



Challenges of the everyday

Evolving community security trends in Shida Kartli



Tabib Huseynov

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Acknowledgements

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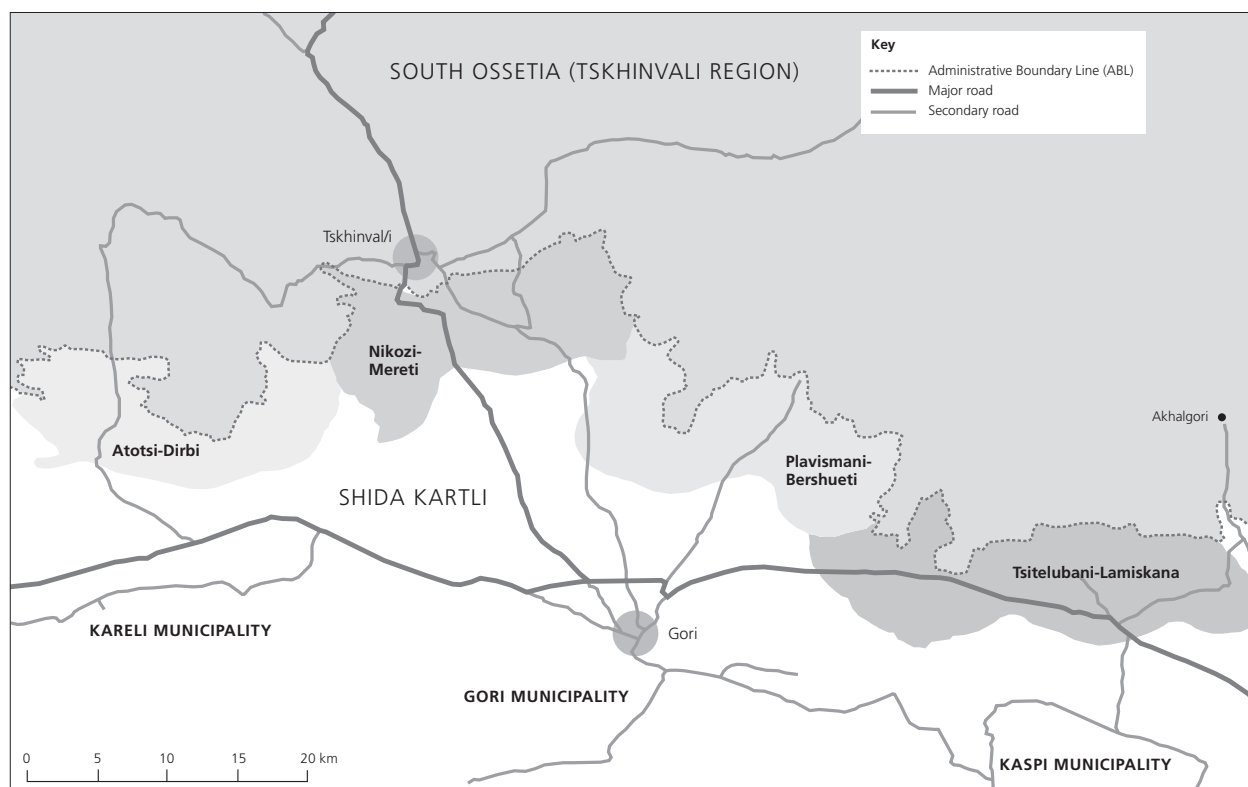
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Map of the four research areas in Shida Kartli



Executive summary

THIS IS THE THIRD household survey conducted since 2010 by Saferworld and the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC), carried out in four research areas adjoining the administrative boundary line (ABL) with South Ossetia/the Tskhinvali region of Shida Kartli. The surveys are designed to track public perceptions of safety and security in those regions over time. The four research areas are **Atotsi-Dirbi**, **Nikozi-Mereti**, **Plavismani-Bershueti** and **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana** (see map). The aim of the report is to provide locally-informed insights on the factors that undermine security and livelihoods of these conflict-affected communities and, based on this assessment, work out locally-appropriate ways of responding to the causes of insecurity. The methodology included a household survey and a series of focus groups in select locations.

The survey comes at a critical time when substantial internationally-funded post-crisis rehabilitation assistance to affected communities in Georgia following the conflict has come to an end. This leaves the government and international relief organisations with fewer resources to address the evolving problems of these communities. Therefore, it is essential that local challenges and opportunities are better understood to serve both as an effective early warning mechanism as well as an information channel for both national and international actors to tailor their assistance strategies to better and more effectively meet local needs.

Communities and their needs

The survey shows a general improvement in comparison to the previous year in the perceptions of physical safety and security. There is, however, a general perception of worsening livelihood conditions, which is closely connected to the reduced contact and ability to develop trade and exchange across the ABL. As Russian border guards consolidated their control over the ABL,¹ many people living in the area no longer have the opportunity to use lands that were previously accessible to them for cultivating crops, grazing their cattle or collecting firewood in the winter.

Atotsi-Dirbi, in spite of recent positive trends, remains an area where people report the greatest physical insecurity, which is further aggravated by poor roads, ambiguity over where the ABL lies, and lack of economic opportunities. The picture remains mixed in **Nikozi-Mereti**, with depopulation continuing, albeit at a slower rate than previously and driven both by physical insecurity and lack of access to irrigation water. In **Plavismani-Bershueti**, communities increasingly suffer from the economic effects of the conflict, particularly the inability to access firewood which, given lack of supply

¹ *Consolidated Report on the Conflict in Georgia*, Council of Europe, October 2011. <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1854497&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=DBDCF2&BackColorIntranet=FDC864&BackColorLogged=FDC864> (accessed March 14, 2012).

of natural gas in the area, further deepens the problem of energy provision in winter. In Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, the socio-economic impact of the conflict is increasingly felt, particularly related to problems concerning irrigation water from South Ossetia. Lack of access to natural resources previously available to communities increases local frustration and represents a potential threat to the local stability and sustainability of the communities living along the ABL.

Recommendations for responding to community needs

- All actors should prioritise conflict-affected communities' safe access to natural resources – in particular, energy, irrigation water, and agricultural lands – essential for their livelihoods, both within the local context and through all possible negotiation mechanisms.
- Special attention should be paid to the areas of **Atotsi-Dirbi** and **Plavismani-Bershueti** with regard to access to agricultural lands and pastures; and to the areas of **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana** and **Nikozi-Mereti**, with regard to accessible irrigation water.
- All actors should explore alternatives, such as green energy solutions, to better provide these resources to conflict-affected communities.

Perceptions of personal safety and role of the security providers

No major security incident has taken place since the last survey was conducted and overall, more and more people are feeling safer. Shootings remain the most frequently reported security incident, particularly in **Atotsi-Dirbi** and **Nikozi-Mereti**. Respondents state, however, that most of these are aimed in the air or take place during military training exercises, and therefore do not directly threaten the local population. Nevertheless, all the respondents who reported hearing shootings in **Atotsi-Dirbi** and **Nikozi-Mereti** areas agreed they caused fear and panic, underscoring the continued psychological impact of the conflict. Another alarming trend in personal safety was that the rate of reported detentions doubled, which was reported most of all in the areas of **Atotsi-Dirbi** and **Plavismani-Bershueti**.

People in **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana** ranked rather well on many issues covered by the survey; however, they are the most critical of the Georgian central authorities and the police. Their critical attitude to these actors is linked to the growing socio-economic impact of the conflict, which local communities believe the government is not effectively addressing.

Recommendations for improving security providers' responsiveness to local needs

- All stakeholders should work together to analyse and address the root causes of why people cross the ABL in order to minimise detentions, particularly in **Atotsi-Dirbi** and **Plavismani-Bershueti**.
- Communication and relationships between communities and government actors should be strengthened in all areas, most particularly in **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana**. This would allow authorities to be more informed about the needs of the local population and better respond to them, while the local population would also be better informed of the actions taken by the government to meet local needs.

Perceptions of the likelihood of increased tension and return to violence

Overall, the ratio of people who believe increased tension and return to violence is very or quite likely halved in comparison to previous year – this is in line with a gradual return to normality in many aspects of people's lives. The most positive trend in perceptions took place in **Atotsi-Dirbi**. **Nikozi-Mereti** remained the only area where,

despite a relative improvement in risk perception, more than half of respondents still expected increased tensions in the near future.

More people believed increased tensions may be caused by socio-economic problems, rather than security incidents. This is particularly the case in **Plavismani-Bershueti** and **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana**, where people more heavily depend for their livelihoods on resources from the other side of the ABL, particularly firewood (in both areas) and supply of irrigation water (in **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana**).

Recommendations for reducing tensions in communities and the likelihood of violence

- All stakeholders should be sensitised to the real potential of socio-economic problems to become a trigger for renewed conflict in all four research areas. Particular attention should be paid to the problems of accessing irrigation water in **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana** and **Nikozi-Mereti**, and of access to firewood in **Plavismani-Bershueti**.
- Measures should be taken to address the psychological distress caused by the proximity to the conflict zone, particularly in **Nikozi-Mereti**. This may include continuing rehabilitation programmes to address psychological trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Opportunities for conflict transformation

Due to restrictions on crossing the ABL, contact with Ossetians living in South Ossetia remained very limited, apart from in **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana**, where the vast majority of the population retains contacts across the ABL. However, the forced estrangement of communities across the ABL has not translated into hostile attitudes towards the ethnic Ossetian communities living in South Ossetia, which shows that there is significant potential for engaging the communities from across the divide to rebuild trust and confidence among them.

Communities living along the ABL are strongly supportive of measures to increase engagement with Ossetians living in South Ossetia. Support for travel across the ABL to meet friends and family was most marked in **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana**, showing that many families in this ethnically-mixed area wish to have secure contact with their relatives on the other side. The population in **Nikozi-Mereti**, while generally supportive, remained less enthusiastic about cross-divide engagement. Overall, notwithstanding the general support to cross-divide engagement, the population's belief in the efficacy of most of these measures is much lower, reflecting their perceptions that the causes and solutions to their problems depend on relationships between Tbilisi and Moscow. However, when looking at the types of engagement deemed as more effective, one can see that people prefer concrete action-oriented measures that focus on local needs, especially enabling trade and facilitating travel across the divide.

Recommendations for fostering trust and confidence across the divide

- Explore ways for allowing safe conduct of trade in locally-produced goods among the communities living on both sides of the ABL.
- Using the available negotiation mechanisms, facilitate travel across the ABL to meet relatives and friends, particularly in **Tsitelubani-Lamiskana** and **Plavismani-Bershueti**.

Introduction

THIS REPORT ASSESSES public perceptions of safety and security of the communities living along the administrative boundary line (ABL) in the Shida Kartli region of Georgia, which is adjacent to South Ossetia/the Tskhinvali region (hereinafter, South Ossetia). It also provides local perspectives on the potential for increased tensions and ways to reduce them. Respondents were asked about how the situation has changed within the last year, likely trends, types of incidents and events that could aggravate tensions, and which measures may be more effective in creating opportunities for normalisation and reconciliation across the divide.

The aim of the report is to provide locally-informed insights on the factors that undermine the security and livelihoods of these conflict-affected communities and, based on this assessment, work out locally appropriate ways of responding to the causes of insecurity. Findings are based on a quantitative survey held in December 2011 in four target groups of villages adjoining South Ossetia, as well as four focus groups with local people living in these villages. Saferworld published the first and second tracker surveys in October 2010 and March 2011.²

This report comes at a critical time: substantial internationally-funded post-crisis rehabilitation assistance that envisaged \$4.5 billion over a three-year period to support the affected communities in Georgia following the August 2008 war came to an end in 2011. As was mentioned in the previous survey analysis, the vulnerabilities of these communities are likely to increase now that post-crisis assistance to the region has ended.

Although no major security incident has taken place since the last survey was conducted, and by common acceptance the security situation has improved,³ the main lasting effect of the conflict which continues to have profound negative impact on the livelihoods of the communities in Shida Kartli is severe restriction on freedom of movement. In the aftermath of the war, Russia took systematic measures to consolidate the ABL between South Ossetia and the Shida Kartli region of Georgia.⁴ People have been detained for crossing what Russia and the de facto authorities in Tskhinvali now refer to as the 'state border' between Georgia and South Ossetia.

In addition to limiting contacts across the divide, the imposition of strict border regulations has impeded many communities living near the ABL access to their

² Malte Viefhues and David Wood, *Life on the boundary line: The future of security in Shida Kartli*, Saferworld, October 2010, and Tamara Patarala and David Wood, *Moving Beyond security? A survey of community security in Shida Kartli*, Saferworld, March 2011, www.saferworld.org.uk/smartweb/resources/view-resource/585 and www.saferworld.org.uk/smartweb/resources/view-resource/482 (accessed 14 March 2012).

³ In an op-ed published in October 2011, the EUMM head Andrzej Tyszkiewicz said 'there is no doubt that the security situation has significantly improved since the immediate aftermath of 2008', adding however that the situation is 'still sometimes unpredictable'. "EUMM head: security situation improved", *Civil.ge*, 17 October 2011 www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24041 (accessed 14 March 2012).

⁴ In April 2009 Russia signed a joint border protection agreement with both de facto authorities in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which allows Russian border guards to patrol and secure their borders: "Moscow Signs Border Treaties with Tskhinvali, Sokhumi", *Civil.ge*, 30 April 2009, www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=20823 (accessed 14 March 2012).

sources of livelihood. The ABL often runs through agricultural lands and forests, or even in the outskirts of the villages. Now, as it has become an almost impassable boundary between South Ossetia and the Shida Kartli region, many people no longer are able to use these lands, which they traditionally used for cultivating crops, grazing cattle, or collecting firewood for winter. In many instances, local communities do not know where the ABL lies, as it is not marked and in some other instances, specific areas of the ABL have been disputed and repeatedly moved by both sides.

All parties have failed so far to agree on a comprehensive international peacekeeping or security arrangement, in spite of some unilateral initiatives made by Georgia. In January 2009, Georgia unilaterally agreed to create a 'restricted armament zone' adjacent to South Ossetia (and Abkhazia), committing not to deploy more than a battalion of troops within an average of 15km zone adjacent to the ABL.⁵ In November 2010, Tbilisi further announced it would never use force to restore its territorial integrity.⁶

The European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM), described in the Georgian national security concept adopted in December 2011 as a 'significant deterrent factor' to renewed violence,⁷ has been able to patrol only the Georgian-controlled side of the ABL, and has been only occasionally allowed to investigate incidents on the South Ossetian side. Furthermore, some 200 unarmed monitors of the EUMM can only record the incidents after they have happened, or occasionally, verify if a particular allegation relating to security incidents is true. Another important security instrument is the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM), which has set up telephone hotlines and holds regular meetings between local security providers on both sides to avert occurrence of incidents and dissipate tensions.

The IPRM has been the only tangible result of the deadlocked Geneva talks, the only official, 'track one' international negotiation forum that brings together all the parties to the conflict. It is important to note that, though the South Ossetian de facto representatives boycotted the IPRM meetings for almost a year, they have now resumed their participation. On the other hand, the Georgians and South Ossetians also have not yet implemented an informal agreement to charge detainees under administrative law, entailing warnings and interrogation, but not arrest.⁸

By employing a community-based approach to security, the report attempts to shed light on the vulnerabilities of different communities living along the ABL in Shida Kartli. In the absence of comprehensive security provision, a closer look at what makes local communities feel insecure and finding locally appropriate ways to respond to these causes of insecurity can serve as both an effective early warning mechanism, as well as an information channel for both national and international actors to tailor their assistance strategies to better meet the local challenges and needs. As with the previous reports, the security picture drawn by this report is incomplete, as it does not cover the communities on the South Ossetian-controlled part of the ABL.

This report begins by looking into the overall situation in communities, their perceptions of security and safety and challenges for their sustainability. The community-level assessment is followed by the assessment of feelings of personal security, trends over the last year and perceptions of the performance of security providers. Then the study investigates the potential for increased tension, events which are believed to be more likely to cause this tension and factors that influence community assessment of trigger events. Finally, the study explores the level and types of engagement that presently exist, the types of engagement which people would be willing to participate in, and how effective people think such measures would be to increase trust and confidence between communities in South Ossetia and Shida Kartli.

⁵ "Tbilisi unilaterally agrees on restricted arms zones," *Civil.ge*, 28 January 2009, www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=20340 (accessed 3 February 2012).

⁶ "Georgia makes 'unilateral pledge' of non-use of force," *Civil.ge*, 23 November 2010, www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22880 (accessed February 3, 2012).

⁷ "Georgia's new National Security Concept," *Civil.ge*, 23 December 2011 www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24299 (accessed 3 February 2012).

⁸ *South Ossetia: the burden of recognition*, Crisis Group Europe report No 205, 7 June 2010, p. 16 www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/caucasus/georgia/205-south-ossetia-the-burden-of-recognition.aspx (accessed 14 March 2012).

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Communities and their needs

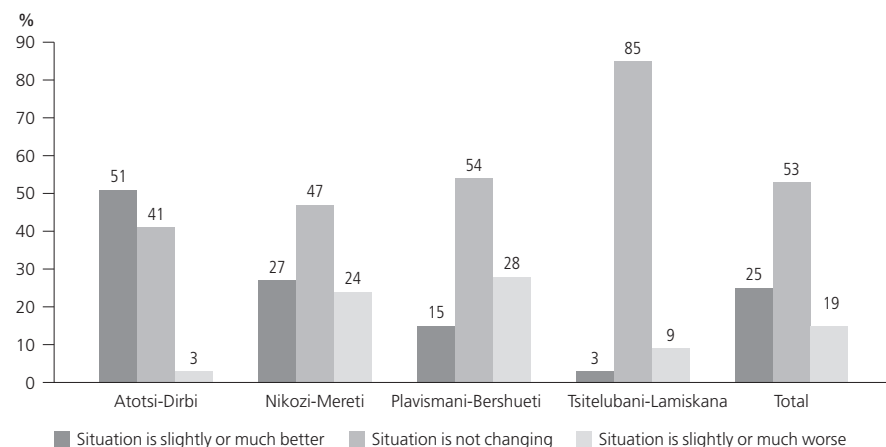
How is the situation within communities changing?

The economic impact of the conflict has taken over physical security concerns

In general, the communities report some improvements in comparison to previous years in their perceptions of physical safety and security on one hand, and general perception of worsening livelihood conditions on the other. The latter, in many instances, is associated with the conflict, as people report problems with accessing resources located on the other side of the ABL as a major reason for the decline in their livelihoods.

When asked about how the situation in the community has changed compared to a year ago, 25% of the respondents said the situation improved, 19% said the situation worsened, and 53% said it did not change. The most notable improvement in overall perception of change has taken place in **Atotsi-Dirbi**, with 51% saying that the situation is much or slightly better compared a year ago, and only 3% saying the situation is slightly or much worse. This overall positive change may be connected to the decreased number of security incidents and a relative degree of normalisation along the ABL. Nevertheless, **Atotsi-Dirbi** remains an area where people report the greatest physical insecurity among the four selected areas (see below).

Figure 1 How would you describe the situation in your community/village compared to one year ago?



77% of the respondents identified less opportunity to earn money as the most significant general problem which has negatively impacted the situation in their

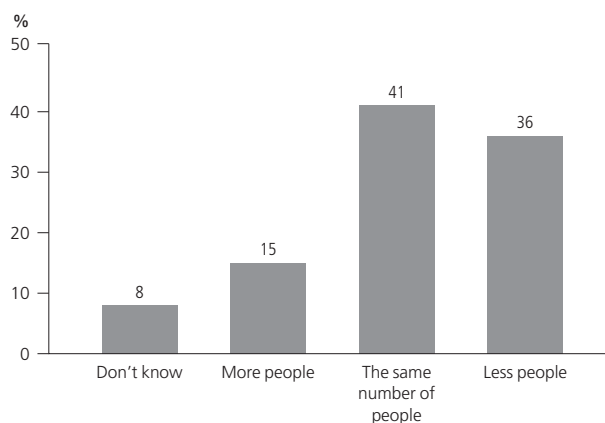
communities compared to a year ago. All subsequent reasons, such as less opportunity for agricultural activity (53%), inability to collect firewood (45%), worsened provision of irrigation water (29%) and others, are connected to economic vulnerabilities associated with the presence of the conflict and difficulties in accessing resources on the other side of the ABL. As a result, 61% – or more than twice as many as in previous year (29%) – named less opportunity to earn money as the most urgent community problem, making this the second most cited problem for the conflict-affected communities along the ABL, after close proximity to the conflict zone.

On the contrary, 45% of the respondents cited less criminality and 39% – less security incidents as major improvements in their community compared to last year. The one exception is Atotsi-Dirbi, where 66% of those minority respondents who thought the situation in their communities had worsened attributed this to more security incidents (as many also referred to less opportunity to earn money as another reason for worsened community situation). At the same time, 39% of those who believed that the situation has improved attributed this to less criminality in their community. The mixed security picture in Atotsi-Dirbi may be linked to the fact that the surveyed communities in these areas live in particularly ambiguous sections of the ABL and thus they reported higher detention rates by Russian/South Ossetian forces.

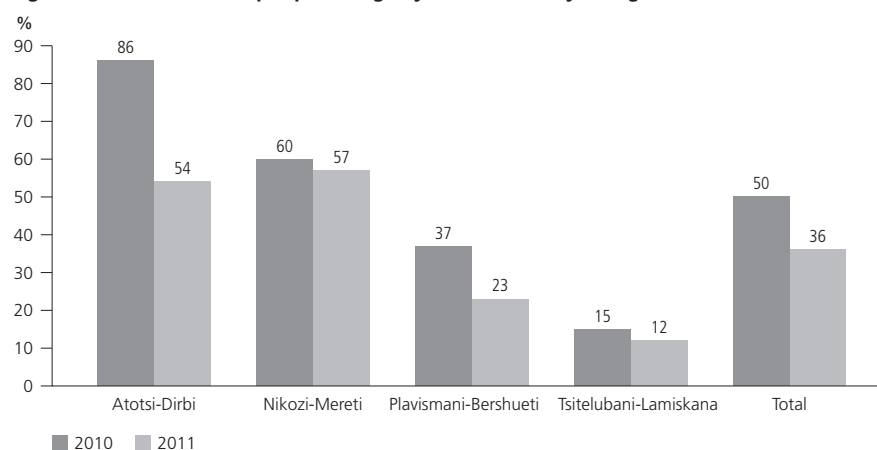
Conflict-caused depopulation continues, although at a slower pace

Over one-third (36%) of those surveyed said there are now fewer people living in their community than a year ago. This is slightly less than in previous year, when over half of the respondents reported shrinking communities.

Figure 2 Number of people in your community compared to a year ago (Total %)

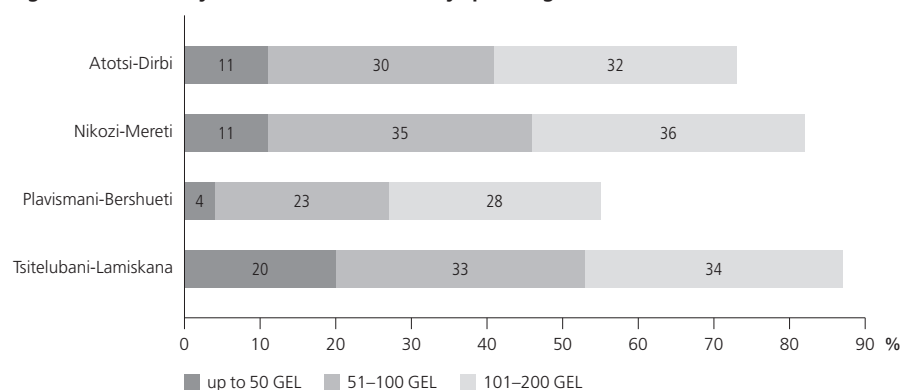


In particular, as with the previous survey, depopulation remains a big problem for two areas – Nikozi-Mereti and Atotsi-Dirbi, where respectively 57% and 54% of those surveyed think their communities have shrunk compared to a year ago. In last year's survey, 60% in Nikozi-Mereti thought their community has shrunk since August 2008 war and 86% thought the same in Atotsi-Dirbi, indicating that the rate of depopulation has decreased, but nevertheless persisted in these areas. By contrast, only 23% in Plavismani-Bershueti and 12% in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana said there are fewer people in their community compared to a year ago, a small improvement from last year's results.

Figure 3 Are there fewer people living in your community/village than before?

Poverty and less opportunity to earn money in these conflict-affected areas are the driving forces behind continued depopulation. Agriculture provides the main source of income (86%) for these communities living near the ABL. As such, they are highly reliant on access to pastures, cultivation lands, firewood and water located on the other side of the ABL or in close proximity to the ABL.

Poverty is widespread in all surveyed villages. Of those surveyed, 69% reported spending less than 200 lari (GEL) (approximately 80 Euros) per household per month prior to the survey, and 37% said they spent less than 100 lari, while in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana the figure for those spending 100 lari or less is much higher, at 53%.

Figure 4 What was your household's monthly spending last month?

In the absence of adequate conditions for providing for themselves, the communities' dependence on state targeted social payments along with pensions remains high, making up the second biggest source of income for the population. 59% of the respondents, and as many as 72% in Atotsi-Dirbi, named state-provided social payments and pension as a major source of income. Employment in the public sector is an additional source of income for some 12%. Other sources of income are negligible. These figures are slightly less than in the previous year, but taking into account inflation, one can conclude that situation has largely remained the same.

What are the critical needs of the communities?

Physical insecurity has decreased, but remains a major problem in Atotsi-Dirbi

Conflict remains a dominant factor in the lives of all the communities living close to the ABL. 62% of the respondents named close proximity to the conflict zone as one of the most urgent problems for their community.

When it comes to physical security threats, respondents reported less physical security concerns compared to a year ago. 13% of the overall respondents, compared to 18% in the last survey, identified the threat of renewed violence as an urgent community

problem. Similarly, shootings were named as the most urgent problem by 4% of the respondents, as opposed to 11% last year. This indicates an increased degree of stabilisation in physical security three and half years after the war.

However the picture remains mixed in Atotsi-Dirbi. In the previous survey, significantly more people there expressed concern with physical security threats than in the other regions (39%, as opposed to an average of only 4% in the three other areas). The indicators on physical insecurity slightly increased in comparison to the previous year. Detentions (sometimes referred to by communities as ‘kidnappings’) and ethnic-based tensions (between Georgians and South Ossetians) were each separately mentioned as the top five most urgent community problems by 16% of the respondents in Atotsi-Dirbi, compared to an average of 2% in other three areas.

When it comes to other areas, the local concern with the impact of the conflict on the communities’ livelihoods – as opposed to physical security – becomes more apparent. Thus, no physical security concern was mentioned in the other three areas when asked why the situation in their communities has worsened compared to previous years. Instead, people complained about fewer economic opportunities and poor infrastructure.

This contrast is particularly visible in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana and Plavismani-Bershueti, which were less affected by the conflict but now suffer from its economic impact. In these areas, socio-economic and infrastructure problems dominate the list of the urgent issues. In Tsitelubani-Lamiskana for example, irrigation water was named as the number one priority both on community and personal levels ahead of the close proximity to the conflict zone. This reaffirms the finding of the last survey, which was that for most communities the conflict does not provide a constant physical threat – instead, the local populations are predominantly concerned about its ongoing economic impact. The focus groups showed, however, that in recent months the government has undertaken measures to improve access to irrigation water in some villages: “Finally we have a water pump. But it was laid down in autumn [2011] and [therefore] we were not able to harvest anything. As we did not have water for almost two years, our fruit trees dried out.”⁹

International aid distribution matters

Areas which received less international aid, such as Tsitelubani-Lamiskana and Plavismani-Bershueti, reported a perceived greater likelihood of economic deterioration in their communities. Thus, in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana 100% of the respondents believed a worsening in the economic situation was very likely to happen by end of 2012, and in Plavismani-Bershueti 70% of the respondents said this was very likely or likely to happen. By contrast, in the two other areas that received a greater amount of international aid, perceptions about local economic prospects looked less bleak: 48% of the respondents in Nikozi-Mereti and only 22% in Atotsi-Dirbi believed a worsening in the economic situation was likely this year. But now that the post-crisis assistance has ended, these perceptions may quickly change to more negative ones.

Less access to irrigation water, particularly in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana

Access to irrigation water in summer and firewood in winter are the two most persistent seasonal problems. Both problems are mainly caused by the conflict, as most of the water resources and forests are located on the other side of the ABL.

While overall, 39% of the respondents named irrigation water as one of the five major problems facing their community, the problem is particularly salient in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana and Nikozi-Mereti.

⁹ Focus group participant, female, 38 years old, village of Lamiskana (Tsitelubani-Lamiskana area).

In Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, 79% of the respondents identified access to irrigation water as the most urgent problem for their community, while 23% also prioritised drinking water. Access to irrigation water is listed as the number one issue which can cause tension or renewal of conflict in this area. In stark contrast to other areas, 61% of the respondents said problems with irrigation water can cause tensions or a renewal of conflict, and 91% said their community is very likely or likely to face more problems with supply of irrigation water by year's end.

In Nikozi-Mereti, problems remained largely unchanged from last year. Of those respondents who reported a general deterioration in their community's situation, 58% cited worsening provision of irrigation water as a reason. It is the second major problem in this community after the close proximity to the conflict zone. Similar to the Tsitelubani-Lamiskana area, the situation has deteriorated, with 67% (as opposed to 49% in last survey) identifying access to irrigation water as an urgent community issue in Nikozi-Mereti: "If there is no water, there will be no harvest... People will not be able to harvest crops and will die of hunger. So, what is the difference if they die in a war, or die of hunger?"¹⁰ This problem also partly explains the fact that of the 60% of the respondents who believed the situation in their communities has worsened attributed this to less access to agricultural lands.

Access to firewood and natural gas makes heating in winter a challenge

Though generally a seasonal concern, the inability to collect firewood in the forests is an urgent community problem for half of the respondents.

Since most of the forests are on the other side of the ABL, people collecting firewood risk being detained by the Russian/South Ossetian forces, creating a sense of physical insecurity in these communities.

Access to firewood is a particularly acute issue in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana and Plavismani-Bershueti, where respectively 65% and 63% of those surveyed mentioned it as the most urgent community problem. In Plavismani-Bershueti, 60% of those who believed the situation in their community has worsened believed limited access to firewood contributed to the problem. 95% of the respondents who reported the problem said the main reason that makes it impossible to collect firewood in the forest is the risk of being detained by South Ossetian/Russian forces: "Once, Ossetians kidnapped [local] men who went to the forests and detained them in Tskhinvali for eight months."¹¹ "It is quite difficult to get firewood. Last year when our villagers went for firewood, Ossetians took their cars."¹²

A lack of supply of natural gas aggravates the problem of heating homes during the winter: "We do not have gas. Two years ago we were promised that we would have gas but nothing has changed."¹³ It comes as no coincidence that areas which prioritised limited access to firewood as an urgent community problem are also the ones which suffer from lack of gas supply the most (Tsitelubani-Lamiskana – 65%, and Plavismani-Bershueti – 49%).

Ambiguity about the ABL affects livelihoods and increases physical insecurity

Ambiguity about the ABL has seen the greatest increase as a problem in comparison to any other problem in the previous survey. While this was mentioned as a problem by only 4% of the respondents in the last survey, this year 21% of those surveyed named it as one of the most urgent community problems they face.

This problem appears more salient in areas in which the ABL passes through

¹⁰ Focus group participant, male, 18 years old, village of Kere (Nikozi-Mereti).

¹¹ Focus group participant, female, 38 years old, village of Lamiskana (Tsitelubani-Lamiskana).

¹² Focus group participant, male, 47 years old, village of Lamiskana (Tsitelubani-Lamiskana).

¹³ *Ibid.*

the farmlands and pastures. This is particularly the case in the Atotsi-Dirbi and Plavismani-Bershueti areas, where concern with the ambiguity about the ABL is more widespread. 36% of the respondents in Atotsi-Dirbi and 22% in Plavismani-Bershueti named ambiguity about the ABL as one of the most urgent community problems.

Many people do not know where the ABL lies and refrain from using their pasturelands or cultivating their farmlands out of fear of being detained for inadvertently crossing it. In some areas, for example the village of Dvani in the Atotsi-Dirbi area, the surrounding territories around the village are subject to an ongoing dispute across the ABL, which has resulted in frequent movement of the ABL.

These problems may explain the reason why Atotsi-Dirbi reports much higher numbers of detentions by the Russian/South Ossetian forces of citizens for crossing the ABL than anywhere else (16%, compared to an average 2% in the other three areas).

Interestingly, in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana while only 4% named ambiguity about the ABL as a community problem, ten times more people (43%) said it represented a personal threat. When identifying urgent problems for themselves and their community, many respondents identify problems such as access to pasturelands and lands for cultivation, and detentions due to crossing of the ABL, but do not recognise the ambiguity of the ABL as a root cause for many of these problems.

3

Perceptions of personal safety and role of the security providers

How safe do people feel?

More people are feeling safer

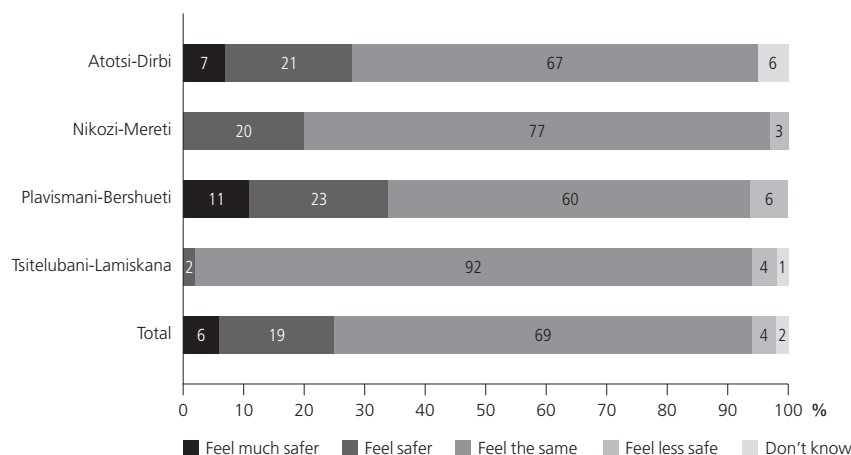
Overall, people feel more safe than unsafe. Only some 4% of those surveyed felt personally less safe, whereas 25% felt safe or much safer compared to the previous year. This is a small improvement compared to the previous year, when 27% of the respondents felt very or quite unsafe and 38% felt very or quite safe. 69% of the respondents, however, felt their personal safety situation has not changed, which may suggest that regardless of the number of security incidents, deep-seated insecurity is prevalent among the communities living near the ABL.

A degree of normalisation could also be seen in Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti, areas which have been more insecure: nobody in the former, and only 3% in the latter, felt less safe compared to last year. At the same time, 27% in Atotsi-Dirbi and 20% in Nikozi-Mereti felt safe or much safer, with the rest feeling that the safety situation remained the same. The focus groups in these two areas confirmed the results of the survey: 'We feel more secure now than last year.'¹⁴ 'We did not have any incidents.'¹⁵

In Plavismani-Bershueti, 34% felt safer or much safer, as opposed to 6% who felt less safe. In Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, where people overwhelmingly (93%) felt safe in the previous survey, some 92% said they felt the same, while only 4% said they felt less safe compared to last year. No group demonstrated a worsening trend compared to the previous survey.

¹⁴ Focus group participant, male, 51 years old, village of Dvani (Atotsi-Dirbi).

¹⁵ Focus group participant, female, 47 years old, village of Kere (Nikozi-Mereti).

Figure 5 How have your personal feelings of safety changed over the last year?

As in the previous survey, people in the Nikozi-Mereti area feel less safe after dark, reflecting their perception of living ‘on the front line’. 52% of the respondents in this area feel a little or much less safe after dark, compared to the 8% average for three other areas. This perception is likely to stem from presence of large South Ossetian settlements, including the regional capital Tskhinvali, and the proximity of a Russian military base. Since this area suffered from the 2008 war the most, people are afraid of what they see as the possibility of surprise attacks which may be launched from the strongholds across the ABL: “If even two armed men come down with automatic weapons at night, the whole [village of] Kere will become empty.”¹⁶ The rotation of military arms and movements in the nearby Russian military base contributes to such fears: “We are living in a place from where we can always see military rotations or the transfer of arms [to the Russian base], especially at night [and so] we are afraid.”¹⁷

Shootings remain most the frequent security incident

As in the previous survey, respondents identified a range of physical security incidents that have happened in their community since last year. Shootings still remain the most frequently reported security incident: 23% of the respondents said shootings occur at least several times a month. This figure, however, shows a visible decrease in the intensity of such incidents, as the overall figure last year was 51%. Furthermore, the fact that only 3.5% of the respondents named shootings as one of the five most urgent community problems implies that most of the shooting occurrences do not directly threaten local people. 92% of those who reported hearing shootings said they were shot in the air, while 3% claimed they were aimed. Respondents reported no deaths, bodily injury or damage to property from these shooting incidents. In focus group discussions, participants said most of the shootings took place on the other side of the ABL and thought that most of these were military training exercises: ‘We hear gunshots when there is a military exercise, but this is not aimed at civilians.’¹⁸

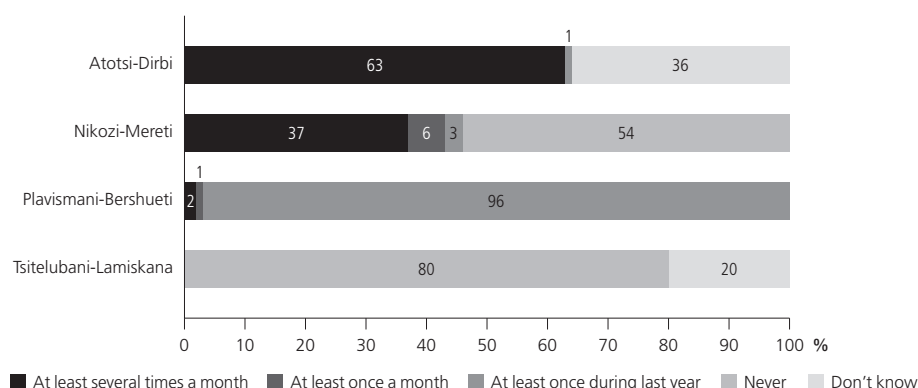
As before, most of the shooting is reported in the Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti areas. In Atotsi-Dirbi, 63% and in Nikozi-Mereti, 37% of those surveyed said they heard shootings occur at least several times a month. Nikozi-Mereti was the only area in which respondents who reported hearing shootings in the last year also reported hearing shootings from grenade launchers (20% of the respondents), artillery (19%) and tanks (4%). Virtually all the respondents who reported hearing shootings in Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti areas agreed they caused fear and panic, thus expressing the psychological distress resulting from such incidents. In contrast, the two remaining areas of Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana reported virtually no shooting incidents throughout the year.

¹⁶ Focus group participant, female, 55 years old, village of Kere (Nikozi-Mereti).

¹⁷ Focus group participant, female, 40 years old, village of Kere (Nikozi-Mereti).

¹⁸ Focus group participant, male, 54 years old, village of Kirbali (Plavismani-Bershueti).

Figure 6 How often have shootings occurred in your community/village during the last year?

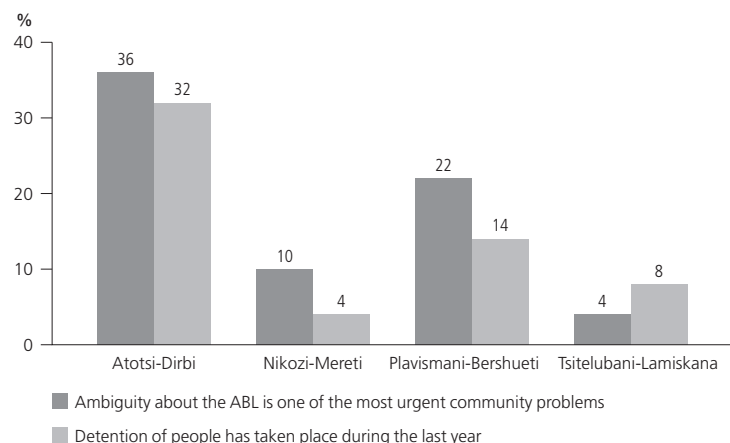


Increased rate of detentions as a result of ABL crossings

The rate of reported detentions has increased twofold in comparison with last year’s survey. 15% of the respondents (as opposed to 7% in previous survey) said the detention of people from their community has taken place at least once during last year. This increase is most likely linked to stricter enforcement of the *de facto* border and further restrictions on freedom of movement along the ABL by the Russian/South Ossetian forces.

Detentions are most reported in Atotsi-Dirbi (32% said it has taken place at least once during last year), followed by Plavismani-Bershueti (15%), Tsitelubani-Lamiskana (8%) and Nikozi-Mereti (5%). Moreover, detentions are reported more often in areas where respondents also complained more about the ambiguity about the ABL.

Figure 7 Link between the ambiguity about the ABL and detentions

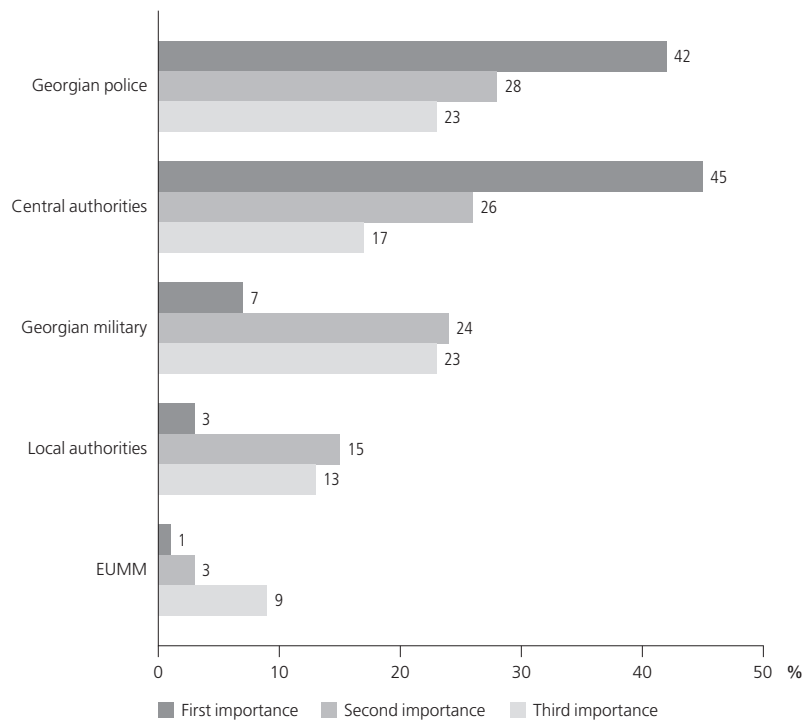


How does the public perceive security providers?

People perceive Georgian central authorities and Georgian police to be functioning effectively as primary security providers

As was the case in the previous survey, Georgian central authorities and the Georgian police are perceived to be the ‘primary security providers’. 45% of the respondents, about the same as in the last survey, named the Georgian central authorities as their most important security provider. The Georgian police remains the most important security provider overall – 42% of the respondents (as opposed to 28% in the last survey) cite them as their most important security provider, 28% put them second, and 23% put them third. Similarly to previous survey results, other actors perceived as providing security in order of importance are the Georgian military (54% first, second, third combined), the Georgian local authorities (30% combined) and the EUMM (13% combined).

Figure 8 Who is responsible for protecting you in your community (who is your 'primary security provider')?



The combined importance of the Georgian central authorities was most evident in Atotsi-Dirbi (98%) and Nikozi-Mereti (91%), and relatively less in Plavismani-Bershueti (84%) and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana (78%). In Atotsi-Dirbi, which is characterised by the highest perceptions of physical insecurity, the majority of the respondents (72%) identified the central authorities as their most important security provider; by contrast, in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, where respondents were least concerned with their physical security, only 23% put central authorities in first place in terms of protecting their community. These discrepancies demonstrate that the Georgian central authorities are perceived to have greater responsibility for protecting the communities in areas where people feel more insecure. This in turn hints at a perception that the risks posed by the conflict depend more on wider political developments, rather than local dynamics.

As opposed to central authorities, the police are an equally important security provider for all the communities, and the differences between the various areas do not appear significant. As the previous survey noted, most of the respondents said they would seek help if they become a victim of crime or violence – 77% said they would definitely seek help from a security provider, and 11% said they would probably do so. Almost all the respondents would turn to the police (90%), followed by the Georgian authorities in far second (29%), the EUMM (10%), relatives and friends (10%), and the courts (10%).

Some 4% said they would unlikely ask for help, and 3% would by no means do so (as opposed to 2% and 1% respectively in last survey). Among the top three answers provided as a rationale for not asking for help among these respondents, the inclination to solve the problem by themselves (34%), disbelief that the security providers would be capable of responding to the kind of challenges they face (25%), and doubts that security providers would be willing to respond (19%) were the most common reasons cited.

Non-state security actors, such as Georgian NGOs, church or relatives/friends, continue to play virtually no role as security providers in respondents' minds. The opinion about the effectiveness of Georgian NGOs was evenly divided between those who considered them as quite or very effective (16%) and those who considered them

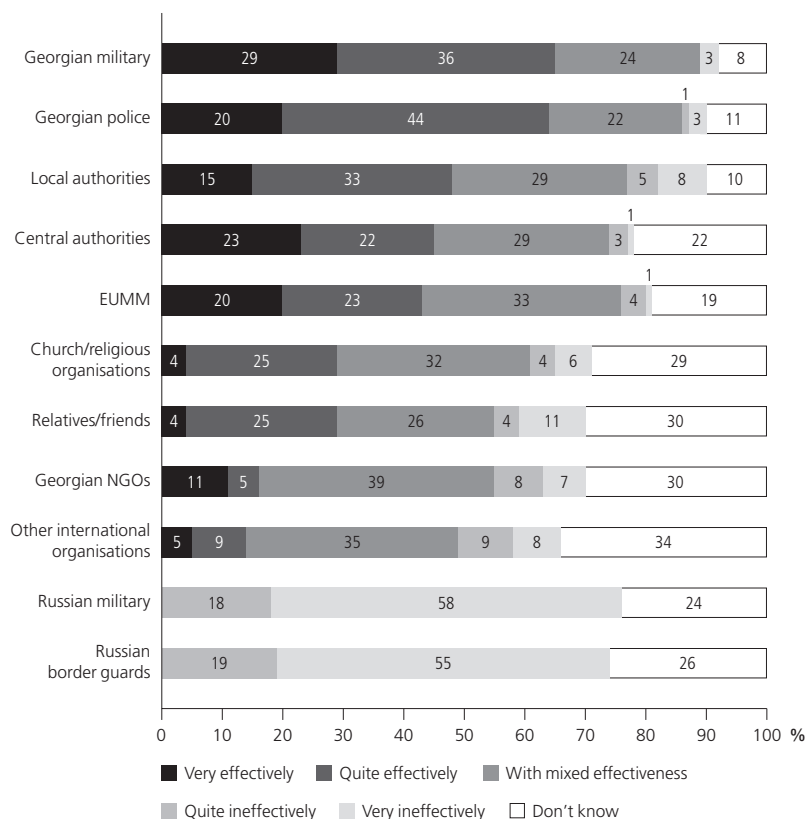
as quite or very ineffective (15%) in dealing with community problems, while 30% had no opinion on their performance.

More conflict-affected communities rate security provider effectiveness higher

Overall, the Georgian military and the police received the best assessment of all the security actors in terms of their perceived effectiveness – 65% and 64% of the respondents rated them respectively as very or quite effective.

Figure 9 General perceptions on the effectiveness of the security providers

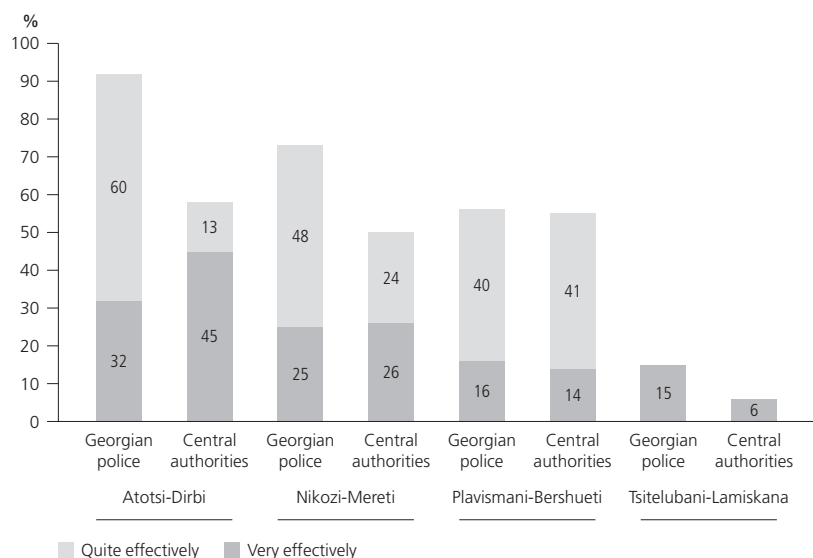
How well are the following actors dealing with security problems affecting your community/village?



However, there is a discrepancy between the views of the respondents in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana and other areas concerning the effectiveness of the security providers. In Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, the two primary security providers – the Georgian central authorities and police – received the lowest assessment of effectiveness among all the areas (see figure 10). Only 15% of the respondents (as opposed to 74% average in other three areas) said the police was very or quite effective in dealing with security problems affecting their community, and only 6% (as opposed to 54% average in other three areas) said the same about the central authorities. In comparison, in three other areas, an average appraisal of the police being very or quite effective was 73% (91% in Atotsi-Dirbi, 73% in Nikozi-Mereti, and 56% in Plavismani-Bershueti) and of the central authorities 54% (58% in Atotsi-Dirbi, 49% in Nikozi-Mereti, 55% in Plavismani-Bershueti).

Figure 10 Comparison in attitudes to primary security providers in Tselubani-Lamiskana and other areas

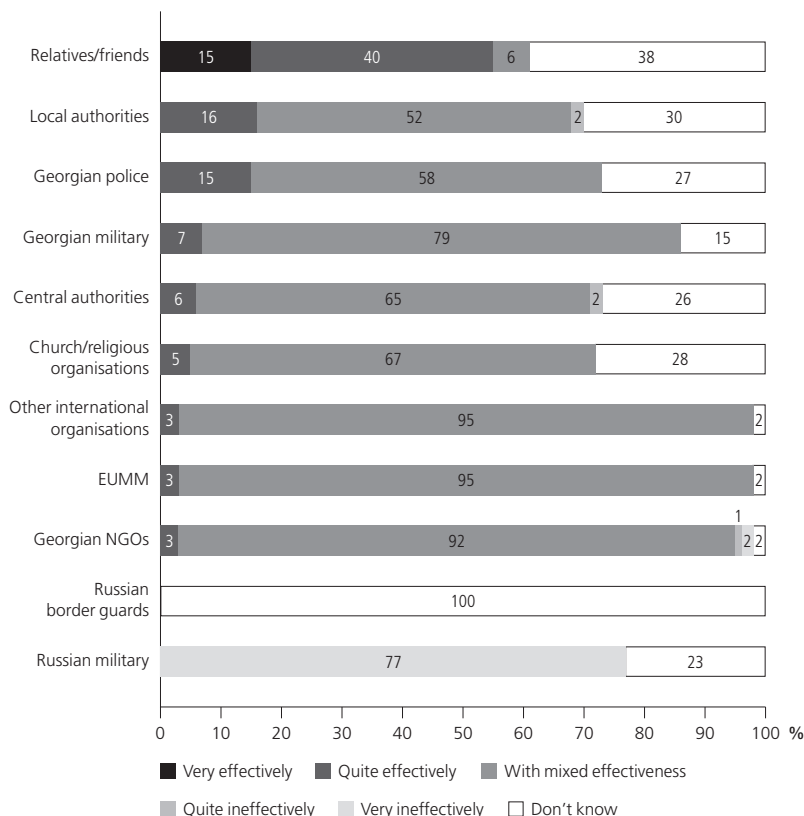
How well are the following actors dealing with security problems affecting your community/village?



Likewise, virtually all other security actors received lower ratings of effectiveness from the respondents in Tselubani-Lamiskana in comparison to other areas. Thus, while the Georgian military received the best assessment of all providers in three other areas, with an average of 75% of the respondents evaluating it as very or quite effective (73% in Atotsi-Dirbi, 72% in Nikozi-Mereti, 80% in Plavismani-Bershueti), only 7% in Tselubani-Lamiskana were of the same opinion. Similarly, while an average of 49% of the respondents in other three areas categorised the EUMM as very or quite effective in dealing with local security problems (49% in Atotsi-Dirbi, 34% in Nikozi-Mereti, and 63% in Plavismani-Bershueti), only 3% were of the same opinion.

Figure 11 Tselubani-Lamiskana: Perceptions of effectiveness of security providers

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



When analysing these discrepancies, several factors should be taken into consideration. First, the discrepancies in levels of satisfaction may be linked to security providers' prioritisation of the most insecure and most conflict-affected communities in Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti, as opposed to the less insecure and less affected Tsitelubani-Lamiskana. The local community in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, which lives further away from the area of the conflict, may feel less dependent on (or less engaged with) security providers such as the Georgian military, police or EUMM, unlike more the insecure communities living in Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti, and therefore may rate effectiveness differently.

Also, the fact that very few people rated police work as very or quite ineffective is also significant. Indeed, in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, where people were least satisfied with the effectiveness of the police, no one described police work as very or quite ineffective, just as no one did in Atotsi-Dirbi, where people seemed most satisfied with the effectiveness of the police. In Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, however, a sizeable 27% responded "don't know" to the question about effectiveness of the police, perhaps indicating they have less contact with the police than the other research areas do, because of their less secure situation.

Attitudes towards Russian security forces remain negative

Russian military and border guards remain the only actors towards whom Georgian communities living near the ABL retain strong negative feelings. The vast majority of the respondents (76% and 74% respectively) consider Russian military and border guards as very or quite inefficient. However, only 14% of the respondents said Russian forces were present in the area they lived, and none of them have been in contact with these forces.

It appears that most people are more dissatisfied with the restrictions on crossing the ABL and accessing livelihoods that the Russian forces enforce, rather than the physical security threats they pose. Thus, while 14% of the respondents consider Russian forces one of the five most urgent problems facing their community, 20% believe the presence of Russian forces pose a personal threat. The inability to collect firewood was a most urgent community problem for half of the respondents and almost all of those (95%) named the threat of being detained by Russian forces as the reason for their inability to collect firewood. Of those respondents who reported detentions, 58% said it was the Russian forces behind such detentions. All of these restrictions contribute to negative perceptions of the Russian military and border guards.

4

Perceptions of the likelihood of increased tension and return to violence

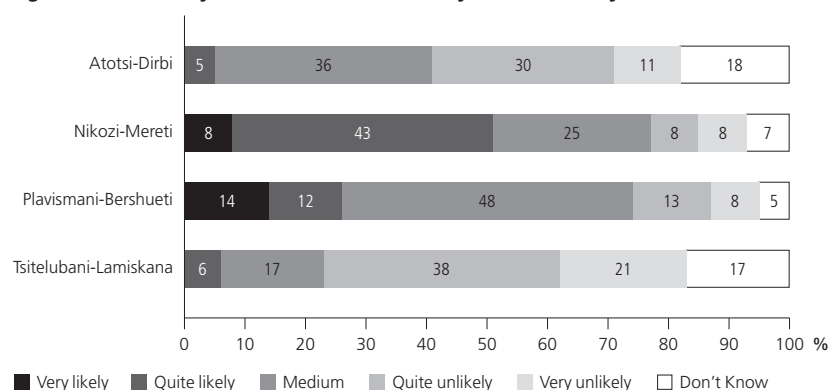
What is the potential for renewed conflict?

Outbreak of violent conflict is perceived as less likely

Half as many people, but a still sizable 24%, of respondents believe increased tension and return to violence is very or quite likely in comparison to the previous year. 37% (as opposed to 28% last year) assess increased tension as a medium likelihood and 29% (as opposed to 20% last year) believe return to violence is very or quite unlikely.

A perceived improvement in the security situation is visible in all three areas – Nikozi-Mereti, Atotsi-Dirbi and Plavismani-Bershueti – in which a majority of the respondents in the last survey believed increased tension was very or quite likely. The decline in perceived potential for tension was most dramatic in Atotsi-Dirbi. Only 5% of those surveyed in this area said it was quite likely that the situation in their community would become more tense (none believed it was very likely) – a stark contrast with previous survey results, when 12% and 49% respectively believed that the situation in their community was very likely or quite likely to become more tense.

Nikozi-Mereti remains the only area where more than half of the respondents expected increased tensions. Here, 51% believed the situation was very or quite likely to become more tense, compared to average 12% in other three areas. This, however, represents an improvement in risk perceptions compared to previous survey results. In the October 2010 survey, 68% in Nikozi-Mereti believed situation was very or quite likely to become more tense by the end of the year. The highest anticipation of renewed tensions points to the past experience of people in this area, who suffered from the August 2008 war the most in terms of physical destruction and looting. The proximity to major South Ossetian settlements, including Tskhinvali, and nearby Russian military bases contributes to the perceived insecurity and perceptions of risks among this group.

Figure 12 How likely is it that the situation in your community will become tenser?

Interestingly, in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, where in the last survey over 90% of the respondents believed they were unlikely to experience increased tensions, there was a moderate degree of deterioration in risk perceptions. While this area, due to its distance from the conflict zone, remains the least preoccupied with threats to physical security, 6% (as opposed to 0% previously) believed the situation was quite likely to become more tense and 17% (as opposed to 3% previously) deemed moderate likelihood of increased tensions. This negative dynamic is likely due to economic insecurity, aggravated by the reduced ability to access resources across the ABL (see further below).

What events could trigger increased tensions?

Political escalation, movement of the ABL, and security incidents across the ABL are thought to carry the greatest risk of increased tension or renewal of violence.

Over two thirds of respondents think that the main trigger event that can cause tension or renewal of conflict is political escalation between Georgia and Russia, while nearly half see political escalation between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali as the second most important trigger. As with the previous survey, these results affirm that people perceive the main causes of tensions as external to their community and outside of their influence while at the same time, in contrast to the official Georgian position, perceive Tskhinvali to be a separate actor.

Figure 13 Which events could cause increased tension/renewal of conflict?

Further political escalation between Georgia and Russia	70%
Further political escalation between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali	48%
Movement of the ABL by Russians/South Ossetians	34%
Clashes between armed forces across the ABL	28%
Shootings	26%
Inability to collect firewood for winter in the nearby forests	21%
Domestic political upheaval/unrest	21%
Inaccurate or inflammatory statements by politicians about the situation	17%
Movement of the ABL by Georgians	13%
Worsening economic situation	12%
Worsened criminal situation	11%
EUMM leaving the region	11%
Flow of arms into the region	10%
Inaccurate or inflammatory media reporting of the situation	10%
Reduced ability to cross the ABL	10%
Problems with supply of irrigation water	9%
Escalation of external political situation	8%
Increase in illegal movement of people and contraband	5%
Problems with supply of potable water	2%

A notable difference between the previous survey and this one is that the perception that the role of moving the ABL by Russian/South Ossetian forces as a potential trigger factor increased (from 27% to 34%), making it the third most important risk factor overall. The role of the shootings as a perceived risk factor decreased (from 41% to 26%). These changes may be explained by the general decrease in the reported shooting incidents and reduced insecurity caused by such incidents. At the same time, persisting concerns about the access to resources across the ABL and ambiguity over where it lies make movement of the ABL an increased risk factor for the local population.

Similar to the pattern identified in the previous survey, those who see shootings as a potential source of renewed tension tend to experience them more often in their community, feel relatively more insecure and identify shootings as a more urgent community problem and personal threat. These are the characteristics which continue to differentiate communities located closer to the epicentre of the conflict in Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti from those further away in Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana.

What influences community assessment of likely trigger events?

Economic vulnerabilities associated with the conflict and difficulties accessing resources on the other side of the ABL are thought to be more likely triggers for increased tensions

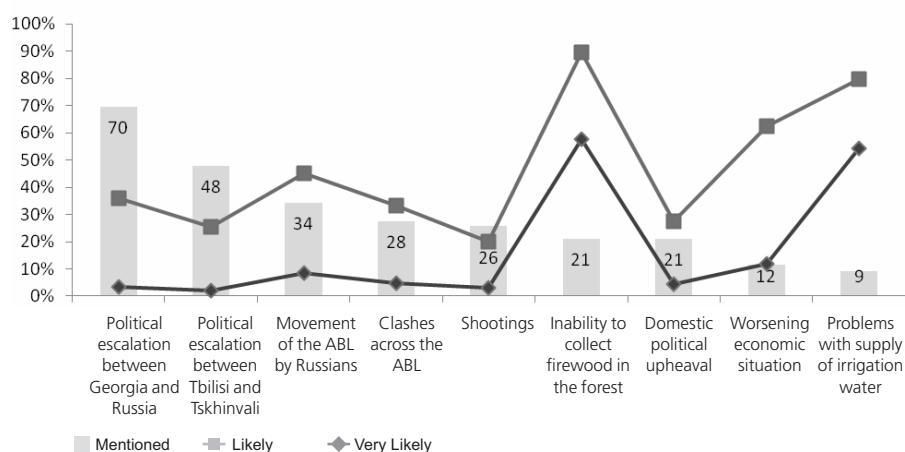
In numerical terms, a relative majority of the respondents (9,907 people) considered escalation between Georgia and Russia as a very likely or likely event that would trigger increased tensions by the end of 2011. This suggests that the political situation is still widely seen as unstable by a large part of the population.

However, unlike the previous survey, when shootings were considered the most likely trigger event to happen and movement of the ABL the least likely, the picture is quite different now. More people believe increased tensions may be provoked by livelihood-related problems as opposed to security incidents such as shootings, for example. 90% of those surveyed indicated inability to collect firewood in the nearby forests as a likely trigger of conflict and believed it would cause increased tensions by the end of 2012. Almost all of these respondents come from Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, serving another example of the salience of this problem in these areas. 80% of the respondents held the same view about the problems with supply of irrigation water. The vast majority of them came from Tsitelubani-Lamiskana and Nikozi-Mereti, where more respondents reported higher concern on both community and personal levels about supply of irrigation water.

These problems are closely linked to the difficulties in accessing resources on the other side of the ABL and reflect growing local frustration with inability to access their traditional livelihoods, particularly in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana and Plavismani-Bershueti.

Figure 14 Which events do you think are able to cause increased tension/renewal of conflict? How likely it is for each event to happen during this year?

Only those events which either were mentioned by more than 20% of the respondents or were deemed likely to trigger tensions by the majority (50%+) of those who identified a specific event are included.



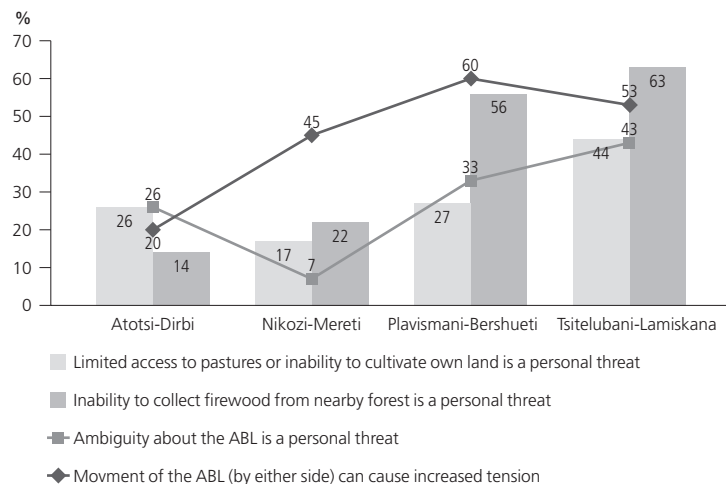
Tsitelubani-Lamiskana and Plavismani-Bershueti have a greater dependence on access to resources across the ABL and so are more sensitive to changes in the ABL

Interestingly, concern over the moving of the ABL is greater in areas which have less anxiety about the physical insecurity impacts of the conflict. In Plavismani-Bershueti 60% of the respondents believe that movement of the ABL – whether by Russians (43%) or Georgians (17%) – could cause increased tensions. In Tsitelubani-Lamiskana this is a view held by respectively 42% and 11% of the respondents. By comparison, moving the ABL by Russians/South Ossetians and by Georgians is perceived as a possible trigger factor by respectively 31% and 14% of those surveyed in Nikozi-Mereti and only by 16% and 3% in Atotsi-Dirbi.

This discrepancy in risk perceptions across the research areas is due to the fact that people in Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana more heavily depend for their livelihoods on resources, particularly firewood (in both areas) and the supply of irrigation water (in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana), that lie across the ABL. Respondents in Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana were twice as likely to prioritise the inability to collect firewood from nearby forests, limited access to pastures, or the inability to cultivate their own land as most urgent community and personal problem, in comparison to two other areas. Because of their greater dependence on resources across the ABL, these areas were also more concerned about the ambiguity about the boundaries in comparison to other two areas (see Figure 15).

Figure 15 Communities in Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana are more dependent on resources from across the ABL, and therefore, are more sensitive to changes in the ABL

What represents a threat to you personally? Which events do you think can cause increased tension/renewal of conflict?



Therefore, in contrast to Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti, where respondents mentioned political and security factors as main potential triggers for increased tension and the importance given to economic insecurities as a source of conflict was insignificant, in Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana respondents also prioritised economic issues such as the inability to collect firewood (32% and 60% in Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana respectively), problems with irrigation water (61% in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana), and the reduced ability to cross the ABL and the worsening economic situation (21% and 20% respectively in Plavismani-Bershueti).

5

Understanding opportunities for conflict transformation

How has the level and nature of contact across the divide changed?

Contact has further reduced to very low levels, but popular attitudes remain non-hostile

Almost all of the respondents (96%) said the nature of their relationships with Ossetians living across the ABL in South Ossetia has not changed. A small number (3%) said relationships worsened and illustratively, none of the respondents, apart from a tiny number in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, reported improvement in relationships compared to previous year.

Overall, slightly more people (80% as opposed to 73% in last survey) report having no relationship with ethnic Ossetians in South Ossetia compared to a year ago. The absence of relationships is particularly high in Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti (94%), fairly high in Plavismani-Bershueti (79%) and lowest in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana (29%).

Half of the respondents (49%) in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana and one-fifth (20%) in Plavismani-Bershueti reported having family links with ethnic Ossetians in South Ossetia, while in the other two areas this represented an insignificant number. Virtually none of the respondents in Atotsi-Dirbi and Nikozi-Mereti, and only 3% in Plavismani-Bershueti reported having friends among ethnic Ossetians from across the ABL, while in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana 22% said they had such friendships. A greater degree of ties and contacts in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana compared to other areas could be attributed to the fact that it is further away from the site of the conflict and more importantly, has a sizeable ethnic Ossetian minority population (31% of the respondents from this area were ethnic Ossetians). In all four areas, however, respondents said they had no or virtually no business or trade relationships (less than 1%) with ethnic Ossetians living in South Ossetia.

Reduced contact between the communities living across the ABL risks further alienating these communities over time, and thus undermining an important resource for reconciliation. However, the forced estrangement of the communities apparently has not translated into hostile attitudes towards the ethnic Ossetian communities living in South Ossetia. Only 1% of the respondents said they feel mistrust, and none of the respondents stated that they had openly hostile relationships towards ethnic Ossetians living on the other side of the ABL. These figures are in line with similar ones

What measures do people support for engaging with Ossetians in South Ossetia?

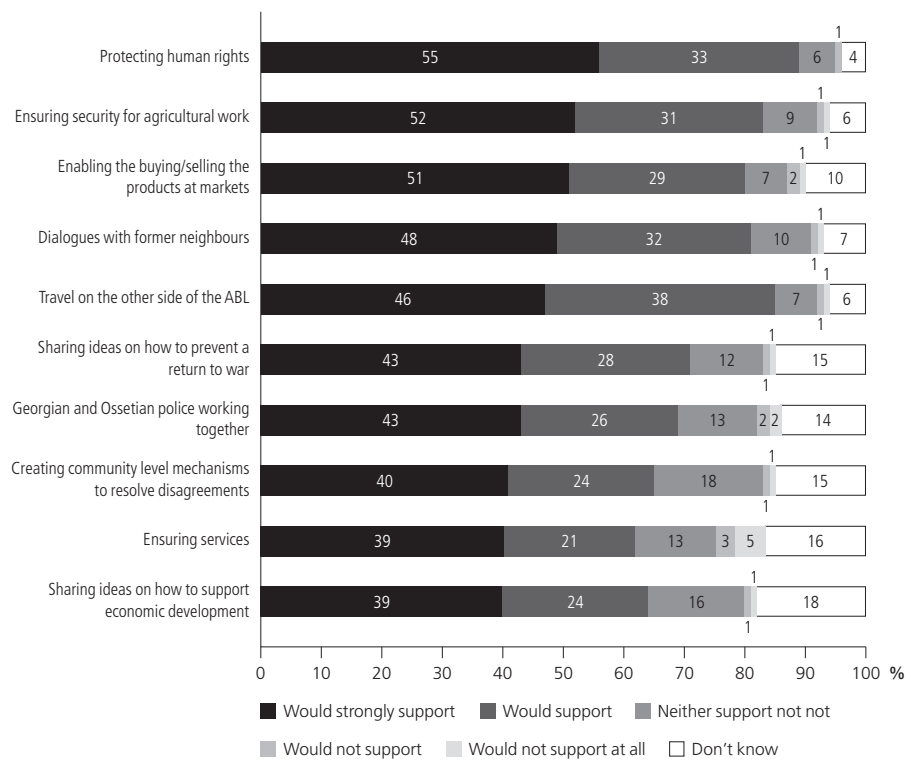
People support increased human contacts and business relations across the ABL

As the previous survey, respondents are supportive of any measures supporting engagement with Ossetians in South Ossetia and, while some measures were clearly more preferred than others, the amount of disapproval of all of them was limited, and in many instances even negligible.

89% of the respondents either support or strongly support engagement with ethnic Ossetians across the ABL to protect human rights, 84% support travel to meet friends and relatives on the other side and 83% support engagement measures to ensure security for agricultural work. These forms of engagement are closely followed by support for dialogue with former neighbours (80%) and measures that would enable trade across the ABL (see, Figure 16). Support for travel across the ABL to meet friends and family was most (94%) in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, where many families in this ethnically mixed area wish to have secure contact with their relatives on the other side of the ABL.

Figure 16 Support for engagement measures

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



As in the previous survey, respondents in Nikozi-Mereti, although mostly supportive, are less enthusiastic about the proposed engagement measures. While in other areas respondents were more likely to 'strongly support' rather than simply 'support' a particular proposed measure, the trend in Nikozi-Mereti was the opposite, and there was also a relatively stronger disapproval of all types of engagement than in other areas (an average of 3%, as opposed to average 0.5% in Atotsi-Dirbi, 1.5% in Nikozi-Mereti and 0% in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana).

What measures do people deem more effective?

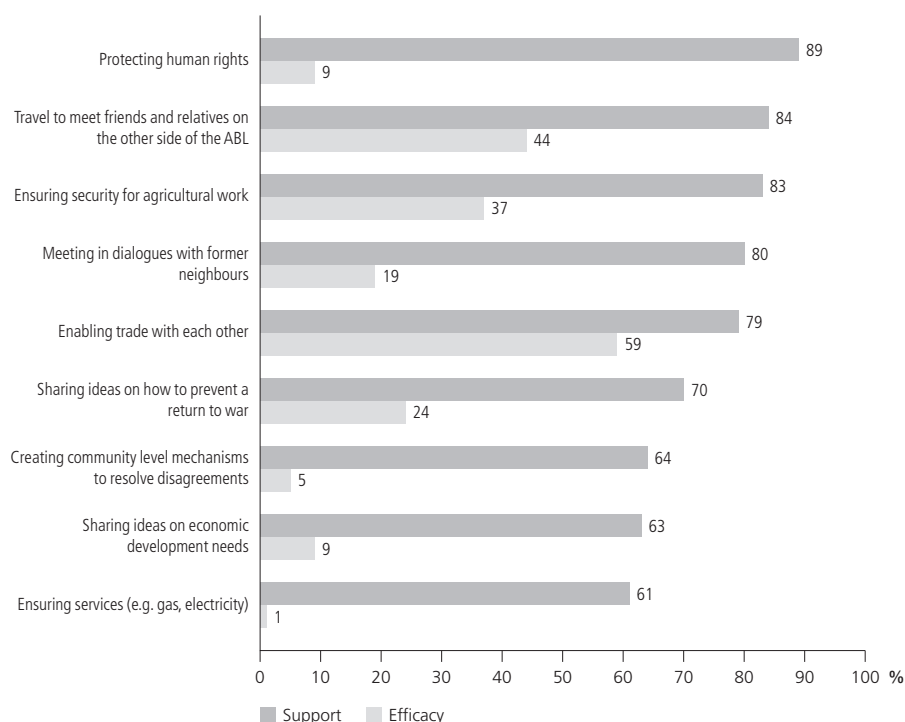
General confidence in effectiveness of confidence-building measures is low, except for promoting trade

While respondents displayed a high degree of support toward various measures for building trust and confidence with ethnic Ossetians living in South Ossetia, their belief in efficacy of most of these measures is much lower (see Figure 17). For example, while engagement with Ossetians to protect human rights was the most supported measure, it was mentioned as an effective measure by only 9% – ten times fewer respondents.

Discrepancies between the support and perceived efficacy of confidence building measures indicate deep-seated frustration with the on-going effects of the conflict, and also a lack of belief that local-level initiatives can actually produce tangible results in a context whereby most people perceive the main causes of tensions as external to their community: “Russians stand between Georgians and Ossetians... If Russians do not stand back, nothing will be settled.”¹⁹ “Everything will be okay when the Russian troops are gone.”²⁰ It is telling that only 5% of the respondents stated that creating a community-level mechanism to resolve local disagreements to build trust and confidence across the ABL would be effective.

Figure 17 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?



However, when looking at the types of engagement deemed as more effective, one can see that people prefer concrete, action-oriented measures that focus on local needs. Thus, as in the previous survey, enabling trade across the ABL is considered as the most effective measure for building trust with Ossetians on the other side of the divide. 59% of respondents identified it as one of the three most effective measures and relative majority of 35% named it as the most effective measure. This measure was deemed most effective in all areas except for Atotsi-Dirbi.

Facilitating travel to meet ethnic Ossetian friends and relatives on the other side of the ABL and ensuring security for agricultural work are mentioned as two of the three most effective measures to build trust by respectively 44% and 37% of respondents. This was closely followed by measures to ensure secure access to pastures, named an effective measure by 36% of respondents. All other measures were considered effective by less than a quarter of respondents.

¹⁹ Focus group participant, female, 41 years old, village of Kere (Nikozi-Mereti).

²⁰ Focus group participant, female, 40 years old, village of Dvani (Atotsi-Dirbi).

6

Conclusion

IN MANY RESPECTS, physical security has improved in areas of Shida Kartli adjoining the ABL. Half as many people (24%) believe increased tension is likely in comparison to the previous year. There has been no major security incident within the reported timeframe. People report less shootings, and confirm that most of these are due to military trainings and are not directed at civilians.

However, while the survey shows a trend of gradual normalisation of the security situation and decreasing physical threats, the importance of economic insecurity – closely connected to the reduced contact and ability to access resources across the ABL – is on the rise. The consolidation of control over the ABL by the Russian border guards prevents many people living in the area from using these lands, which they traditionally used for cultivating crops, grazing their cattle or collecting firewood for winter. This undermines the livelihoods of the people living close to the ABL. As a result, twice as many respondents (61%) as in the previous year named less opportunity to earn money as the most urgent community problem, making this the second most cited problem for the conflict-affected communities along the ABL, after close proximity to the conflict zone.

Furthermore, all those who believed that the situation in their communities worsened cited economic problems associated with the presence of the conflict and difficulties in accessing resources on the other side of the ABL. Stricter enforcement of the ABL and further restrictions on freedom of movement along it by the Russian/South Ossetian forces have also led to a twofold increase in number of reported detentions (15%). Restrictions imposed on ABL crossing and associated economic insecurities threaten the sustainability of the communities living along the ABL, and by increasing local frustrations, represent a potential threat to local stability.

Atotsi-Dirbi

Atotsi-Dirbi remains an area where significantly more people continue to express concern with physical security threats than elsewhere (39%, as opposed to an average of only 4% in the three other areas). Other physical security challenges, such as detentions for crossing the ABL and ethnic-based tensions, are mentioned as the top five most urgent community problems by 16% of the respondents in Atotsi-Dirbi, compared to an average 2% in other three areas. The greater number of detentions is closely linked to the ambiguity about the ABL, which often runs through agricultural lands with no clear delimitation marks, thus making people vulnerable to arbitrary detentions by Russian/South Ossetian forces. Physical insecurity combined with economic hardship have further contributed to depopulation in this remote area, although the rate of reported depopulation has somewhat decreased.

But Atotsi-Dirbi has also witnessed the biggest positive trend in overall perception

of change. 51% of the respondents in this area believe that the situation has improved compared to previous year. The area saw the most dramatic decline in perceived potential for tension. Only 5% of those surveyed here said it was quite likely that the situation in their community would become more tense by the end of 2012 (and none believed it was very likely) – a stark contrast with previous survey results, when 12% and 49% respectively believed the situation in their community was very likely or quite likely to become more tense.

While a degree of normalisation accounts for the relative improvement in local risk perceptions, economic vulnerabilities remain a high priority for population in Atotsi-Dirbi. Bad roads (65%) and less opportunity to earn money (57%) constitute respectively the second and third most urgent community problems after close proximity to the conflict zone. To preserve sustainability of the communities in this remote area, it is critical to further reinforce the security environment, while also investing in livelihood opportunities and rebuilding infrastructure such as roads.

Nikozi-Mereti

The picture in Nikozi-Mereti remains mixed. Roughly equal numbers of respondents (27% and 24%, respectively) consider that the situation has improved or deteriorated, while almost half (47%) believe that the situation in their communities has not changed. People continue to perceive themselves at the centre of the conflict zone, and 79%, more than in other three areas, consider close proximity to the conflict zone as the most urgent community problem. Proximity to large South Ossetian settlements, including the regional capital Tskhinvali, and to a Russian military base increases feelings of insecurity.

Although improvement is observed in the sense of perceptions of risks compared to previous survey results, Nikozi-Mereti remains the only area where the majority of respondents (51%) expected increased tensions (compared to average 12% in other three areas). These perceptions of threats also explain their relatively less trusting attitudes towards the proposed engagement measures with South Ossetians.

As with Atotsi-Dirbi, depopulation, although decreased in scale, remains a serious problem in the area and 57% of those surveyed – a figure higher than elsewhere – said their communities have shrunk compared to a year ago. The sustainability of the communities in Nikozi-Mereti is challenged both by physical insecurities and economic vulnerabilities, particularly access to irrigation water.

Plavismani-Bershueti

While less affected by the conflict directly, communities in Plavismani-Bershueti increasingly suffer from its on-going economic effects. 70% of the respondents in the area believe their economic situation will worsen. Of those respondents who believed that the situation in their community did worsen, 60% believe limited access to firewood contributed to the problem.

The imposition of strict border regulations along the ABL has impeded this community's access to traditional resources, particularly access to firewood, which has been collected in the nearby forests on the other side of the ABL. Lack of access to natural gas compounds problems with heating during the winter season.

Given their dependence on access to firewood, communities in Plavismani-Bershueti are very sensitive to changes in the ABL. A stronger enforcement of 'border regulations' by Russian/South Ossetian has increased the likelihood of detentions for crossing the ABL. Plavismani-Bershueti was second after Atotsi-Dirbi where respondents identified ambiguity about the ABL as an urgent community problem (22%). Also, it was second after Atotsi-Dirbi for the greatest number of detentions reported (15%). Facilitating access to firewood, including through trading across the ABL, and improving natural gas supply to the region could significantly mitigate the intensity of local problems.

Tsitelubani-Lamiskana

More than anywhere else, conflict does not represent an immediate physical threat in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, but its economic impact is increasingly felt by local communities. Socio-economic and infrastructure problems, such as bad roads and problems with gas supply, dominate the list of urgent concerns. Most notably, irrigation water is named as the number one priority both on the community and personal levels, ahead of the close proximity to the conflict zone. In stark contrast to other areas, 61% of the respondents in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana said problems with irrigation water can cause tension or renewal of conflict, and 91% said their community is very likely or likely to face more problems with supply of irrigation water by the end of 2012.

Similarly to Plavismani-Bershueti, communities in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana are very dependent on access to livelihood assets across the divide, and therefore are very sensitive to changes along the ABL. Respondents in both Plavismani-Bershueti and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana were twice as likely to prioritise the inability to collect firewood from nearby forests, limited access to pastures, or the inability to cultivate their own land as the most urgent community and personal problems in comparison to two other areas. Tellingly, 100% of the respondents in the area believed a worsening of the economic situation was very likely to happen by end of 2012.

Given their economic difficulties and growing frustration over restricted access to resources on the other side of the ABL, communities in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana are more critical of the effectiveness of the Georgian central authorities and police than other communities. In response, the government should pay greater attention to socio-economic problems in Tsitelubani-Lamiskana, and in particular should take further measures to improve access to irrigation water in the area.

ANNEX 1: Methodology

This report is based on data collected in a tracker survey undertaken in December 2011. The tracker survey comprises a household survey and a series of focus groups discussions. The methodology (discussed below) used is similar to the one used in previous survey, which allows for comparisons to be made over time.

The original methodology was developed in April 2010 following 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.²¹

The research sample involved 752 respondents in four target groups of villages (Atotsi-Dirbi – 11 villages, 3,189 households, Nikozi-Mereti – 12 villages, 3,363 households, Plavismani-Bershueti – 17 villages, 6,164 households and Tsitelubani-Lamiskana – 16 villages, 2,234 households²². To better assess the impact of the conflict on local communities mainly those living directly along the ABL that were deemed accessible to the research team were selected. In total, 41.5% of the respondents were male and 58.5% were female and all were over 18 years old.

In addition to quantitative survey, four focus group discussions were organised in December 2011 in four select villages – one village from each of the four target village groups. In each focus group, ten participants were selected from one of the following villages: Dvani (Atotsi-Dirbi), Kere (Nikozi-Mereti), Kirbali (Plavismani-Bershueti) and Lamiskana (Tsitelubani-Lamiskana). The purpose of the focus groups was to test the results of the quantitative survey, gain a deeper understanding of the underlying problems and address issues that need clarification.

Household survey and focus group discussions revolved around the four main questions: 1) opportunities for livelihoods and how these are being addressed by the communities, local and central governments; 2) responses of the security providers to local security needs; 3) perceptions about the potential for increased tensions; and 4) measures to rebuild trust and confidence across the divide.

In order to guarantee an acceptable level of anonymity for the participants, CRRC and Saferworld decided not to disclose the names of the recruiting villages. Due to the very small community sizes, the personal data included in this report might otherwise suffice to identify participants. During the focus groups, the moderator asked questions according to a guide, which included the above-mentioned 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: [<http://crrcenters.org/>].

²¹ Malte Viefhues and David Wood, *Life on the boundary line: The future of security in Shida Kartli*, Saferworld, October 2010, www.saferworld.org.uk/smartweb/resources/view-resource/482 (accessed March 14, 2012).

²² Number of household for Tsitelubani-Lamiskana were approximated from number of registered voters in the selected area. Average number of adults per household in the given area was taken from the previous Saferworld survey data.

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 in Ergneti with firewood, January 2012

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Saferworld
The Grayston Centre
28 Charles Square
London N1 6HT
UK

Phone: +44 (0)20 7324 4646

Fax: +44 (0)20 7324 4647

Email: general@saferworld.org.uk

Web: www.saferworld.org.uk

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