi (72%) and Plavismani-Bershueti (50%), with the conflict not being considered a community problem by any of the respondents from Tsitelubani-Lamiskana – indicating that this area has been less affected by the conflict, both since the initial violence in the early 1990s and since the August 2008 war (see figure 1): “The Ossetia factor [affects us], first of all, because we live on the border. We live in conditions in which we don’t know what will happen tomorrow.”<sup>10</sup>

Apprehension about the conflict is not, however, in all cases driven by the physical threats posed by the ongoing conflict and proximity to the ABL. A very small minority of respondents named concrete security issues as community priorities – the presence of unexploded ordnance, unofficial armed groups, or kidnappings were each named by less than 1% of respondents. Even the ongoing shootings and the presence of Russian troops are perceived to be an urgent problem by no more than 11% and 10% of the local population, respectively. Indeed, the threat of renewed violence, which was identified by 18% of respondents as one of their three most urgent problems, is associated with fear about the future, rather than present realities: “Renewal of violence is possible at any minute. When we visit our neighbours, their soldiers watch our every move.”<sup>11</sup>

This indicates that for many communities, the conflict does not provide a constant physical threat – instead, they are predominantly concerned about its ongoing economic impact (see below). That being said, 39% of respondents in Atotsi-Dirbi and 30% of respondents in Nikozi-Mereti identified the threat of renewed violence as an urgent community problem (compared to 18% overall), and 35% and 15% respectively identified shootings as an urgent community problem (compared to 11% overall).

#### **Poor access to irrigation water affects many communities, especially in Nikozi-Mereti.**

Access to water is an urgent problem for many communities. 36% of respondents named problems with irrigation water as one of the three most urgent problems affecting their community, while 14% prioritised problems with potable water. Indeed, problems with access to irrigation water is considered the second most urgent problem overall, after proximity to the conflict. Problems accessing irrigation water are mostly associated with the conflict, as many water sources are situated on the other side of the ABL. As communities are unable to cross the ABL, they are not able to clean and maintain these sources, while in some cases water sources are purposely tampered with or diverted by communities living on the other side of the ABL. Lack of irrigation water is an especially salient issue for the Nikozi-Mereti region, with 49% of respondents from this region identifying it as an urgent community problem. At the same time, respondents in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana identified reduced access to water as the trend most likely to increase tensions or result in renewed violence (see below).

#### **Economic problems are most keenly felt in Plavismani-Bershueti and are closely linked with restrictions on movement across the ABL.**

Taken together, poor economic opportunities provide the greatest concern for communities living along the ABL. The most significant economic challenge for communities, identified by 34% of respondents, is the lack of access to markets for agricultural production, followed by the scarcity of opportunities for earning money (29%). As noted above, these issues are closely linked with challenges in crossing the ABL and reduced ability to trade with communities on the other side: “Before, we did not even have to go to the market. The Ossetians came [across the ABL] 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?”<sup>12</sup>

There were again significant differences between the four village groups. Economic problems seem to be most urgent in Plavismani-Bershueti, where 68% identify the lack

<sup>10</sup> Focus group participant, male, 48 years old, Plavismani-Bershueti.

<sup>11</sup> Focus group participant, female, 35 years old, Atotsi-Dirbi.

<sup>12</sup> Focus group participant, female, 54 years old, Nikozi-Mereti.

of access to markets for agricultural production as an urgent community problem and 48% identify reduced opportunities for making money. This indicates that while the conflict has had fewer physical security repercussions in this area, it has significantly impacted on economic security. Indeed, concerns over trade and earnings in Plavismani-Bershueti seem to be linked to reduced contact with communities across the ABL – 18% of respondents from this area say their relations across the ABL have worsened since the beginning of 2010.

**The conflict is not considered an urgent issue in Tselubani-Lamiskana, where communities are more concerned about longer-term infrastructure problems.**

Overall, survey respondents consider infrastructure problems less urgent than physical security or economic issues, with the exception of irrigation water. The most significant infrastructure problem – bad roads – was identified by 24% of the respondents as one of the most urgent problems in their community, while problems with the gas supply were identified by 21% of respondents. Bad roads are considered an especially pressing issue in Atotsi-Dirbi, where 47% of people identify it as an urgent problem – reflecting the region's isolation.

People in Tselubani-Lamiskana were most likely to perceive their communities as in need of infrastructure development, with over 81% citing bad roads, problems with gas supply and problems with water for irrigation as urgent community problems. It is most likely that these issues were given higher priority in Tselubani-Lamiskana due to the limited impact of the conflict in this region on economic and physical security (as noted above, no respondents from this group considered the conflict an urgent community problem) rather than because the infrastructure needs of communities in Tselubani-Lamiskana are greater than those in the other village groups.

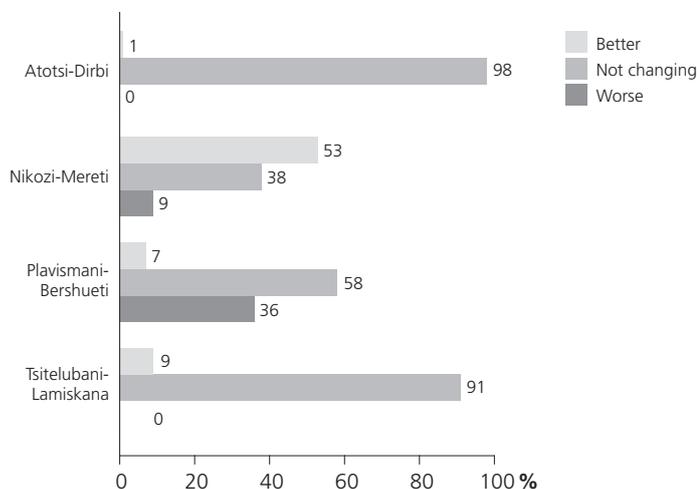
### How is the situation in communities changing?

**Improved physical security has made life better in Nikozi-Mereti, but Plavismani-Bershueti is more vulnerable due to increasing economic insecurity.**

Different areas along the ABL with South Ossetia have experienced different trends since the beginning of 2010. The situation seems to have improved in Nikozi-Mereti, where 53% of respondents described the general situation in their community as 'better'. It has remained the same for Atotsi-Dirbi and Tselubani-Lamiskana – more than 90% said that nothing has changed in both areas – and is perceived to have become worse in Plavismani-Bershueti (36%) – Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Changes in the community situation over in the six months preceding July 2010**

How would you describe the situation in your community or village compared to 6 months ago?



Of those with a positive assessment – almost exclusively inhabitants of Nikozi-Mereti – 43% attributed the improved situation in part to better provision of potable water,

and 38% to the fact that there are fewer security incidents. Economic insecurity seems to be the most relevant issue for those with a negative opinion – who are mainly from Plavismani-Bershueti – as they blame fewer opportunities to earn money (42%), the increasingly limited supply of irrigation water (20%) and fewer opportunities for agricultural activities (16%).

### **Summary and conclusions**

The survey demonstrates the ongoing impact of the conflict on communities along the ABL in terms of depopulation and poverty, and shows that further depopulation remains a real threat. It also highlights the divergent needs of different communities. While physical insecurity is most pressing in Atotsi-Dirbi and all indicators point to further depopulation there, life in communities in Nikozi-Mereti has improved, partly as a result of a reduction in security incidents. In Plavismani-Bershueti, on the other hand, economic insecurity is on the increase and is driven by the reduced ability to trade across the ABL. Communities in Tselubani-Lamiskana feel less affected by the physical and economic security impacts of the conflict, prioritising instead longer-term infrastructure problems.

As such, priority should be given to countering the risk of further displacement from Atotsi-Dirbi, especially through measures to reduce levels of physical insecurity experienced by communities there, and to reinforce economic security in Plavismani-Bershueti, by increasing opportunities for communities in this area to trade and earn money, including across the ABL.

# 3

## Personal safety and the role of security providers

**WHEREAS THE PREVIOUS SECTION ANALYSED PERCEPTIONS** of the overall situation in communities, their needs and challenges for their sustainability, this section looks at the frequency of physical security incidents, their relative importance compared to other causes of insecurity, feelings of personal security, and the performance of security providers. The evidence below should be of help to international and especially local agencies when planning security responses, and when balancing national security and local community priorities.

### What physical security incidents affect personal safety and how do these relate to non-security issues?

Apart from shootings, physical security incidents related to the conflict are rare.

Survey respondents identified a range of physical security incidents that have happened in their community since the August 2008 war. However, most are 'ordinary' incidents such as drunken disorder and conflicts between neighbours (figure 4). One notable exception is shootings, which are the most frequent incident according to the majority of respondents. Notably, in Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti, four out of five people hear or witness shootings a few times a month.

**Figure 4: Frequency of security incidents**

Since August 2008, how often has the following happened in your community or village?

... a few times a month	Shootings	51%
	Drunken disorder	7%
... at least once a month	Conflict between neighbours	14%
	Drunken disorder	11%
... at least once a year	Agricultural & livestock thefts	18%
	Drunken disorder	9%
	Conflict between neighbours	9%
	Other thefts	8%
	Kidnapping	7%
... at least once	Injuries through unexploded ordnance	18%
	Agricultural & livestock thefts	17%
	Kidnapping	12%
	Other thefts	7%

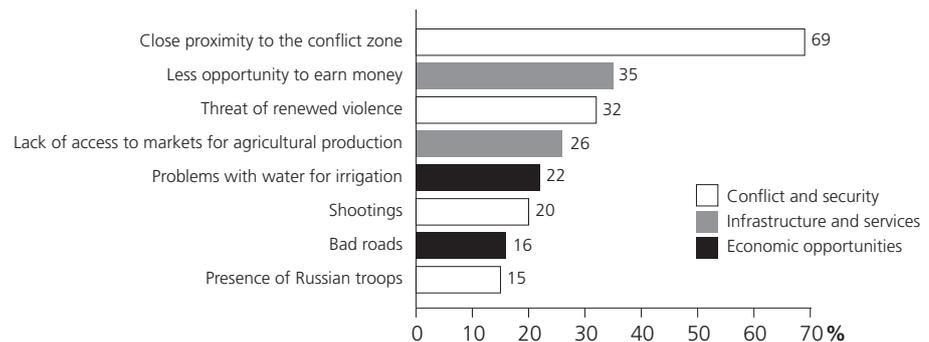
Other incidents directly related to the conflict are rare. Community members have been injured by unexploded ordnance once or twice in Nikozi-Mereti and Plavismani-Bershueti, and never in the other areas. Kidnapping is equally uncommon in all areas,

with 7% of all respondents having heard of such an incident at least once a year, and 12% at least once since August 2008. It should also be noted that it is unclear whether the agricultural and livestock thefts identified by respondents are everyday crimes or are related to the conflict (i.e. committed by groups from across the ABL). The fact that they happen in all areas except Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, the area least affected by the conflict, would seem to suggest the latter.

**Physical security issues represent a greater threat to individuals than to communities, especially in Nikozi-Mereti and Atotsi-Dirbi.**

Similar to the community level, close proximity to the conflict zone is considered the greatest personal threat, identified as such by almost three quarters of respondents. However, the physical security impacts of the conflict are more evidently threatening to individuals than to communities as a whole, while individuals feel less threatened by economic and infrastructure issues. 32% of respondents in Shida Kartli said that the potential for renewed violence represents a threat to them personally (figure 5) compared to 18% at the community level. Similarly, 20% and 15% of respondents think that shootings and the presence of Russian troops respectively represent the greatest threat to them personally, compared with 11% and 10% who considered such issues as urgent problems for their communities.

**Figure 5: Personal threats to respondents**  
What represents a threat to you personally?



Physical security issues are deemed to be most threatening in Nikozi-Mereti and Atotsi-Dirbi, where more than half of respondents (58% and 59% respectively) fear the threat of renewed violence. Significantly, shootings were considered to be a greater threat in Atotsi-Dirbi (59%) than in Nikozi-Mereti (30%) reflecting the improved security situation there. Other physical security issues related to conflict – such as kidnappings (an issue often associated with life along the ABL), ethnic-based tensions and the presence of unofficial armed groups – were considered a threat by less than 2% of people, in line with respondents’ prioritisation at a community level. This indicates that, similar to the community level, personal worries about physical security issues are more based on apprehensions about the future, rather than deriving from existent threats: “I do not have plans for my future, because there is always some feeling of fear.”<sup>13</sup>

### How safe do people perceive themselves to be?

**The majority of people in Atotsi-Dirbi feel unsafe, and feelings of insecurity are driven by shootings.**

Overall, more people in Shida Kartli feel safe (38% feel very or quite safe) than unsafe (27% feel very or quite unsafe and 35% feel neither safe nor unsafe). Atotsi-Dirbi is subjectively the least safe area, with 56% saying they feel quite or very unsafe and only 17% feeling quite or very safe. In Plavismani-Bershueti, opinions are evenly split, with 23% feeling safe and 25% feeling unsafe. On the whole, more people in Nikozi-Mereti feel

<sup>13</sup> Focus group participant, female, 27 years old, Nikozi-Mereti.

safe (45%) than unsafe (22%). People in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana overwhelmingly feel quite safe (93%), which is certainly due to the fact that the area did not border Tskhinvali controlled territory prior to August 2008, and did not suffer during the August 2008 violence.

The predominant feeling of insecurity in Atotsi-Dirbi corresponds to the high frequency of shootings in this area and the fact that more than half of respondents (59%) consider shootings to be a threat to them personally. The relatively high level of insecurity in Plavismani-Bershueti, on the other hand, is influenced by economic concerns. The fact that the majority of people from Atotsi-Dirbi feel unsafe provides further evidence of the potential for additional displacement from the area.

**While they feel more secure, people in Nikozi-Mereti still perceive themselves to be on the ‘front line’ of the conflict.**

Nikozi-Mereti is becoming safer, with 40% of respondents stating that their personal safety has increased since the beginning of 2010 and only 15% stating the opposite. In Tsitelubani-Lamiskana the situation is also improving – all people either feel personally as safe as they did at the end of 2009 (69%) or even safer (31%). 85% of people in Plavismani-Bershueti feel the same level of security, while 8% feel safer and 7% feel less safe. Atotsi-Dirbi is the only group demonstrating a worsening trend – 86% feel as safe as they did at the end of 2009, but 14% feel less safe.

While they feel safer overall, a number of indicators demonstrate that communities in Nikozi-Mereti still feel as if they are living on the ‘front line’ of the conflict. 94% of people from this area feel less safe after dark (compared to the average of 39%). This contrasts starkly with Atotsi-Dirbi where respondents did not indicate any difference between their feelings of safety during the day and at night. Indeed, Nikozi-Mereti is the only area in which the presence of Russian troops on the other side of the ABL is seen as both an urgent community problem and a threat to individuals by a sizeable part of the population (31% and 41%, respectively). This feeling of being on the front line helps explain why people from Nikozi-Mereti still feel threatened by the proximity of the conflict zone, and are the most pessimistic in their assessment of the potential for increased tensions in the future (see below).

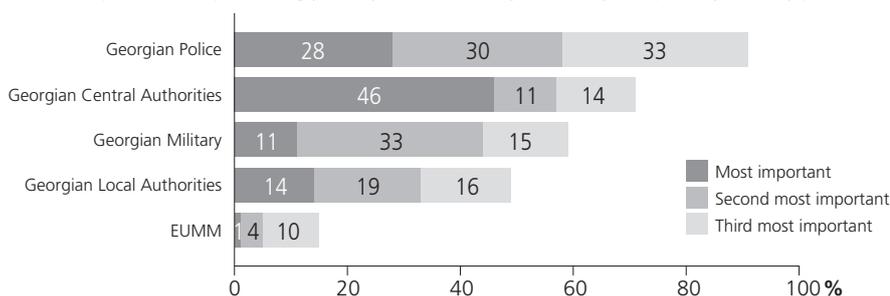
**Who provides security and how do communities relate to these security providers?**

**The Georgian Central Authorities provide security through political management of the conflict, while the Georgian Police are the main provider on the ground.**

The Georgian Central Authorities are perceived to be the ‘primary security provider’ when it comes to protecting people in their community – 46% identify them as most important provider (figure 6). The Georgian Police are, however, the most vital provider overall – 28% of respondents cite them as their primary security provider, 30% put them second and 33% put them third. Other actors perceived to provide security are the Georgian Military (11% first, 33% second), the Georgian Local Authorities (14% first, 19% second) and the EUMM (15% first, second and third combined).

**Figure 6: Perceptions of primary security provider**

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



The only discrepancy in responses was from the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana village group, where only 12% see the Georgian Central Authorities as the 'primary security provider', but a full 62% see the local authorities as the most or second most important provider. The Georgian Police are as important to people from this area as they are to others; but communities in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana put less emphasis on the military's role, and do not consider EUMM to be an important actor at all.

The primacy of the Georgian Central Authorities for communities hints at a perception that the conflict, and associated security issues, is the result of international political problems rather than local dynamics. As such, the Government in Tbilisi provides security by politically managing the conflict and by ensuring a military presence. Indeed, respondents who chose the central authorities as their primary security provider were also very likely to choose the Georgian Military as the second most important security provider (40%): "Individuals cannot make the Russians leave. We don't know who is able to do this. This is decided at the top level, and the whole world is involved in this. Our opinions do not change anything."<sup>14</sup> The discrepancy in responses from Tsitelubani-Lamiskana underlines the fact that the communities in this area are not as affected by the conflict as those in the other three areas, and are more interested in responses to everyday security issues.

The perception of the police as the most important security provider overall reflects the fact that the police force is the primary 'coalface' provider on the ground (more so than the military), with responsibility both for managing the ABL and ensuring the security of communities living there. For example, 88% of people would turn to the police if in need. Non-state actors such as Georgian NGOs, churches, relatives or friends have virtually no role as security providers in respondents' minds. The fact that in other conflict contexts these groups are often thought to be important security providers underlines the success of the Georgian Government in continuing to deliver a security service in difficult circumstances.

**People are most satisfied with the police, but feel their effectiveness could be improved by strengthening communication and relationships with communities.**

The police and the military received the best assessment of all providers – 80% and 64% of respondents rate them as quite or very effective (figure 7). While this satisfaction with performance is genuine, it should be interpreted with care. Such positive responses are often due to nervousness on the part of respondents to criticise national security providers. It is also likely that people are responding to their visibility, e.g. patrols and checkpoints, rather than making an accurate judgement of their effectiveness in meeting local needs. In the focus group discussions, for example, people said they do not expect effective responses to their needs from the police and complained that the police could play a greater role: "They should be working much better. They are just standing at their posts for salaries and doing nothing."<sup>15</sup>

People thought that the police (as well as other organisations) would be more effective if they spent more time providing information and advice to local communities about the security situation, and if communities were able to both directly voice their concerns to the police and to play a role in developing security responses: "We should know in the case of emergency what to do, where and how to go;"<sup>16</sup> "The most important thing is that there should be people who actually consider our input. At the local level, everyone would be willing to co-operate without payment."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Focus group participant, male, 57 years old, Atotsi-Dirbi.

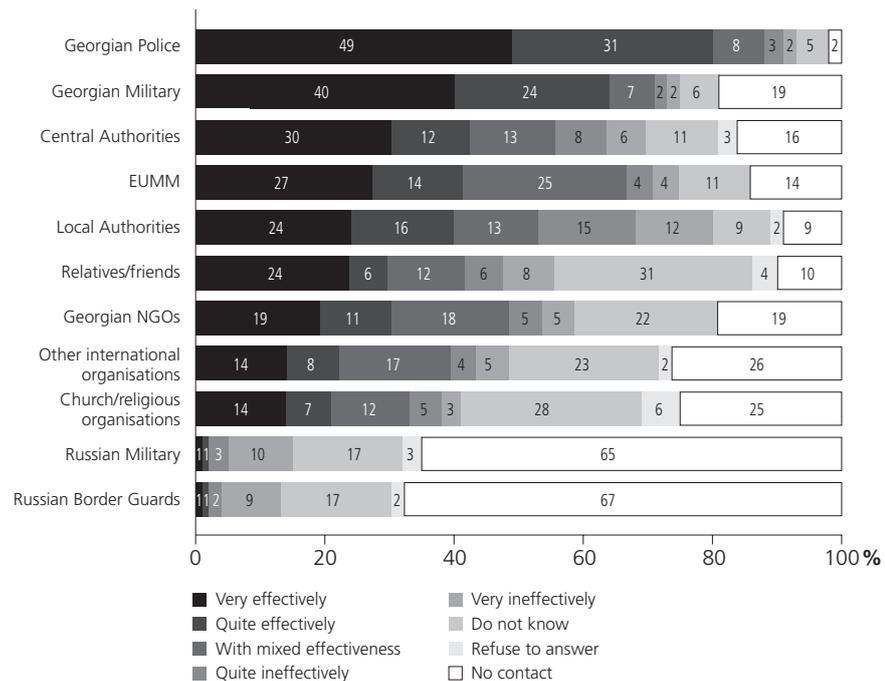
<sup>15</sup> Focus group participant, male, 45 years old, Atotsi-Dirbi.

<sup>16</sup> Focus group participant, male, 35 years old, Nikozi-Mereti.

<sup>17</sup> Focus group participant, female, 54 years old, Nikozi-Mereti.

**Figure 7: Effectiveness of security providers at dealing with local concerns**

How well are the following actors dealing with security problems affecting your community/village?



### Communities understand the low-profile approach to policing, but some feel abandoned, and others are frustrated that the police also restrict movement across the ABL.

The police in Shida Kartli have taken a low-profile approach to ensuring security and stabilising the post-conflict environment, so as not to escalate tensions. This approach is in most cases understood by communities along the ABL: “Our police will be punished by our government if they resist the other side.”<sup>18</sup> That said, there is a feeling in some communities that this approach leaves them exposed to threats from across the ABL and reinforces a sense of abandonment: “Ossetians took away the grapes that had been picked, and on the next day, they brought workers and picked what was left and took that away too... Both our police and the special unit are there, but they don’t have the right to go out and control the situation. They are stationed in one place. They can’t intervene too much in order not to cause conflict;”<sup>19</sup> “We live in a village, which is neither a buffer zone nor conflict zone. No one cares about us.”<sup>20</sup>

In those cases where the police have been able to provide more of a protective presence in villages or between villages and the ABL, this has had a significant positive impact on communities’ sense of security: “Before this special unit and our police were stationed there, there had been cases of armed groups of people entering our village.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, some focus group respondents would like the police to provide a more protective presence in and around their villages.

This desire for the police to take a greater role in protection is balanced with a frustration in some communities that the police and special police units have also (in addition to the Russians) played a role in restricting relations and trade across the ABL: “The police are limiting us in every possible way because they cannot control the territory and think we have some links with the Russians.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, in some cases, police officers have even dealt insensitively with Georgians crossing the boundary line: “What does it feel like when a person gets on a minibus and publicly tells you to open

<sup>18</sup> Focus group participant, female, 34 years old, Atotsi-Dirbi.

<sup>19</sup> Focus group participant, male, 59 years old, Plavismani-Bershueti.

<sup>20</sup> Focus group participant, male, 40 years old, Plavismani-Bershueti.

<sup>21</sup> Focus group participant, male, 50 years old, Plavismani-Bershueti.

<sup>22</sup> Focus group participant, male, 25 years old, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana.

your bags, will throw the things out and make you come down from the minibus?”<sup>23</sup> These frustrations are more widespread in Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana.

### **Strengthening relationships between communities and providers**

Previous research on how to strengthen relations between communities and providers has provided some guidance on how to structure interaction so it is most successful:

- establish regular meetings between government and community representatives to identify local priorities and appropriate responses.
- ensure that community involvement in security responses goes beyond participation in formal meetings and includes a role in implementing solutions.
- respond to priorities raised in meetings so that communities see tangible outcomes.
- security providers should ensure greater transparency and accountability in their processes.

Tatum J, Viehues M and Wood D, *Security, Community and Participation in Shida Kartli after the August War*, (Saferworld, 2010)

### **NGOs are considered to lack transparency and act in an unfair manner.**

Although some people still considered NGOs to be effective, they received less striking praise and many people reported having had no contact with them. For example, Georgian and international NGOs are respectively considered quite or very effective in dealing with community security problems by only 30% and 22%, while 41% and 49% of respondents do not have an opinion on their performance. While relatively low estimations of NGO effectiveness may be due to low levels of contact and low understanding of their role, the focus group discussions demonstrated this response is partly influenced by the feeling that post-conflict assistance has been unfairly distributed: “These non-governmental organisations made these poor people hate each other. If they are helping, they should help everybody. If it is not possible then they shouldn’t help anybody.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Russian security forces restrict contact with communities across the ABL.**

The Russian Military and Russian Border Guards operating on the other side of the ABL are the only actors perceived as ineffective by a majority of those in Shida Kartli who have to deal with them. While only 15% of all respondents report having contact with Russian security forces, over 80% of these respondents deem those forces to be very or quite ineffective in addressing their communities’ security problems.

Given that the findings throughout this study demonstrated an overall improvement in the security environment in Shida Kartli and that this coincides with a reported increase in Russian presence, it might have been expected that Russian security forces would be perceived as making a positive contribution to security (even if their presence is politically unacceptable). Indeed, during the focus group discussions people stated that Russian forces provide an important barrier to security incidents: “When the war ended [...] 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.”<sup>25</sup>

Responses during the focus groups demonstrated that people’s negative appraisal is rooted in the fact that Russian forces restrict contact with communities across the

<sup>23</sup> Focus group participant, female, 29 years old, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana.

<sup>24</sup> Focus group participant, female, 40 years old, Nikozi-Mereti.

<sup>25</sup> Focus group participant, male, 61 years old Atotsi-Dirbi.

ABL: “The Russians don’t let them communicate with us;”<sup>26</sup> “Russians make problems for the Ossetians and for us. If your cow crossed the border and you want it back, no problem, they will let you find it. But they do not let us visit each other freely.”<sup>27</sup>

**People do not hesitate to ask the police for help if they become a victim.**

The vast majority of respondents to the survey said they would look for help if they became a victim of crime or insecurity – 76% would definitely seek help from a security provider, and a further 18% would probably do so. Only 2% deem it unlikely that they would call for help, and 1% would by no means do so.

Almost all respondents would turn to the Georgian Police (88%), followed at some distance by the Georgian Central Authorities (24%), the Courts (13%) and the EUMM (11%). Importantly, only a very small proportion of respondents said they would turn to relatives or friends (5%), the Georgian Military (4%), journalists, NGOs or religious groups (all less than 2%) – actors that often provide important points of recourse in conflict-affected environments. Among those rare respondents who would not address anybody, the lack of willingness to help on the part of the security providers, and their lack of capacity were the most common reasons cited.

**Summary and conclusions**

Overall, these responses demonstrate that security incidents are rare (except for shootings) and that the security environment is stable or improving, except in Atotsi-Dirbi. In addition, it is clear that the police are the main ‘front line’ security provider, delivering an accessible security service that is appreciated by communities. At the same time, police responsiveness to local concerns and priorities could be strengthened by the provision of more information on the local security situation and by creating opportunities for community members to voice their concerns directly to the police and other providers.

There is also scope for more sensitive policing that takes a varied approach along the ABL, for example by looking to reinforce security in some communities in Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti, but by introducing more permissive policing measures in some communities in Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, so as to enable them to continue and deepen relations and trade across the ABL. It will be important for the police to work with communities to identify where and when more permissive activities could be appropriate.

<sup>26</sup> Focus group participant, female, 34 years old, Atotsi-Dirbi.

<sup>27</sup> Focus group participant, male, 40 years old, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana.

# 4

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

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

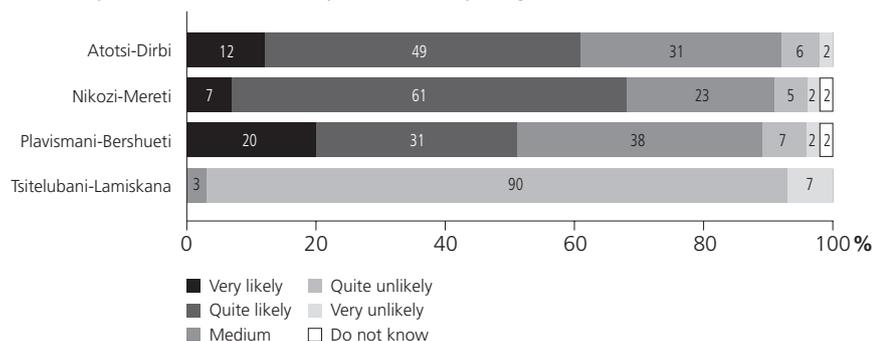
### What is the potential for increased tensions in communities?

People in Shida Kartli are pessimistic about the future, especially in Nikozi-Mereti and Atotsi-Dirbi, with half expecting increased tensions before 2011.

Overall, 50% of respondents think that it is quite or very likely that the situation in their community will become tenser before the end of the year. 28% deem increased tensions a medium risk, and only 20% think that it is quite or highly unlikely that the situation will become tenser.

**Figure 8: Potential for greater tension before 2011**

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



The situation is considered to be most volatile in Nikozi-Mereti and Atotsi-Dirbi, where increased tensions are deemed quite or very likely by 68% and 61% of respondents respectively (figure 8). On the other hand, communities in Tselubani-Lamiskana – which previously did not border territory controlled by Tskhinvali – consider the situation to be much more stable, with over 90% of respondents believing they are unlikely to experience increased tensions.

The pessimistic outlook in Nikozi-Mereti runs contrary to the area's recent experience of improved security, but fits with the overall feeling of being on the 'front line' and communities' lack of support for engagement measures across the ABL (see below). The perceived likelihood of increased tensions in Atotsi-Dirbi, however, reinforces concerns about the sustainability of populations living there and the potential for additional depopulation. It is also important to note that one in five respondents (20%) from Plavismani-Bershueti consider it very likely that their community will become tenser. This corresponds to widespread economic insecurity and the significant number of respondents from this area who have seen their relationships with communities across the ABL worsen since the beginning of 2010 (see below).

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

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

56% of respondents think that political escalation between Georgia and Russia is likely to cause new tensions or renewed conflict, while 31% see a further political escalation between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali as a trigger (figure 9). This indicates that people perceive the main causes of tensions as external to their community and outside of their influence. These responses also demonstrate a sophisticated view of the conflict that, while giving primacy to the international dimension, recognises Tskhinvali as a separate actor: "If you are interested in the truth, you should go to the Kremlin and the White House;"<sup>28</sup> "The Ossetians even said, 'Misha wanted to take Tskhinvali, but he made us lose it, too!'"<sup>29</sup>

**Figure 9: Potential triggers for increased tensions**

This event is able to cause increased tension or renewal of conflict...

Further political escalation between Georgia and Russia	56%
Shootings	41%
Further political escalation between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali	31%
Moving the border line by Russians or Ossetians	27%
Clashes between armed forces across the ABL	23%
Domestic political upheaval or unrest	23%
Problems with the supply of irrigation water	15%
EUMM leaving the region	14%
Worsening economic situation	11%
Worsening criminal situation	9%
Problems with the supply of potable water	6%
Inaccurate or inflammatory statements by politicians	6%
External political situation	5%
Flow of arms into the region	4%
Inaccurate or inflammatory media reporting	3%
Moving the border line by Georgians	2%
Reduced ability to cross the ABL	1%
Increase in illegal movement of people and contraband	1%

<sup>28</sup> Focus group participant, male, 37 years old, Nikozi-Mereti.

<sup>29</sup> Focus group participant, male, 38 years old, Plavismani-Bershueti.

Shootings were mentioned by 41% of respondents as a potential cause for increased tension and by more than double this number in Atotsi-Dirbi (84%). Those who see shootings as a potential source of renewed tension tend to experience them more often in their community, feel less safe and identify shootings as a more urgent community problem and personal threat. Shootings are common in Shida Kartli, especially in Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti. The fact that almost half of respondents see them as a potential cause of conflict suggests that shootings are a problem that is ‘hard to ignore’, even if, aside from psychological stress, concrete incidents and injuries are rare.

27% of people see moving of the border line by Russians or Ossetians as likely to increase tension, although this is a less salient issue for respondents from Atotsi-Dirbi (only 5% of whom deem it a potential cause of tension). Moving the ABL is given such prominence as it directly negatively affects communities’ livelihoods by reducing their access to pastures and irrigation water. Indeed, many people who had identified limited access to pastures and irrigation water as an urgent community problem were twice as likely to deem Russians or Ossetians moving the ABL a potential cause of tension: “[Most of us] 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.”<sup>30</sup>

#### Illegal movements of people and contraband will not lead to tensions

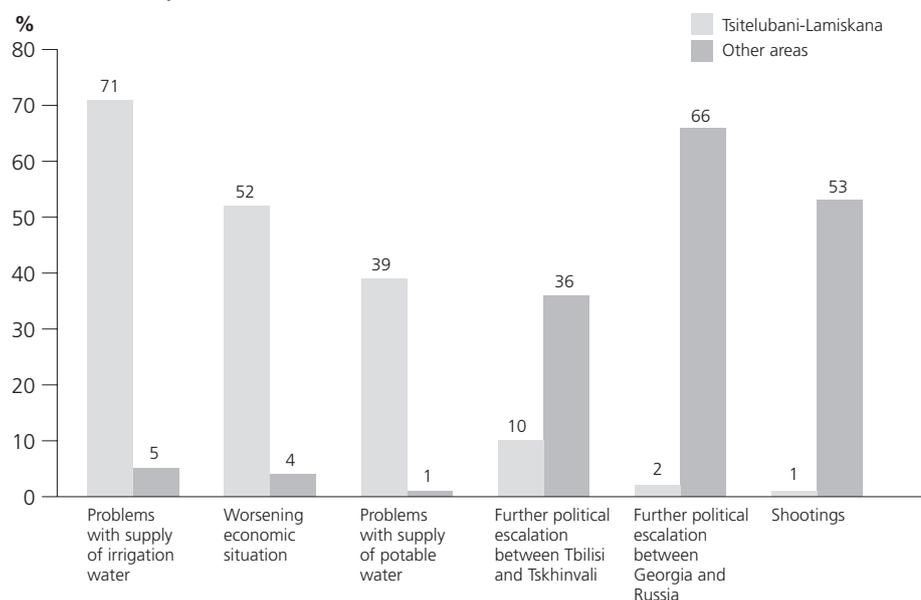
As well as understanding what people think will cause increased tensions, it is also important to analyse those events and incidents that are thought unlikely to cause tensions. For example, only 1% of respondents think that increases in illegal movement of people and contraband would create tensions. This suggests that expending resources on strict control measures along the ABL might not be necessary for ensuring a secure and stable environment for communities living there.

#### Problems with water will trigger future tensions in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana.

Responses about potential triggers of increased tensions in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana differ significantly from those in all other areas. People from this area tend to be much less concerned about the conflict over South Ossetia. The only conflict-related event they deem likely to cause new tensions is Russians or Ossetians moving the ABL (32%).

**Figure 10: Potential triggers for future tensions in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana**

Which events do you think are able to cause increased tension/renewal of conflict?



<sup>30</sup> Focus group participant, female, 36 years old, Plavismani-Bershueti.

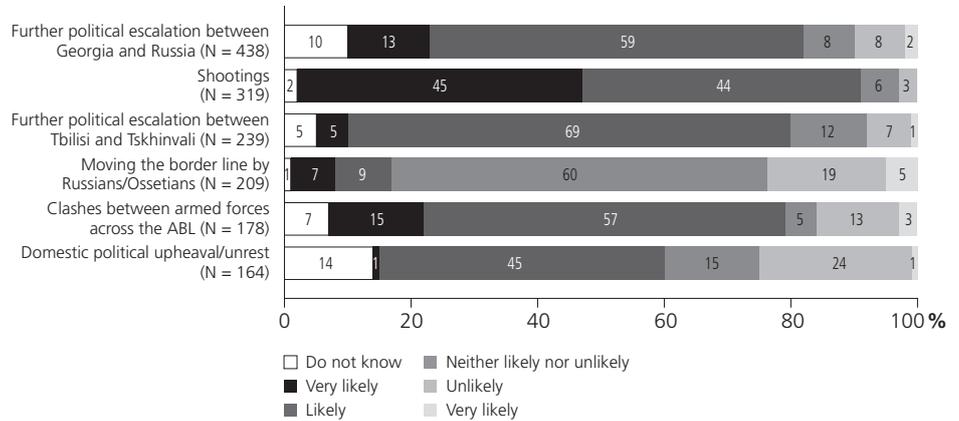
On the other hand, communities in this area are much more concerned about water and economic issues: the supply of irrigation and potable water is considered a potential cause of increased tensions or renewed conflict by 71% and 39% of respondents, respectively (figure 10). At the same time, 52% of people living in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana identified a worsening economic situation as likely to increase tensions. While these responses are partly reflective of the relatively low impact of the conflict on this area, it is clear that access to water should be monitored closely.

**Shootings are considered the most likely trigger event to happen, movement of the ABL the least likely.**

People who had identified a specific event that could cause increased tension or renewed conflict were asked whether they thought the event likely to happen during 2010. On the whole, respondents considered trigger events likely to happen. Shootings are considered the most likely event, with 89% of the 319 respondents that indicated shooting as a potential trigger of conflict believing it will happening this year – 45% even say that they think new shootings are very likely to occur, which is in line with the reported high frequency of such incidents since August 2008 (figure 11).

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

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



Only those who identified a specific event as a potential cause of tension were asked, and only the six most mentioned (>20%) events are analysed

Political escalation is also thought likely to occur, an indication that people perceive the political environment to be extremely unstable. Of the 438 people who said that further political escalation between Georgia and Russia could cause new tension, 72% thought that this is indeed likely or very likely to happen. Among those 239 that see further political escalation between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali as a problematic development, 74% expect it to happen during 2010. Only movement of the border line by Russians and Ossetians is seen as less likely to actually happen (16% of 209).

**What influences community assessments of trigger events?**

**Perceptions of the potential for trigger events are biased by past experiences of insecurity and do not reflect the real likelihood of such events occurring.**

The widespread expectation that trigger events will occur, regardless of the fact they have occurred very rarely in the immediate past (apart from shootings) and that almost all security providers active in the region are perceived to deal with security problems effectively, hints at the particular mindset of people living in Shida Kartli. Even if the physical security situation is improving, the local population feels insecure. Indeed, it seems that individual feelings of trauma and psychological stress dominate many assessments of the immediate future and the potential that trigger events will occur: “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.”<sup>31</sup>

#### **Inaccurate coverage of the conflict fuels fears of crisis scenarios.**

According to the survey results, inaccurate or inflammatory media reports and statements made by politicians are not considered likely to cause increased tension and renewed conflict (3% and 6%, respectively). This may be because media and political coverage of conflict issues affecting Shida Kartli is accurate, or because people believe that inaccurate or inflammatory reporting will not change realities on the ground. This understanding is, however, at odds with thoughts expressed by focus group participants, who were quite vocal and critical of the role played by politicians, and the media in particular.

Focus group participants stated that they often noticed a discrepancy in what is reported by the media and the events they experience first-hand. For example, they noticed that the media sometimes exaggerated events taking place in or near their community: “They [the media] sometimes exaggerate the situation – people don’t like that.”<sup>32</sup> They could also recall incidents when journalists had visited their villages and subsequently written stories that presented a distorted picture of local needs. The result is that community members do not trust information on conflict issues provided by the media, and feel that coverage does not focus on local needs: “Neither the mass media nor the government know what our conditions are.”<sup>33</sup> As a result, communities want more in-depth reporting of the context and needs in their communities, instead of reporting on fragments of the bigger picture: “They should learn the situation – what problems people have.”<sup>34</sup>

In addition, focus group participants were critical of the negative role that the media can have in increasing fears of crisis scenarios in communities living along the ABL. The mock news report of an invasion by Russian forces shown on Imedi TV on 13 March 2010 elicited especially strong emotions: “That false news programme was a crime, not a mistake. It caused, first of all, panic and confusion here;”<sup>35</sup> “The report they showed... [the] imitated one... [because of it] people left the village.”<sup>36</sup>

## **Summary and conclusions**

Overall responses demonstrate that while concerns over the future are widespread, shootings are the only local events likely to increase tensions, and that the media plays a negative role in fuelling fears of other trigger events. This indicates that local and international actors should establish processes for monitoring the link between shooting incidents and increased community tensions, with a focus on Nikozi-Mereti and Atotsi-Dirbi, and for providing information to communities on the causes and effects of shooting incidents, so that they do not create excessive concern. In addition, local actors should establish mechanisms for ensuring that analysis and comment by the media on the local conflict situation is well informed and conflict-sensitive – that is, that coverage does not increase fears at the local level.

<sup>31</sup> Focus group participant, male, 46 years old, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana.

<sup>32</sup> Focus group participant, female, 54 years old, Plavismani-Bershueti.

<sup>33</sup> Focus group participant, male, 25 years old, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana.

<sup>34</sup> Focus group participant, female, 44 years old, Atotsi-Dirbi.

<sup>35</sup> Focus group participant, male, 35 years old, Nikozi-Mereti.

<sup>36</sup> Focus group participant, male, 36 years old, Plavismani-Bershueti.

# 5

## Contact, trust and confidence across the divide

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

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

Contacts with Ossetians across the ABL have reduced since August 2008 and are now at very low levels, apart from in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (73%) do not presently have any relationships with ethnic Ossetians living in South Ossetia. Overall, 20% report family links (among ethnic Ossetian respondents this figure is as high as 85%), 6% entertain friendships across the ABL and only 1% have business links. The level of ties to the other side varies between areas, with people in Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti reporting fewer ties (less than 10%). In Plavismani-Bershueti, people with family ties make up one fifth of the population (20%). In Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, the only area with a large ethnic Ossetian population (47%), links are even more widespread – 66% report family ties and 26% are friends with ethnic Ossetians from the other side, leaving only 8% without any contact across the ABL.

While the survey only measured changes in contact levels across the ABL since the beginning of 2010 (rather than since August 2008), the focus group discussions made it clear that the August 2008 war has had a dramatic impact on contacts as both sides fear negative repercussions – even for phone calls: “I had relations with Ossetians. I had friends and businesslike relations, but after the war I stopped contacting them

and they stopped as well;”<sup>37</sup> “And everyone avoids phoning them [Ossetians], no question about it.”<sup>38</sup>

**It is becoming even more difficult to maintain relationships, especially in Plavismani-Bershueti, and this is likely to have a knock-on effect on future reconciliation.**

While 89% say that the nature of their relationship with ethnic Ossetians living in South Ossetia has not changed since the beginning of 2010, 10% feel that relations have worsened to some extent or a lot. A large proportion of those with a negative experience come from Plavismani-Bershueti, where 7% say that their relations have worsened to some extent and 11% say that they have worsened a lot.

The difficulties faced in visiting family and friends across the ABL are likely to erode even close personal relationships over time, undermining an important resource for future reconciliation and conflict prevention. In addition, reduced contact with the other side will prevent young people from forging new bonds with communities living there, leaving future generations without a deep understanding of the others’ perspective. Indeed, the focus group discussions demonstrated that this estrangement is already taking place: “People of our age know everything well. The young [Ossetian] people were raised with the idea that we took away those territories and Tskhinvali from them.”<sup>39</sup>

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

**Hostilities are low and, given the right opportunities, people are willing to reinvigorate contacts.**

While the number of friendships and business links are very low for a border region, only 2% of Shida Kartli’s population feel mistrust towards ethnic Ossetians on the other side, and less than 1% say that they are openly hostile. These are very encouraging figures coming only two years after the war. There seems to be little residual hate and it is very likely that given the opportunity, communities would rebuild ties across the divide: “Georgians cannot be without Ossetians and Ossetians cannot be without Georgians.”<sup>40</sup>

At the same time, some people are presently unwilling to re-engage with communities across the divide because of experiences during the conflict. Time is needed to overcome personal grievances: “We used to invite each other on various occasions. Now we are of the same opinion – there is no way to forgive them;”<sup>41</sup> “Those who have suffered so much will need years to accept the reconciliation.”<sup>42</sup>

**People prefer community-led approaches to engagement, which focus on local needs and are less supportive of externally managed measures.**

While respondents are supportive of most types of engagement, the most popular choices relate to local needs. 90% either support or strongly support engagement to protect human rights, 82% support engagement measures to ensure security for agricultural work and 78% support measures that enable trade (figure 12). It is encouraging that people are largely in favour of common meetings that offer opportunities to share ideas, suggesting that respondents value the opportunity for dialogue with communities across the divide. It is important to note that respondents from Plavismani-Bershueti were more supportive of measures to enable trade than those from the other village groups.

<sup>37</sup> Focus group participant, male, 35 years old, Nikozi-Mereti.

<sup>38</sup> Focus group participant, male, 38 years old, Plavismani-Bershueti.

<sup>39</sup> Focus group participant, male, 59 years old, Plavismani-Bershueti.

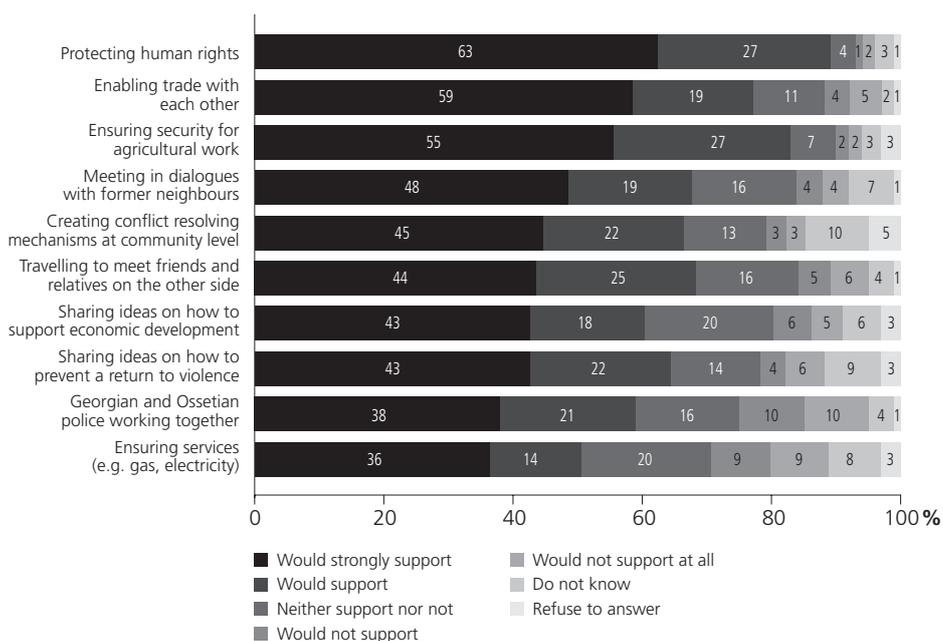
<sup>40</sup> Focus group participant, female, 40 years old, Nikozi-Mereti.

<sup>41</sup> Focus group participant, male, 45 years old, Atotsi-Ditsi.

<sup>42</sup> Focus group participant, female, 36 years old, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana.

**Figure 12: Support for engagement measures**

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



There is, however, significant opposition towards externally managed measures (i.e. that are managed by international or political actors separate from the communities) such as police co-operation or the common organisation of services such as gas and electricity – about a fifth of respondents did not support either activity (20% and 18% respectively). Reservations about externally managed co-operation with communities in South Ossetia reflect the feeling that ordinary communities should take a leading role in reducing tensions and restoring trust. This suggests that rather than looking to create formal engagement measures, national and international actors should instead consider the steps that can be taken to allow communities to themselves develop informal engagement processes at their own pace.

#### People in Nikozi-Mereti are less supportive of joint activities with communities across the divide.

In general, people from Nikozi-Mereti and Plavismani-Bershueti are less enthusiastic about most proposed engagements (apart from measures to support trade, which were more supported in Plavismani-Bershueti than in the other groups). While their opinion on engagement stayed positive, they were more likely to simply 'support' a given activity than to 'strongly support' it. In Nikozi-Mereti, there was also relatively stronger opposition to all types of engagement – in most cases, twice as strong as in the other areas. The most striking examples were the negative responses to potential police co-operation and common organisation of basic services, both of which were opposed by 46% of respondents from Nikozi-Mereti, but by between 10–15% of respondents from the other areas.

Considering that Nikozi-Mereti was the area of Shida Kartli most affected by the events of August 2008, these responses indicate that people living there are more likely to believe that reinforcing barriers separating them from South Ossetia is the best way of protecting their communities. This suggests that more of a focus should be given to creating an enabling environment for engagement in the other three areas, and for the time being the focus in Nikozi-Mereti should be on more 'protective' measures, to build up both a greater sense of security and support for engagement measures in the future.

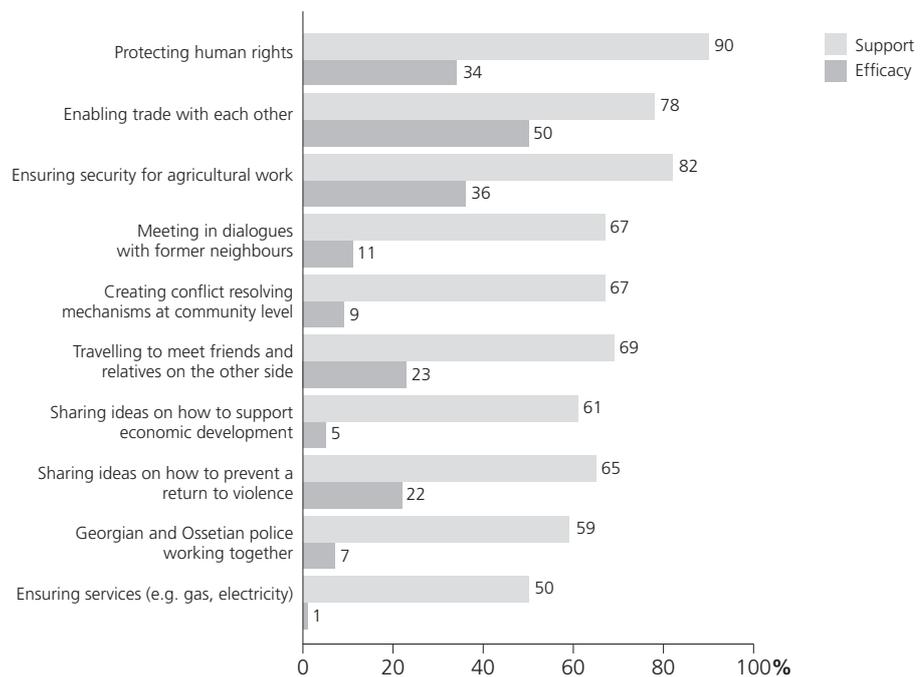
## What measures will be most effective?

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

Although people were very supportive of almost all types of engagement proposed, confidence in the efficacy of these activities was less widespread. Again, most respondents had greater faith in measures that focus on local needs. Enabling trade across the divide was considered the most effective measure, with 50% of respondents naming it as one of the three measures most likely to build trust and confidence. 36% named ensuring security for agricultural work among the three most effective measures, followed by protecting human rights (34%, figure 13). All other potential measures were considered effective by less than a quarter of respondents.

**Figure 13: Perceived effectiveness of engagement measures**

How supportive are you of the following engagement activities with Ossetians living in South Ossetia? What measures would build trust and confidence with Ossetians living in South Ossetia at this point?



## Summary and conclusions

Overall responses suggest that, as much as possible, local and international actors should look at ways in which they can encourage informal trade across the ABL. While the resulting movement and trade may not be entirely legal (e.g. it would not be taxed) it would help to increase trust and confidence at the local level and is unlikely to have negative repercussions – as noted above, only 1% of respondents felt that increases in illegal movements of people or contraband would increase local tensions: “Let’s recall 1995–1996 when the Ergneti market was opened. It was not only about money. People went there, to Tskhinvali, and Tskhinvalians came to Georgia. The people were connected. Young boys and girls would like each other, get married.”<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Focus group participant, male, 25 years old, Tsitelubani-Lamiskana.

# 6

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## Conclusion

**THE RESULTS OF THE SURVEY** demonstrate that two years after the August war, new vulnerabilities are emerging in some communities and that needs and priorities diverge along the ABL. It is important for local and international actors to properly take account of these differences when designing security responses and measures to increase engagement across the ABL. This section outlines the main vulnerabilities and needs identified in the research according to the village groups.

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

### **Atotsi-Dirbi**

The situation in Atotsi-Dirbi is perhaps most worrying of all. Communities in this area have suffered from the highest level of depopulation. Atotsi-Dirbi is by far the most insecure area, with the majority of people from this area feeling unsafe and a significant proportion feeling less safe than at the beginning of 2010. Most people experience shootings and these experiences are the greatest driver of insecurity. Indeed, of the 61% who think that their community will become tenser over the next six months (before the end of 2010), 84% think that this will be caused by shootings.

Insecurity in this area is reinforced by its isolation and relative dependency on state support. 47% of respondents identified bad roads as an urgent community problem (compared to 24% overall) and less than 10% maintain ties across the ABL. At the same time, 81% of people are reliant on a state pension (compared to an average of 60% along the ABL). All of these indicators point towards the risk of further depopulation and the resultant need to address ongoing insecurity.

### **Nikozi-Mereti**

Communities in Nikozi-Mereti consider themselves to be at the ‘front line’ of the conflict, and overall appear to be the most affected by it – 83% of respondents from this group consider proximity to the conflict as an urgent community problem (compared to an average of 55%). Indeed, 94% of people feel less safe after dark (39% average) and Nikozi-Mereti is the only area in which the presence of Russian troops is seen as both

an urgent community problem and a threat to individuals by a sizeable part of the population (31% and 41%, respectively). At the same time, poor access to irrigation water because of the conflict continues to affect people in this area.

The situation in Nikozi-Mereti is, however, the most improved of all the groups. 53% of respondents say the situation in their community has got better over the last six months (since the beginning of 2010), while 40% think their personal safety has increased. Only 15% say their personal safety has got worse. Nevertheless, due to past experiences, more people in this area than in the other groups fear a resumption of violence and believe that tensions in their community will increase. People in this area were also least supportive of measures to encourage engagement across the divide. These findings demonstrate that more action is needed to persuade people in this area that improved security will endure.

### **Plavismani-Bershueti**

While not as affected by the conflict as Nikozi-Mereti and not as insecure as Atotsi-Dirbi, communities in Plavismani-Bershueti have seen the most negative recent trends. This is the only area where a significant proportion of people said their community's situation had got worse since the beginning of 2010 (36%). Increased economic insecurity is the main reason for this perception – 68% identify the lack of access to markets for agricultural production as an urgent community problem, while 48% identify reduced opportunities to make money as urgent (compared to averages of 34% and 29% respectively).

Concerns over trade and earnings in Plavismani-Bershueti seem to be linked to reduced contact with communities across the ABL – 18% of respondents from this area say their relations across the ABL had worsened over the six months preceding the survey. Indeed, people from this area (along with Tsitelubani-Lamiskana) also expressed the greatest levels of frustration with the effect of security operations on relationships and trade across the divide. As such, it is essential to increase the potential for people from this area to trade across the ABL.

### **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana**

Communities in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana do not appear to be as affected by either the conflict or insecurity – 93% feel safe and 90% think it unlikely that the situation in their community will become tenser. Indeed, people in this area are more concerned with longer-term infrastructure problems than with conflict and security issues, with over 81% citing bad roads, problems with gas supply and problems with water for irrigation as their most urgent community problems. Indeed, reduced access to irrigation water is thought to carry a significant risk of increasing tensions for communities in this group.

Only communities in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, 47% of whom are ethnic Ossetian, maintain significant relationships across the divide – 66% report family ties and 26% are friends with ethnic Ossetians from the other side, leaving only 8% without any contact across the ABL. It might be the case that the lack of concern over security and conflict issues is partly a result of these relationships. These findings indicate that communities in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana should be a secondary priority for security responses, but that they represent an important resource for future reconciliation and that their access to irrigation water should be closely monitored.

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## Annex 1: Methodology

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

Development of the methodology started in April 2010 with a set of baseline focus group discussions, designed to provide greater insight into how communities understand 'community', 'security' and 'conflict', and to explore ways of encouraging community participation in identifying community security priorities and developing appropriate responses, as well as greater engagement between communities and security providers.<sup>44</sup>

The household survey was conducted in July 2010. We surveyed 790 individuals from four target groups of villages (Atotsi-Dirbi – 9 villages, 3,040 households; Nikozi-Mereti – 13 villages, 3,435 households; Plavismani-Bershueti – 17 villages, 6,164 households; and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana – 16 villages, 2,272 households). Only communities living directly along the ABL that were deemed accessible to the research team were selected, as it was found that the situation had returned to normal for those communities situated even a few kilometres away from the divide.<sup>45</sup>

The sample included two levels of clustering. Each village comprised a first-level cluster, and each household within each village comprised a second-level cluster. Villages within each target group were selected with probability proportional to size. Households within each village were selected using systematic sampling beginning in the centre of the village and using a step size of four. Respondents within each household were selected using the most recent birthday method. In total, 39.6% of respondents were male and 60.4% were female. All were over 18 years old.

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

Four representative villages were selected, one from each of the target areas. 20 persons were recruited from each village. From each 20-person list, 10 were selected and 10 were placed on a reserve list. The participants were selected to ensure a ratio of 5 female and 5 male participants, and aged between 18–35 and 36–45, in each focus group.

In order to guarantee an acceptable level of anonymity for the participants, the CRRC and Saferworld decided not to disclose the names of the recruiting villages. Due to the very small community sizes, the personal data included in this report might otherwise suffice to identify participants. During the focus groups, the moderator asked questions according to a guide, which included four main questions and a number of follow-up questions and prompts to stimulate debate or get the discussion back on track.

Further information on the methodology and full datasets can be found on the CRRC website.

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<sup>44</sup> See Tatum J, Vieffhues M and Wood D, *Community, Security & Participation in Shida Kartli after the August War*, (Saferworld, 2010).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

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

**COVER PHOTO:** Villager leaving the village of Mereti. His house was looted and partly burnt down during the August war. October 2008.

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ISBN 978-1-904833-51-2