

PEACE, SECURITY AND STABILITY IN GEORGIA – A COMMUNITY-INFORMED STRATEGY



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Peace, security and stability in Georgia – a community-informed strategy

Introduction

This report summarises the results of a process to identify and plan for challenges to peace, security and stability in Georgia, undertaken by a network of four representative groups from Kvemo Kartli, Samegrelo, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Shida Kartli in 2009 and 2010. The first section of the report summarises a ‘strategy’ to meet five key national challenges, as identified by the network, while the subsequent five sections analyse each challenge in more detail and recommend preconditions and concrete steps for how they should be addressed. The ‘strategy’ is community-informed. This means that the network of representative groups consulted with a wide range of communities at each step of the process (i.e. identification of challenges, analysis of key challenges and strategising solutions) in order to get their thoughts and perspectives. As such, this is not an ‘expert analysis’, but one grounded in the understanding and reality of people living in four parts of Georgia. We hope that this report will help local, national and international decision-makers to better address challenges facing the country.

This report is one outcome of the project *Promoting broader and more informed dialogue on conflict, security and peace in Georgia*. Jointly implemented by the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, the Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association and Saferworld, this project is designed to develop the capacity of Georgian civil society to analyse, and play a constructive role in policy development on, issues related to conflict, security and peace. The process involves a two-way conversation between representative groups and wider society in the four target regions. It also involves regular meetings between representatives of these regions, to share outcomes from their respective analyses. The process has the following objectives:

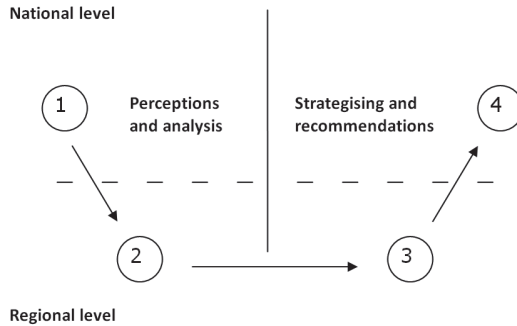
1. to elicit information from community members about their perspectives on conflict issues
2. to provide more balanced and impartial information about conflict issues
3. to stimulate people to think about these issues in new and wider ways

4. to share perspectives between community members in the different regions.

The overall process consists of four stages (see diagram opposite). The purpose of the first stage was to understand community perspectives on the causes and effects of the August 2008 war in the four target regions, and the differences between the perspectives held by people in these regions. The results of this stage are captured in the report 'Community perceptions of the *causes* and *effects* of the August 2008 conflict in Kvemo Kartli, Samegrelo, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Shida Kartli'. The second stage focused on deeper analysis of the challenges for peace, security and stability in each of the target regions, while the third stage focused on the development of strategies to respond to key region-specific challenges. Regional strategies have been created for the four target regions based on the region-specific results of stages two and three. The final stage, which is captured in this report, focused on a national-level strategy to respond to challenges shared by the four target regions. For the methodology used to analyse the challenges identified, and to develop corresponding 'solution strategies', please see the annex at the end of this report.

The value of this process is that it promotes a deep and sustained dialogue among a consistent group of interlocutors, both within and between the four target regions. The strategies for peace, security and stability developed in this process for each of the four regions, and for the nation as a whole, will then serve as the basis for dialogue between Georgian civil society and decision-makers at the regional, national and international levels.

STAGES IN THE DISCUSSION PROCESS



1. Causes and effects of the August 2008 conflict
2. Analysis of region-specific challenges to peace, security and stability
3. Strategising solutions to key region-specific challenges
4. Strategising solutions to key shared / national challenges

Summary of the strategy

This strategy seeks to address the following key challenges for peace, security and stability in Georgia, as identified by communities in the four target regions:

1. Threats to future national security.
2. Integration of ethnic minorities into social and political life.
3. Difficulties of greater engagement and dialogue between Georgians, and Abkhaz and South Ossetians.
4. Low levels of economic development in the regions.
5. Poor progress in developing local democratic institutions.

To address these challenges, the network of representative groups proposes the following:

Ensure future national security through:

- Agreement between the conflicting parties on replacing the Russian military in Abkhazia and South Ossetia with an international peacekeeping force.
- Restoration of diplomatic relations between Russia and Georgia.
- Development of a more balanced approach towards national security.
- Increased accountability over national security decision-making on all sides of the divides.

Promote integration of minority communities into social and political life through:

- Creation of common interests between different ethnic groups in the economic, social, political and cultural spheres.
- Increased civic awareness among all ethnic groups.
- Improved knowledge of the state language (Georgian) in minority communities.
- Supporting local and national media outlets to play a positive role in the process of integration.

Promote greater engagement and dialogue between ethnic Georgians and ethnic Abkhazians and Ossetians through:

- The Georgian Government consistently promoting the development of contacts across the divides, both through policy and practice.
- More active involvement of the public in peace processes and greater public support for their objectives.
- The media reporting constructively on initiatives related to peacebuilding.
- The Government of Russia (as well as Sukhumi and Tskhinvali) easing restrictions on communication between ethnic Georgians, Abkhazians and Ossetians.
- The international community's assistance supporting broad peacebuilding initiatives that involve a wide range of people.

Support economic development in the regions through:

- Strategies for economic development are tailored for each region, with these strategies supported by the central authorities.
- Exploitation of natural resources in the regions.
- Elaboration and implementation of a concept for the development of agriculture in the regions.
- Diversification of the market for selling agricultural produce.

Further develop democratic institutions in the region through:

- Further decentralisation of governance processes.
- Improved professionalism of public officials working in local government.
- Greater involvement of the local population and civil society in governance processes.
- Increased understanding of local governance and how it works.

Concrete steps for achieving each recommendation are elaborated in the following five sections.

Key challenge 1: Threats to future national security

a) Importance for future peace, security and stability

Georgia has found itself in a difficult security situation since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It initially struggled to ensure internal rule of law across the whole country, with a civil war and conflicts occurring in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the 1990s and their subsequent *de facto* independence, followed by high levels of violence and criminality. On the international stage, Georgia has searched for the best policy for protecting its sovereignty and balancing the competing interests in the region of Russia (because of its perceptions of 'spheres' of influence) and the West (because of access to energy resources and interest in democratic development).

The August 2008 war demonstrated that the tools applied for ensuring national security – development and professionalisation of the military, and membership of NATO – are not on their own sufficient. Georgia suffered significant military and civilian casualties during the war, was split in half by invading Russian forces, and large parts of the country came under Russian control. While it has now been more than two years since the end of the war, no international security mechanisms have been established along the Abkhaz and South Ossetian Administrative Boundary Lines (ABLs), while the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and UN Missions to Georgia have been disbanded, in effect removing another layer of security.

b) National impact (who suffers and how do they suffer)

- Large parts of Georgian society feel insecure and fearful about the future, both because of their recent experience of war and because of the increased Russian military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This insecurity aggravates concerns that violence and hostilities could re-emerge in the future.
- This sense of insecurity is most palpable in the ethnic Georgian communities that continue to be directly affected by the conflict – both in the Gali region and along the ABL with South Ossetia. This is primarily because of the removal of the international security / peacekeeping presence and a resultant fear that families and livelihoods could easily be damaged by future

fighting.

- Ethnic Abkhaz and Ossetians also continue to feel insecure because of perceptions that the Georgian Government will use force again in the future, and concerns over the potential impact of a large Russian military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia on their cultures and futures.
- Because of the continuing widespread sense of insecurity and fear, many people in Georgia are not planning for, or investing in, the future. This lack of planning and investment will be a negative factor in social stability and economic and political development. It could also see another generation of Georgians deciding to pursue opportunities overseas.
- The ongoing potential for violence will also affect the international image of the country, which in turn could have a negative impact on foreign investment in the country and hence the rate of economic development.

c) National-level driving factors (causes and actors)

- The Russian military has increased its presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia since the August 2008 war, and the nature of its operations has changed dramatically. While the Russian military was present in both areas before the war, its actions were based on ceasefire agreements. Its presence is no longer based on an agreement with Georgia and it is considered by Georgia to be an occupying force.
- The discussions held as part of the Geneva Process have not yet resulted in agreement by the conflicting parties to a security mechanism along the ABLs to replace the OSCE and UN Missions to Georgia, which were disbanded in 2009. While the EU Monitoring Mission is still operational, it does not have an executive mandate and its monitors can do little more than record events. This means that there is no effective peacekeeping presence to prevent future hostilities along the ABLs. It also means that apart from the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism established under the auspices of the Geneva Process, there are no established methods for resolving community-level problems.

- Abkhaz and Ossetians do not trust the international community to manage the conflicts (either as monitors or peacekeepers) because they believe that the West is 'pro-Georgian' and would not be able to fulfil such a role in an unbiased and objective manner.
- The threat posed by Russian forces in Abkhazia and South Ossetia is a cause for concern given the hostile nature of relations between Georgia and Russia. While the two countries have in the past had a very close relationship and their cultures have been closely linked, this is no longer the case. There are almost no direct trade and social contacts between Russia and Georgia, and no official diplomatic relations. The absence of diplomatic relations means that there are no mechanisms for reducing tensions between the two countries.
- Georgia's National Security Policy prioritises relationships with the West and is perceived as unreliable by the other conflicting parties. Prior to the August 2008 war, Georgia had strongly pushed for membership of NATO, as the main plank of its National Security Policy. However, this direction worsened tensions between Georgia and Russia and proved ineffective as Georgia was unsuccessful in its membership bid.
- Effective decision-making on security issues depends on high standards of democratic oversight and accountability – i.e. that policies and individual decisions are properly scrutinised. While Georgia has undergone a dramatic reform of its security sector and, in contrast to the 1990s, has created an effective state, much remains to be done.

d) Recommendations

In order **to ensure future national security**, the representative groups recommend the following preconditions and concrete steps:

1. *Agreement between the conflicting parties on replacing the Russian military in Abkhazia and South Ossetia with an international peacekeeping force:*
 - a) Third countries that maintain good relations with both Russia and Georgia take additional responsibility for negotiat-

- ing agreement on the stationing of peacekeeping forces with an international police mandate. Such negotiations can take place either within the Geneva Process or separately from it.
- b) International mediators liaise with Abkhazians and Ossetians to ensure the international peacekeeping force is set up and deployed in a way that is perceived as unbiased and objective, and not undermining their personal security.
 - c) The Georgian Government lobbies the international community, through sensitive dialogue, with the message that the presence of international peacekeepers is of vital importance for the everyday life of the local population. Such lobbying should draw on local research, including that developed in this programme.
 - d) The Government pursues a consistent policy with Abkhazians and South Ossetians so as to encourage trust and a greater sense of security. For instance, the Government should not undermine initiatives to build peace with aggressive or militaristic rhetoric.
 - e) With the mediation of the international community, Tbilisi, Sukhumi and Tskhinvali agree to rebuild local-level mechanisms for solving cross-ABL problems. These mechanisms should learn from the weaknesses of pre-August 2008 mechanisms, and their purpose, scope and ways of working should be based on clear regulations that are understood by all parties.
2. *Restoration of diplomatic relations between Russia and Georgia:*
 - a) The Government of Georgia and the Government of Russia use more constructive language when talking to or about each other.
 - b) The Georgian Government, with the mediation of the international community, negotiates restoration of economic relations and the removal of trade barriers with Russia.
 3. *Development of a more balanced approach towards national security:*
 - a) Together with international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the Georgian Government organises

public discussions on national security policy with the participation of MPs, leaders of opposition parties and the public.

- b) The Government reviews its future plans in line with the results of these discussions.
4. *Increased accountability over national security decision-making on all sides of the divides:*
- a) The Georgian Government and wider society investigate and learn from the reform processes in other NATO countries (especially new members from Eastern Europe), and in particular how they improved public accountability of decision-making in the security sector.
 - b) Tbilisi and Sukhumi / Tskhinvali, together with wider society, investigate and learn about how people across divides in other contexts co-operate to increase accountability over security decision-making.
 - c) Information on security sector expenditure should be made publicly available within the existing framework of Georgian Law, with regular accountability forums between the Government and society.

Key challenge 2: Integration of ethnic minorities into social and political life

a) Importance for future peace, security and stability

Georgia is a multi-ethnic country. One out of every six people in Georgia, and every other person in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, is from a minority background. Ethnically motivated violence in the 1990s clearly demonstrated the importance of integrating all ethnic communities into Georgian society for peace, security and stability in the country, and indeed in the entire region.

Successful integration of ethnic minorities is also important for resolving the conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as it could serve as a positive example of how the rights of Abkhaz and South Ossetians would be protected in a unified Georgia.

Despite the fact that meaningful steps have been made in this direction, the root causes of the violence in the 1990s are still evident today. This includes the absence of sustainable mechanisms to ensure that minority groups are regarded as an integral part of society, and that the needs of ethnic minorities are given due consideration by the Government and wider society. This also includes the fact that in many cases ethnic minorities experience a greater sense of attachment to their historical homeland than to Georgia, depend on media sources from neighbouring countries for information and do not speak the state language (Georgian). As a result, the potential remains for confrontation between different ethnic communities in the future. This is especially the case in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, where levels of communication between different ethnic groups are very low.

b) National impact (who suffers and how do they suffer)

- Less opportunity for people from minority communities to find employment, due to high unemployment across the country, poor understanding of Georgian and limited educational opportunities. This increases their discontent and motivations for leaving the country.
- Restricted access to social services on the part of minority groups of all ages due to their lack of knowledge of Georgian

and the fact that public institutions often have not developed appropriate practices for providing services to them. Poor access in turn significantly diminishes quality of life and increases feelings of dissatisfaction.

- Ethnic Georgian and non-ethnic Georgian communities do not communicate with each other due to geographic separation, the absence of a common language for communication and negative stereotypes.
- Lack of contact between different minority groups increases feelings of distrust between them, especially on the part of the younger generation. This may lead to misunderstandings and tensions at the local level. For example, local ethnic minorities often complain that Georgians plan to assimilate them or expel them from the country. For their part, ethnic Georgians often believe that the interests of minorities undermine the interests of Georgia (or that their promotion has this purpose).

c) National-level driving factors (causes and actors)

- Ethnic and cultural (including religious) differences are frequently a source of misunderstanding, disagreement and tensions. Ethnic disputes following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the increased role of religion in public life deepened alienation among different ethnic groups in Georgia and paved the way for reticence and mistrust.
- Lack of social and economic ties reinforces isolation among ethnic communities. Settlements far away from municipal centres are particularly isolated as a result of poor village roads and transport infrastructure.
- Close bonds (economic, political, cultural and social) between ethnic communities and their historic homeland reinforce their isolation from the rest of Georgia. This tendency is even more evident in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli due to the geographic proximity of these regions to Armenia and Azerbaijan.
- A low level of civil awareness among all ethnic groups hinders their openness towards one another and their ability to understand each other or view each other as fellow citizens. As a

result, their attitude towards one another is built on existing stereotypes and ethnic origin plays a significant role in everyday relations.

- Communication and language barriers between different ethnic groups. Most representatives from minority communities struggle to speak Georgian and some are not able to at all. Motivation to learn Georgian is low, as it does not guarantee greater opportunities for employment. Even if people from minority groups are motivated to learn Georgian, their ability is undermined by inefficiencies in available teaching programmes.
- Reliance on different media sources results in diverse understandings of important events, such as the August 2008 war. Ethnic minorities mainly receive information about current developments (including in Georgia) from media sources from neighbouring countries (Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey).

d) Recommendations

In order **to promote integration of minority communities into social and political life**, the representative groups recommend the following preconditions and concrete steps:

1. *Creation of common interests between different ethnic groups in the economic, social, political and cultural spheres:*
 - a) The Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, with the assistance of NGOs and donors, establishes programmes for promoting joint business opportunities for different ethnic groups, with a particular emphasis on ethnically diverse regions.
 - b) The Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, as well as NGOs, plan and implement joint (multi-ethnic) cultural and sports events.
 - c) The Ministry of Education and Science promotes higher education and vocational training opportunities for ethnic minorities in Georgia.
 - d) The Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure continues infrastructural projects in minority areas and ensures affordable travel within the country.

2. *Increased civic awareness among all ethnic groups:*
 - a) The central and local authorities, in co-ordination with the Ministry of Culture, develop a policy for improving access to social services and protecting the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities.
 - b) The Ministry of Education and Science, together with NGOs and international organisations, develop and implement civic education programmes focused on cultural tolerance.
3. *Improved knowledge of the state language (Georgian) by minority communities:*
 - a) The Ministry of Education and Science and local authorities assess and improve school and pre-school Georgian language programmes in those regions densely populated by minority communities.
 - b) The Ministry of Education and Science, with support from international organisations and donors, prepares Georgian language teachers for non-Georgian schools and trains existing teachers.
 - c) The Government and NGOs, with donor support, create opportunities for minority groups to practise Georgian in the workplace. For example, through internships at public agencies or NGOs.
4. *National and local media play a positive role in supporting the process of integration:*
 - a) International organisations implement programmes for creating and supporting media outlets in the minority regions.
 - b) National media outlets increase their coverage in minority regions and ensure that the population living there has access to information. This should include coverage of developments in other regions and an emphasis on co-operation and friendly ties between different ethnic communities.
 - c) Local and international NGOs strengthen their efforts and implement training programmes for journalists specialising in minority issues on how to cover sensitive aspects of integration.

Key challenge 3: Difficulties of engagement and dialogue between Georgians, and Abkhaz and South Ossetians

a) Importance for future peace, security and stability

As well as at the international level with Russia, Georgia is also suffering from two local-level conflicts between ethnic Georgians and ethnic Abkhaz on the one hand and ethnic Georgians and ethnic Ossetians on the other. While conflict resolution depends on the actions of Russia, it will not be sustainable without Georgians, and Abkhaz and Ossetians reaching agreements. This in turn depends on greater dialogue across the divides with Abkhaz and South Ossetians. Such initiatives take a long time to come to fruition, as the parties need to develop confidence in each other, and as a result need sustained support over a period of time.

Unfortunately, support for and participation in dialogue initiatives has decreased since the late 1990s, and especially since the August 2008 conflict. Dialogue has become especially difficult at the level of wider society. This is because while it is possible to establish dialogue between politicians and civil society representatives, this does not necessarily translate into wider support and participation. At the same time, dialogue initiatives have not received consistent support from the Georgian Government, the international community, Russia, Tskhnavli or Sukhumi. Indeed, there has been a tendency to disengage from and undermine such initiatives. As a result, sustainable resolution of the conflicts is a distant prospect. This means that conflict-affected communities, whether those living near the ABLs or internally displaced persons (IDPs), will continue to suffer.

b) National impact (who suffers and how do they suffer)

- Those individuals and organisations that are engaged in peacebuilding work suffer from political pressure and mistrust from society. This can lead to individuals and organisations stopping their work, or working in a way that is less contested but also less effective. This in turn means that a very limited group of individuals and organisations work on peacebuilding.

- Wider public diplomacy processes that include a large number of people do not receive support from funding bodies, which tend to target a limited number of organisations. This means funding is not as effective for larger scale confidence-building as it could be.
- Ethnic Abkhaz and South Ossetian societies do not trust the commitment of Georgian officials to peace and confidence-building measures. This has a knock-on effect on unofficial peacebuilding initiatives, as Abkhaz and South Ossetians are less likely to participate in them for fear of being linked to official Georgian policy.
- As a result of these challenges, and the apparent lack of commitment to engaging in direct dialogue on the part of officials, the prospects for resolving the conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia are very poor. This affects all communities living in insecure environments, whether along the South Ossetian ABL or in Eastern Abkhazia.
- Slow progress in resolving the conflicts also has an impact on internally displaced people, as the potential for them to return home is very slim. This has implications for state policy towards IDPs, which is presently going through a change in focus towards their full integration into society.

c) National-level driving factors (causes and actors)

- The Government has not consistently supported confidence-building and engagement initiatives, and has voiced scepticism over their effectiveness and even reduced its participation in direct dialogue. Indeed, the Government tends to pay more attention to the international conflict with Russia, rather than the local conflicts between Georgians, and Abkhaz and Ossetians. While the Action Plan for Engagement is an encouraging sign, there are concerns that the aspirations behind it will not be implemented in practice.
- Through the 'Law on Occupied Territories' and the Strategy for Engagement, the Georgian Government has claimed state control over projects implemented in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This means that all activities, with the exception of humanitarian assistance, require the prior consent of the Government.

Some think that these restrictions will hinder the process of building ties between the sides and the development of public diplomacy, and could be used to block activities that are deemed politically unacceptable by the Government.

- Rather than looking for future opportunities to rebuild relationships, Georgian, Abkhaz and South Ossetian societies are overly focused on the past. This is because of: a) trauma experienced during past violence; b) grievances on both sides and the feeling that the other side bears the majority of responsibility; c) a lack of understanding of the other side; and d) a lack of understanding of the potentially positive impact of peacebuilding activities on conflict dynamics. As a result, people are not supportive of peacebuilding activities, and in many cases are opposed to them.
- Low levels of support for peacebuilding are reinforced by poor and inaccurate media coverage. While this is partly due to wider issues of freedom of the media and the structure of the media sector, it is also down to low levels of competency and expertise among journalists.
- Opportunities for engagement and peacebuilding are further undermined by restrictions put in place by the Russian Government, and by Sukhumi and Tskhinvali. Russia believes its regional position is strengthened by stronger divisions between ethnic Georgians, and Abkhaz and South Ossetians. In addition, some groups in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali feel it is in their interest to oppose engagement initiatives.
- While international organisations used to support a broad range of NGOs to engage in peacebuilding activities (e.g. people-to-people contacts, joint activities and joint problem solving), there is now a tendency to support a narrow group of NGOs who may not be very effective, because they are too close to either the Georgian Government or the Abkhaz / Ossetian authorities and do not voice the opinions of ordinary people.

d) Recommendations

In order **to promote greater engagement and dialogue between**

ethnic Georgians and ethnic Abkhazians and Ossetians, the representative groups propose the following preconditions and concrete steps:

1. *The Government consistently promotes the development of contacts across the divides, both through policy and practice:*
 - a) The Government implements the Action Plan for the Strategy for Engagement in a manner that supports engagement in practice, rather than being used as a mechanism to restrict engagement. To this end, the Government should make public statements in support of public diplomacy and include expenses associated with implementation of the Action Plan in the 2012 State Budget.
 - b) The Government, in co-operation with local NGOs and with the support of international NGOs, initiates a dialogue with Abkhazians and Ossetians to explore the best ways of deepening contacts across the divide.
2. *The public is more actively involved in peace processes and supports their objectives:*
 - a) Local NGOs, with technical and financial assistance from donors, raise awareness about the purposes, methods and results of public diplomacy initiatives. Awareness campaigns should target young people in particular.
 - b) International NGOs deliver trainings on the nature and form of public diplomacy, success stories from other countries, as well as ways of getting involved. These trainings should be delivered across the country and not only in the regions adjacent to the conflict zone.
 - c) In addition to implementing the Strategy for Engagement, the Government makes statements in support of activists whose efforts focus on dealing with the past and building trust among Georgians, Abkhazians and Ossetians.
3. *The media reports constructively on initiatives related to peace-building:*
 - a) With the support of international donors and experts, local NGOs organise trainings for journalists at both the national and regional levels to develop skills in conflict-sensitive and peace-sensitive reporting.

- b) Media outlets develop the capacity to independently report on conflict-related issues, so that they are less dependent on the Government's point of view.
 - c) International and local NGOs involved in peace initiatives foster closer ties with media representatives in order to provide the media and, as a result, the public and Abkhazians / Ossetians with accurate information about ongoing peace initiatives in Georgia.
4. *The Government of Russia as well as Sukhumi and Tskhinvali ease restrictions on communication between ethnic Georgians, Abkhazians and Ossetians:*
- a) The international community uses the range of tools at its disposal to convince the Russian Government and the authorities in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali to alleviate restrictions on people-to-people contacts.
 - b) International and Georgian NGOs should lobby jointly with NGOs operating in Russia, and in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, for people-to-people contacts.
5. *The international community's assistance supports broad peacebuilding initiatives that involve a wide range of people:*
- a) The international community and donors focus peacebuilding assistance on increasing contacts between local people across the divides and promoting projects based on common interests.
 - b) International donors consult with target communities when designing peacebuilding projects, so that such projects are based on local realities and local needs.
 - c) Donors should support local and international NGOs that work to encourage dialogue across the divides, both through financial assistance and public statements.

Key challenge 4: Low levels of economic development in the regions

a) Importance for future peace, security and stability

Georgia has undergone a significant economic transformation since the collapse of the Soviet Union, which tore it away from its traditional trading partners. The resulting economic stagnation caused large-scale unemployment across the country. Even though the Georgian economy has experienced a high rate of growth over recent years, this has mainly benefited Tbilisi rather than the regions, which until August 2008 were still economically reliant on Russia (despite some trade and travel restrictions). The August 2008 war - and additional limits on trade and travel in its wake - further damaged the economic situation in the regions. This means that the quality of life in the regions is substantially lower than in Tbilisi and other major cities, increasing the potential for social instability there.

The impact on economic development has been most evident in the regions that are densely populated with minority communities – Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli – as minority communities in these regions traditionally depend on seasonal jobs in Russia and financial assistance provided by relatives living there. When added to existing social and ethnic problems in these regions, relative economic underdevelopment provides the conditions for increased frustration with the Government, as well as increased local instability and tensions between communities.

b) National impact (who suffers and how do they suffer)

- The level of economic development between the regions and the centre is uneven. This has led to significant economic inequality and high rates of labour migration from the regions.
- Deteriorating social and economic conditions as a result of the Russian-Georgian conflict are particularly evident in those regions with large minority communities. This is because these regions are heavily dependent on assistance provided by family members working in Russia.
- Despite the recent efforts of the Government to develop the regions (including, for example, investment in infrastructure

development), some people living in the regions remain frustrated with the authorities over the current state of Georgian-Russian relations. This is especially the case in minority communities.

- Frustration with the social and economic situation in the regions has a negative effect on relations between ethnic Georgians and minorities, as they tend to view social problems through an ethnic prism. This frustration can be increased by media outlets. For example, the Armenian community depends on Russian and Armenian media sources for information.

c) National-level driving factors (causes and actors)

- After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it took some time for Georgia to rebuild its economy and substitute Russia with other trade partners. Nevertheless, before the August 2008 war Georgians living in the regions were still mostly dependent on Russia for their livelihoods. For example, Russia was the main source of seasonal employment for the local population of Samtskhe-Javakheti and the agricultural markets of Shida Kartli and Samegrelo. The money received from selling agricultural produce or from relatives living and working in Russia was the only source of income for many families in the regions.
- Following the deterioration of Russian-Georgian relations, travel to Russia and communication with relatives residing in Russia was hampered. As a result, labour migration and the flow of financial assistance sent from Russia by relatives has decreased.
- The Georgian Government's approach to economic development has not taken account of the different contexts in the regions. Region-specific potentials for economic development have not been studied and priorities for each region have not been defined. Although certain infrastructure projects have been initiated (e.g. in Samtskhe-Javakheti), priorities selected for the development of the country (e.g. tourism) have not affected the regions.
- For example, the natural resources of each region have not been explored, and the agricultural sector remains underdeveloped, despite its vital importance for the economic devel-

opment and sustainability of the regions. Agricultural potential in the regions is hampered by (a) the absence of contemporary technologies and equipment; and (b) poor access to agricultural markets.

d) Recommendations

In order **to support economic development in the regions**, the representative groups recommend the following preconditions and concrete steps:

1. *Strategies for economic development are tailored to specific regions and supported by the central authorities:*
 - a) The Ministries of Agriculture, of Economy and Sustainable Development, of Regional Development and Infrastructure, and of Environment Protection and Natural Resources study the needs of less developed regions, assess their economic potential and identify priority spheres for development.
 - b) The Ministries of Education and Science, of Agriculture, of Economy and Sustainable Development, of Regional Development and Infrastructure, and of Environment Protection and Natural Resources prepare and train specialists in the developmental spheres identified for each region.
 - c) NGOs specialising in economic issues and independent experts monitor the implementation of tailored economic strategies and legal acts for the regions. This monitoring will result in the development of recommendations for improvement and elaboration of results.
2. *Natural resources in the regions are exploited for the purposes of economic development:*
 - a) The Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources, together with local authorities, studies natural resources in the regions.
 - b) The Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources, together with local authorities, develops a strategy for managing natural resources in a way that would benefit the regions, including the issuance of exploitation licences.

3. *Elaboration and implementation of a concept for the development of agriculture in the regions:*
 - a) The Ministries of Education and Science, of Agriculture, and of Economy and Sustainable Development will develop and make accessible training programmes in agricultural development, including through the development of training centres.
 - b) The Ministry of Agriculture assists in the planning and balancing of local agricultural markets through the provision of advice on appropriate types and volumes of crops to plant each season.
 - c) The private sector establishes a farmer insurance system in the regions, while the Government introduces a system of farming credits with assistance from donors.
 - d) The Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure develops a plan to improve infrastructure relevant for agriculture in the regions (e.g. transportation, irrigation and food processing factories).

4. *Diversified market for selling agricultural produce:*
 - a) The Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development and the Ministry of Agriculture support farmers in the regions to access new markets for agricultural produce (both local and foreign), by regulating the import and export of produce.
 - b) The Ministry of Agriculture supports farmers to improve the quality of agricultural produce so as to meet international standards. For example, through the opening of consultation centres, warehouses and laboratories.

Key challenge 5: Poor progress in developing local democratic institutions

a) Importance for future peace, security and stability

While the development of local democratic institutions is a challenge across the country, it has become even more pressing following the August 2008 war. This is because people have begun to question the ability of local government to genuinely represent them and their needs, and hence the readiness of local government to effectively manage crisis scenarios. Indeed, the August 2008 war and its aftermath highlighted a range of flaws in the local democratic process, and the limited capacity of local authorities to cater for their constituencies' needs.

b) National impact (who suffers and how do they suffer)

- A significant part of the population feels that local and central government are not interested in their views on a range of issues important for their daily lives and welfare.
- People do not feel that they are part of the governance process. In particular, they do not feel that they are able to influence the implementation of government policy and actions both at local and central levels.
- People in the regions feel frustrated by the perceived unresponsiveness of the Government to their needs and this is fueling apathy about the political process.
- There is a perception that because of the lack of consultation with local communities, government resources (which are scarce) are spent on projects that do not benefit the local population and do not address real needs.
- People are questioning the effectiveness of democratic values in meeting their needs and aspirations, and especially the preparedness of the local government authorities to effectively manage potential crises. Indeed, the August 2008 war and its aftermath highlighted a range of flaws in the local democratic process, and the limited ability of local government to cater for people's needs.

c) National-level driving factors (causes and actors)

- While legislation provides for the involvement of civil society in setting regional priorities and making budgeting decisions, local authorities appear to lack the capacity and political will to establish viable processes for this to happen.
- Local budgets mainly depend on transfers from the centre and, as a result, central authorities determine priorities for the region. Although local authorities submit their own plans during the process of budget development, final decisions are made in Tbilisi.
- Local government representatives are mainly selected on the basis of party loyalty and not necessarily on the basis of their capacity to represent their constituency. This means that often local government officials are not strongly connected to the citizens they represent and are not encouraged to 'speak up' for their constituents or challenge decisions made or priorities set by more senior officials.
- Civil society is not very active in the regions and is not sufficiently organised to support the population to become more involved in governance processes.
- Few organisations understand their potential role in shaping public policy and have very little experience in doing so in a constructive manner. Even though there are some good media outlets and journalists in the regions, they do not focus their reporting on holding local government processes to account.

d) Recommendations

In order **to further develop democratic institutions in the regions**, the representative groups recommend the following preconditions and concrete steps:

1. *Further decentralise governance processes:*
 - a) With oversight from the Council of Europe, the Georgian Government and civil society conduct a joint review of the existing legal framework establishing the responsibilities of local and central government, so that it is in line with the 'European Charter of Local Self-Government'.

- b) The Government increases the proportion of tax generated in the region that stays under the management of local authorities.
 - c) The Government reforms the institution of Governor by transforming the post into an elected office.
2. *Improved professionalism of public officials working in local government:*
- a) NGOs and local government, with the support of international donors, develop and implement a strategy and training system to improve the skills of local administration officials, with a focus on: i) crisis management; ii) strategic planning and budgeting; and iii) how to communicate and consult with local communities.
 - b) Local government establishes transparent processes for appointing local officials.
3. *Greater involvement of the local population and civil society in governance processes:*
- a) NGOs create a training programme for citizens on how to engage with the local government in a constructive manner and how to monitor local government spending and activities.
 - b) Local government and NGOs agree on appropriate mechanisms for the public review of budgeting processes.
4. *Increased understanding of local governance and how it works:*
- a) Civil society, with support from international donors, conducts a campaign to raise awareness of local governance processes.
 - b) Public discussions of what ‘self-governance’ (i.e. decentralisation) means and how it can be delivered in practice. This will include both challenges and positive examples.
 - c) The public discussions lead to agreements on specific positive changes to how self-governance is delivered, which can then be used as an example for replication. Such positive examples are needed to ensure that participants in public discussions do not become frustrated by an apparent lack of progress.

Annex: methodology for analysing problems and strategising solutions

For each identified key challenge the network of representative groups worked through a process of first developing a more elaborated ‘problem statement’ to explain the challenge, then on the basis of each problem statement developing a ‘solution strategy’ for how to resolve the challenge, which in turn provided the evidence for specific recommendations. At each stage in this process, the representative groups consulted with a range of communities in their respective regions.

Developing a ‘problem statement’

In order to develop a problem statement for a specific challenge, the network of representative groups was facilitated to analyse (1) the driving factors behind the problem – that is *what* causes the problem and *who* is responsible, and (2) the impact of the problem – that is *who* suffers and *how* they suffer. Drawing on the identified impacts, the network was then asked to clearly articulate (3) why the issue is important for peace, security and stability in the regions.

Turning a ‘problem statement’ into a ‘solution strategy’

Once the problem statement had been developed, the network was then asked to develop a corresponding ‘solution strategy’. To do this, they were first asked to identify (1) the overall change that they would like to see in relation to the challenge. They were then asked to identify the key things that need to happen in society to achieve this overall change. That is, to identify (2) the preconditions that need to be met, whether changes to policies, practices, attitudes or behaviours. The most difficult aspect of this part of the process was to make sure that the list did not become a long ‘shopping list’. As such, the network was encouraged to capture only those elements that are absolutely necessary, and without which the overall change could not happen. Finally, the network was asked to brainstorm (3) the steps or changes that are necessary in order to bring about each of these preconditions. Please see below for an example ‘solution strategy’ given to the network to assist their thinking.

Example solution strategy – for illustrative purposes only

1) Overall change wanted			
To create an enabling environment where marginalised women from conflict-affected communities can protect their rights and take an active part in decision-making			
2) Key preconditions that need to be met in order to achieve the overall change			
Women have increased confidence and desire to take part in political life	Women have increased and relevant skills to take part in political life	There are adequate laws to protect women's rights	There is public support for the inclusion of women in decision-making, public life, and for the protection of women's rights
3) Necessary steps to bring about the key preconditions			
↑	↑	↑	↑
Women's successes receive as much recognition as those of men	Women's access to development opportunities increases	There is clear and wide-spread understanding of what women's rights are	There are changes in the perception of the role of women in society
Women have a strong support network	There is an environment in which women can play multiple roles	Civil society is organized and is pushing for greater protection of women's rights	
Women feel an active demand for their input	Women are aware of appropriate career paths for political life	There are champions of women's rights in the political system	
Women see the results of their activities	Culture of politics and public life allows for skills to develop	There is a base of information on the social benefits of women's participation	
Political culture becomes less macho.			

Developing recommendations from the ‘solution strategy’

The network was then asked to draw recommendations from the solution strategy by (1) reformulating each precondition as a key issue that needs to be resolved, and (2) reformulating each step as a precise recommendation of *what* needs to be done and *who* is responsible for the change. Please see below for example recommendations provided to the network to assist their thinking.

Example recommendations – for illustrative purposes only

1) Key issue to be resolved
Enhance the confidence and desire of women to take part in political life
3) Specific recommendations
↑
That the Georgian media increase their coverage of women’s involvement in community and public life, highlighting the contributions that women are making to Georgian society.
That national and international NGOs support women to play an active role in politics, by providing relevant training, encouragement and mobilizing women around opportunities for advocacy;
That all political parties, international organizations and NGOs actively seek the input of women when they are formulating new policies
That all political parties actively recruit women as members and examine their working culture and practices to ensure that they are gender sensitive.

This report is based on the consultations conducted by the following core group members in the four target regions, and has been validated by them:

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The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development

The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD) is a public policy think-tank specialising in the broad area of democracy development. CIPDD was founded in 1992 in Tbilisi, Georgia. It is a non-governmental and not-for-profit organisation. It advocates policy goals such as the development of a vibrant and diverse civil society, effective and accountable public institutions based on the rule of law and an integrated political community, one which at the same time respects and preserves the identities of different ethnic and religious communities. CIPDD's main activities include public policy research and publishing and disseminating its results, and organising different forms of debate – professional, political or public – about this work.



The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA)

The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) is a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting human rights and the rule of law. We adhere to the Constitution of Georgia, legislation and our Statute on the whole territory of Georgia. GYLA is a membership-based organisation.

Goals of GYLA:

- Promote the rule of law;
- Protect human rights and freedoms;
- Increase public legal awareness;
- Promote norms of professional ethics among lawyers;
- Develop the skills and competence of lawyers;
- Develop the legislative basis for civil society and the rule of law in the country.



Saferworld

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 practises through advocacy, research and policy development and through supporting the actions of others.

Peace, security and stability in Georgia – a community-informed strategy

According to a network of representative groups in Kvemo Kartli, Samegrelo, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Shida Kartli, the following challenges have to be met to ensure peace, security and stability in Georgia:

Threats to future national security. The August 2008 war demonstrated that the tools Georgia has applied for ensuring national security are not on their own sufficient. Following the war, no international security mechanisms have been established, while the OSCE and UN Missions to Georgia have been disbanded, in effect removing another layer of security.

Integration of ethnic minorities into social and political life. Georgia is a multi-ethnic country. Ethnically motivated violence in the 1990s clearly demonstrated the importance of integrating all ethnic communities into Georgian society. Despite the fact that meaningful steps have been made in this direction, the root causes of the violence in the 1990s, in terms of low levels of communication and interaction between different ethnic groups, are still evident today.

Difficulties of engagement and dialogue between Georgians, and Abkhaz and South Ossetians. While resolution of the conflict affecting Georgia depends on the actions of Russia, it will not be sustainable without Georgians and Abkhaz, and Georgians and South Ossetians reaching agreements. This in turn depends on greater dialogue across the divides with Abkhaz and South Ossetians. Unfortunately, support for and participation in dialogue initiatives has decreased since the late 1990s, and especially since the August 2008 conflict.

Low levels of economic development in the regions. Growth in Georgia has mainly benefited Tbilisi rather than the regions. The economic situation in the regions, and especially those with large minority groups, was further damaged by increased restrictions on travel and trade with Russia in the wake of the August 2008 war.

Poor progress in developing local democratic institutions. Development of local democratic institutions has become a more pressing issue following the August 2008 war, as people have begun to question the ability of local government to genuinely represent them and their needs, and hence its readiness to effectively manage crisis scenarios.

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