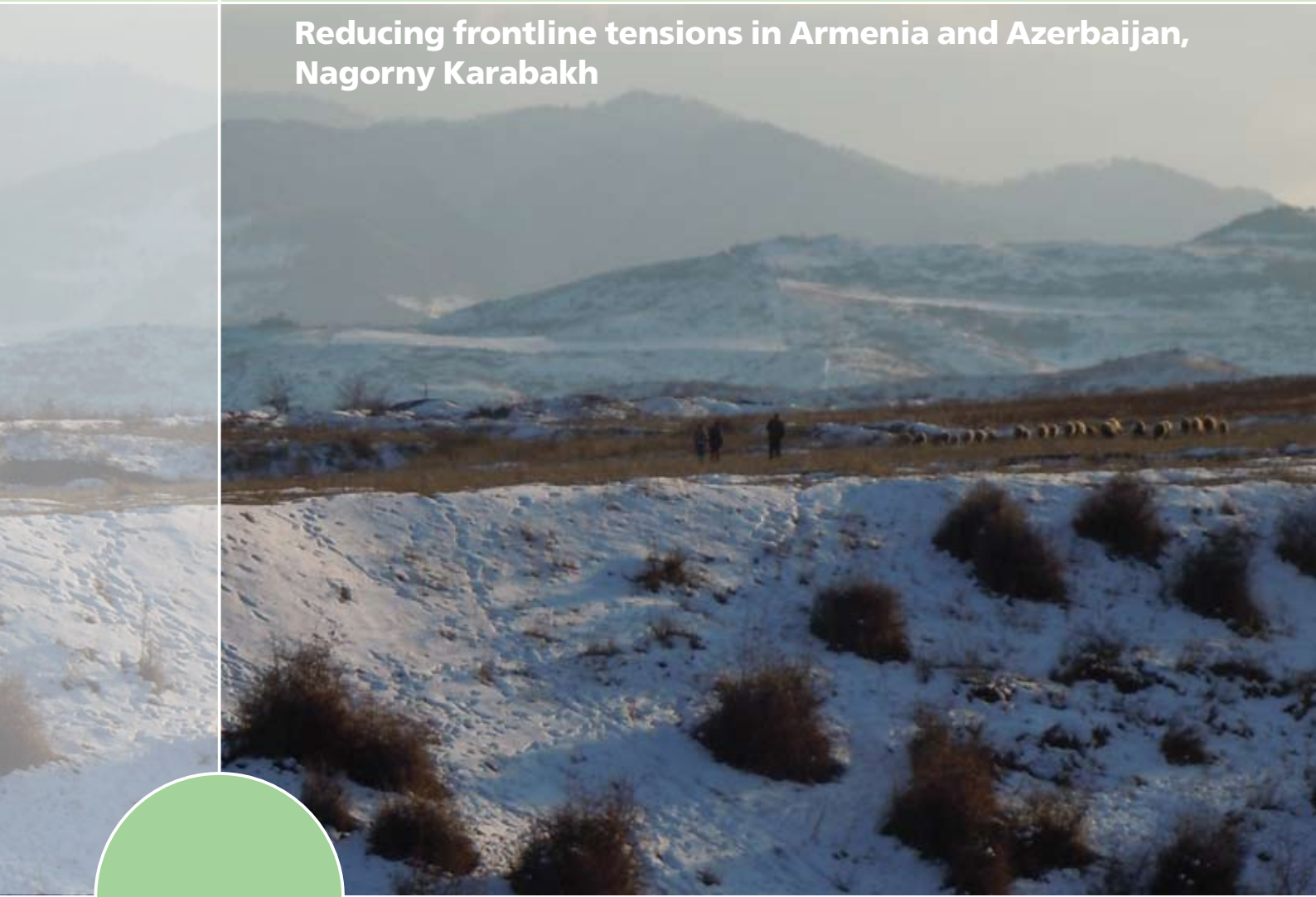




Putting people first

Reducing frontline tensions in Armenia and Azerbaijan,
Nagorny Karabakh



April 2012



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Nagorny Karabakh**

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This report is based on contributions written by Tabib Huseynov (independent consultant) and Tevan Poghosyan (ICHD), setting out Azerbaijani and Armenian perspectives on the situation in frontier districts along the international border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and near the Line of Contact (LOC) around Nagorny Karabakh. It was edited by Craig Oliphant (Senior Advisor, Saferworld). The report has also benefited from comments and input provided by Laurence Broers (Conciliation Resources). It draws on participatory research conducted in areas near the LOC and also in the districts of Tovuz and Gazakh in Azerbaijan along its border with Armenia, and specifically the border districts in the Tavush region.

The People's Peacemaking Perspectives project

The People's Peacemaking Perspectives project is a joint initiative implemented by Conciliation Resources and Saferworld and financed under the European Commission's Instrument for Stability. The project provides European Union institutions with analysis and recommendations based on the opinions and experiences of local people in a range of countries and regions affected by fragility and violent conflict.

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Contents

Background	1
1 Introduction	3
2 Putting people first: the security needs in Azerbaijan's frontline villages in the Line of Contact	7
3 The security needs in Azerbaijan's frontline villages on the border with Armenia	23
4 Karabakh Armenian perceptions	35
5 Local Armenian perspectives from Tavush Region (Marz)	45
6 Recommendations	56
ANNEX I: Methodology	59
ANNEX II: Outline of Basic Principles	61
ANNEX III: Note on casualty figures	62

Nagorny Karabakh



This map is intended for illustrative purposes only. Saferworld takes no position on whether this representation is legally or politically valid.

Glossary of terms

ANAMA	Azerbaijani mine action agency
CBM	Confidence-building measures
EUSR	European Union Special Representative
IDP	Internally displaced persons
LOC	Line of Contact
Marz	Name given for a province, of which there are ten, in Armenia; the ten provinces plus the capital Yerevan make up the altogether eleven administrative divisions in the republic
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NK	Nagorny Karabakh
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RA	Republic of Armenia

Background

IT IS DIFFICULT TO FIND NEW WAYS to describe the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. On the one hand, the facts on the ground have remained in a stalemate and in the same unresolved situation for nearly two decades. On the other, the conflict continues to evolve and pose persistent and shifting challenges. There is certainly no room for complacency in a situation that is far from ‘frozen’. The strains and tensions of the unresolved conflict are evident on a daily basis.

In March 2012 the Co-Chair Foreign Ministers of the OSCE Minsk Group (Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, and French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe) issued a pre-emptive statement to mark the 20th anniversary of the Minsk process, established in 1992 as the multilateral mechanism mandated to facilitate a resolution. The statement on 22 March 2012 noted:

“On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the formal request to convene a conference on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, we, the Foreign Ministers of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries, call upon the sides to demonstrate the political will needed to achieve a lasting and peaceful settlement. As Presidents Medvedev, Obama, and Sarkozy reiterated in their joint statement at Deauville on 26 May 2011, only a negotiated settlement can lead to peace, stability, and reconciliation, and any attempt to use force to resolve the conflict would bring only more suffering to a region that has known uncertainty and insecurity for too long.

We recall that the peoples of the region have suffered most from the consequences of war, and any delay in reaching a settlement will only prolong their hardships. A new generation has come of age in the region with no first-hand memory of Armenians and Azeris living side by side, and prolonging these artificial divisions only deepens the wounds of war. For this reason, we urge the leaders of the sides to prepare their populations for peace, not war.”

The *communiqué*, as noted, recalled the statement from less than a year before when Presidents Dmitry Medvedev, Barack Obama, and Nicolas Sarkozy at the G8 summit at Deauville, France (May 2011) had said that the time had now come for all the sides to the NK conflict to take a decisive step towards a peace settlement. They called on the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan, at their subsequent summit in Kazan in June 2011, to demonstrate their political will by finalising the Basic Principles (see Annex II, page 61). As it turned out, that June summit ended sourly with no progress. The Sochi summit involving Presidents Ilham Aliyev and Serzh Sargsyan on 23 January 2012 – the tenth such meeting held under the mediation efforts of President Medvedev, as part of the Minsk Process and to a certain extent also parallel to it – brought the sides no closer together. The recent Sochi meeting was the first encounter on that level since the Kazan summit in summer 2011. It was notable that in terms of how the Russia-mediated process was presented the emphasis in Sochi was on highlighting the

President Medvedev initiative over the past three or more years as a successful effort in preserving the ceasefire rather than a failed search for a comprehensive solution.

Since fighting ended in 1994 over the disputed territory, there has been an uneasy situation of 'no war, no peace' between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. There has been no major bloodshed although several soldiers die each month in incidents along the LOC between the two sides (see Annex III). But fundamental problems of the conflict remain unresolved. Hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) cannot return home; borders are closed. Nagorny Karabakh lives in an uncertain state; its declaration of independence is recognised by no-one and it is heavily dependent on Armenia for its security and economic sustainability. Moreover, there has been a deterioration of the security environment and tensions have increased across the divide in the past two or three years. The upcoming cycle of elections in the region – with parliamentary elections in Armenia in May 2012 and presidentials in early 2013, and also presidential elections in Azerbaijan in the latter part of 2013 – is a further complicating factor likely to put on hold any notable progress on the political resolution track. However, it should not be allowed to rule out practical small steps to try and improve the situation on the ground in fragile areas.

A future political settlement on NK, which in the absence of political will remains elusive, would inevitably also require significant international support. That support would most likely include requirements from the international community to provide key input on:

- A peacekeeping presence, or at least contribute towards a credible policing operation
- Assistance for rehabilitation projects in the territories around Nagorny Karabakh
- Extensive demining
- Local-level initiatives to help foster reconciliation on the ground.

The focus of this report is to look at what can be done in the area of local-level initiatives and practical confidence building measures (CBMs) near and around the LOC and in districts either side of the international border between Azerbaijan and Armenia. This is an area in which potentially the EU, in support of the lead role of the OSCE Minsk Group, could make a useful contribution as a body with both economic resources and an interest in supporting political settlement, partly drawing on the practical benefit of what CBMs could and should offer.

1

Introduction

THE PRESENT STUDY forms part of the ‘People’s Peacemaking Perspectives’ (PPP) programme, undertaken jointly by Saferworld and Conciliation Resources, two UK-based international NGOs, from October 2010 to Spring 2012. It consists of 18 studies of countries or regions in the world affected by conflict or instability, and is sponsored by the EU’s Instrument for Stability. The report *Putting people first: Reducing frontline tensions in Armenia and Azerbaijan, Nagorny Karabakh* is in two main parts:

- The first part looks at the security needs in Azerbaijan’s frontline villages. It then considers the situation in Tovuz and Gazakh districts bordering on Armenia, also offering local perspectives on security needs there.
- The second part of the report provides local perspectives from a Karabakh Armenian viewpoint. There is also a report looking at the situation in Tavush region, offering an analogous report to that on the Azerbaijani side.

In the final section, there is a list of recommendations set out from the different viewpoints. *The surveys were conducted and written up independently of one another.*

The individual and group interviews were conducted in a variety of locations (see Methodology section in Annex I at the end of this report). They were designed to provide insights to the following general questions:

- What are the impacts of the conflict on people living near frontline areas?
- How are these managed at the local, national and international levels?
- How could management of these impacts be improved?

Main points from research

The research shows that the geography of the Nagorny Karabakh (NK) conflict has resulted in two distinct border contexts. One features a heavily militarised and entrenched LOC along a fiercely contested *de facto* border deep inside internationally recognised Azerbaijani territory, where mostly one side (Azerbaijan) has a civilian population present. The second features civilian populations living on either side of the state border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which although also closed and militarised is less tense and offers more opportunities for mutually-beneficial co-operation.

This overall framework ostensibly allows for pilot CBMs to be organised in one context, and if successful, adapted for the other context. Yet the research also points to the fact that insecurity is experienced in different ways on each side of the conflict. Azeris, settled compactly right up to the LOC, experience it as everyday insecurity and personal danger connected with life on a frontline. Armenians living in NK (generally not in frontline areas) experience it more as a generalised sense of insecurity arising from living in an unrecognised entity with little prospect of gaining recognition, least

of all from Azerbaijan. It is therefore an open question whether CBMs in one context will work in the other. The Armenian research, as contained here, does not present a case for this scenario. A different picture might emerge from a fuller study of perspectives and local views; but that is not necessarily going to differ significantly from the viewpoints expressed in this report. In these circumstances, a way certainly needs to be found to advocate CBMs as a means to alleviate these different experiences of insecurity, allowing such interventions to avoid likely criticisms of ‘false symmetry’ i.e. portraying Armenian and Azerbaijani interests as more compatible and similar than they actually are, or quite different contexts as somehow analogous of each other.

The research highlights a number of key military (joint investigation, sniper withdrawal) and civilian (resource management) CBMs which could potentially be implemented. From the emerging findings, military CBMs would be important and are clearly required and expected by the international community; without co-operation on them, the sides are only undermining their own international standing. Co-operation is also urgently required on issues around missing persons and what the sides need to do to co-operate when remains are found in the frontline area.

The report offers up a useful range of options on civilian CBMs. An issue that merits serious consideration is whether and to what extent these should be explored as a strategy in the Armenia–Azerbaijan international border context irrespective of whether these would or would not be applicable in the LOC context. Clearly, what is needed is a more evolved and defined understanding, on both sides, of what CBMs mean. On the one hand, the sides have at least affirmed, on several occasions, their support for CBMs. But part of a more defined understanding should entail a combination of the more ‘legalistic’ approach (holding politicians to their words) and the persuasive approach, highlighting the potential benefits.

Among other points, a major contradiction that the study highlights is that between specifically conflict-generated problems and hardship, and more generic post-Soviet economic woes. The reports from both sides of the divide note numerous ‘governance’ or ‘state-building’ deficiencies, to do with an obsolete production system in a new economic context, an inefficient (and top-down) system of resource distribution and a resulting difficult livelihood context that is independent of, though exacerbated by, the conflict. In short, two different orders of problem, albeit interconnected, need to be acknowledged and understood. The emphasis in this report overall is on the perceptions and needs of ordinary citizens. Yet in thinking about how to promote their interests, it is also important to give more thought to, and factor, government motives and needs. What is the cost to political leaders of not only a conflict situation, but *a socio-economic problem plus a conflict situation*. That in turn raises a key question: how best to present CBMs as also offering a state-building/governance dividend (rather than the usual other-way-round)?

Overall, the research points to a central conclusion, that if CBMs are to be embarked upon, this needs to happen independently of the broader, more intractable, political frameworks. If the possibility of CBMs is tied to progress on the wider political strand, they are unlikely to happen and they will not exercise their intended effect of making that progress more likely. Underlying these research findings is a basic question about how the sides understand CBMs, and indeed, why they still reckon that CBMs are not in their interest. The report tries to promote the case of framing the benefits of CBMs in terms of concrete improvements for ordinary citizens. The core title of this report – ‘*Putting People First*’ – is arguably the goal that should be shared, notwithstanding the differences in perspective on a highly complex situation. While those fundamental differences persist, there is still scope within an overarching discussion about insecurity, for some common incentives and practical steps to improve the situation on the ground.

A key challenge remains that numerous steps/stages need to be passed through before the bigger issues can be framed in such a way that their eventual resolution becomes

even thinkable. This is not to accept the ‘step-by-step’ approach, widely debated in the 1990s as one of two approaches in the Minsk Group process – the other being the ‘package’ approach where all issues are decided simultaneously (usually associated with the Armenian position) – but to argue that total insistence on the package approach means prolonging the status quo. Paradoxically it is Azerbaijan, by insisting on tying military CBMs in the frontline to progress in the political negotiations track, that is applying aspects of the package approach in relation to the implementation of CBMs. This contributes to the prolonging of an inherently unstable status quo, with significant risks for authorities on all sides, and continued losses for ordinary citizens. All parties have opportunities, outlined in this report, to engage on CBMs resulting in no significant loss of strategic advantage, while holding out the possibility of strengthening their image as credible and reliable actors.

In the Azerbaijani study, specifically, one overriding finding that emerges is that the communities living near the LOC require special attention from both the government and the international donors, because these communities face a double vulnerability. They are particularly exposed to any escalation of the conflict, regular shooting incidents, and landmines. At the same time, the unresolved conflict not only poses a lethal threat, but also undermines the livelihoods of the population in these impoverished conflict-affected areas.

Irrespective of progress in political talks and military CBMs, the conflict parties can and should agree to take up joint measures together with international stakeholders to reduce targeting of the civilian population and their property. This approach would allow circumventing a dilemma of what should come first: progress at the peace talks or strengthening of the ceasefire regime. The kind of co-operation envisaged would not only reflect the sides’ adherence to the requirements of international humanitarian law, but could also serve as a first step to preparing for subsequent expansion of on-the-ground co-operation and CBMs.

The Azerbaijani government has recently taken steps aimed at improving the safety and livelihoods of those living in frontline areas. However, the government’s policies have often been mismanaged, because they were implemented with little transparency, oversight and consultation with their direct beneficiaries. The government should be more considerate of the local needs, and seek to engage the population in frontline districts in regular consultations prior to taking decisions aimed at improving their safety and livelihoods. This way it could not only drastically increase the efficiency of its assistance programmes, but would also help improve the self-reliance of these communities. A self-reliant community would be better positioned to overcome the challenges of living in the conflict area and, instead of being a burden on government, could become a contributor to the common wellbeing.

A particular point in the Azerbaijani analysis is that CBMs involving militaries and civilian administrations on both sides of the Armenia–Azerbaijan border, aimed primarily at supporting the safety and security of the local civilian populations, can be relatively easier to realise in an initial phase. If these work, the co-operative relationship that could stem from such military CBMs on the Armenia–Azerbaijan border could then be used to set up similar arrangements in the NK context as well. From what is set out in the report, that is not a picture that emerges from the Armenian contribution in this research. However, the more generalised and non-specific sense of insecurity of the Armenian side in NK does speak indirectly to that agenda.

Finally, in the sections of the study focused on the local populations on either side in the border areas (in Tovuz and Gazakh districts on the one side, and in districts of Tavush region on the other) the report tries to look into how these needs have been addressed by various security providers and proposes recommendations to improve the physical security and livelihoods of these conflict-affected local populations. One of the aspects that emerges is that people living in those border areas appear to be relatively less concerned about their safety than their compatriots living in the LOC

around NK. Unlike the NK context, on the Armenia–Azerbaijan border both sides have substantial civilian settlements and, therefore, they usually avoid escalating the situation in order not to put their own civilians at greater risk.

The challenges, however, which the unresolved conflict poses to the physical security and livelihoods of those living in border areas should not be underestimated. Local people report frequent shooting incidents, which have occasionally targeted civilians and their properties. Because of the shootings and the mine hazard faced, people living in these districts cannot use substantial parts of their farmlands and pastures. There are virtually no employment or income-generating opportunities. Small-scale subsistence farming is the only means of earning one's living and this opportunity is also undermined by the unresolved conflict and poor social infrastructure.

The governments have mainly focused on responding to the livelihood needs of people living in these areas by rebuilding social infrastructure, such as providing uninterrupted access to electricity, natural gas, drilling new artesian wells and building new roads. Nevertheless, as in the case of Azerbaijani communities living near the LOC around NK, a chronic lack of transparency, of public oversight and of consultation mechanisms reduces the effectiveness of the state-provided assistance policies.

The local perspectives and analysis in this report offer considerable food for thought. They are necessarily stark and sobering in several regards in the depiction of the situation on the ground and given the constraints faced; and provide a number of perceptive insights which, it is hoped, will be useful for policy-makers, civil society organisations, and international practitioners working on this protracted, and currently intractable, conflict.

Note on terminology:

For the purposes of this report, and in keeping with the in-house editing style of Saferworld and Conciliation Resources, the term Nagorny Karabakh is used. Often in the text, the name is abbreviated to 'NK'. Armenians in NK are referred to as 'Karabakh Armenians'; and 'NKR' is used occasionally in the section of the report offering Karabakh Armenian perspectives. 'Karabakhi' is used to encompass both Armenians and Azeris from NK.

In the place names given for villages in areas near the international border between Azerbaijan and Armenia and also near the LOC, the report uses the names provided by the local research input. Some place names used in this report are located outside of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (region), in Armenian-controlled territory previously forming part of surrounding Azerbaijani districts that were not contested at the outset of the conflict (e.g. Nor Maragha). The use of these names in this context reflects only the use of place names by contributing researchers and informants, and does not reflect any opinion of Saferworld or CR on the legal status of any place or territory, nor comment on claims made to different territories or places.

2

Putting people first: the security needs in Azerbaijan's frontline villages in the LOC

Tabib Huseynov

Summary/introduction about the LOC

Living with the conflict

- the security environment
- the targeting of civilians and their properties
- mine hazards
- environmental conflict and water distribution)

Addressing the security and protection needs of the people

- local-level security and protection measures
- building protective walls
- reconstruction of homes and social infrastructure

National-level security and protection measures

- IDP status and discrepancies in its application
- access to social protection
- civil defence

International arrangements

- the role of the OSCE
- the role of the EU

Preliminary assessment

Situation in Tovuz and Gazakh districts

- Safety concerns and livelihoods

Government policies towards border communities

- social protection policies

Opportunities for cross-border co-operation and international involvement

Conclusions and highlighted recommendations

Summary

AZERBAIJAN HAS A SUBSTANTIAL POPULATION living in the immediate proximity of the LOC around Nagorny Karabakh. The unresolved character of the conflict and recurring incidents targeting civilians require the urgent attention of both the Azerbaijani government and international stakeholders to ensure greater human security in these areas and avoid further escalation.

The first part of this report examines the security needs of the Azerbaijani population living near the LOC, analyses the ways these needs have been addressed so far, and discusses possible ways to improve management of the conflict impacts. The findings contained in this analysis are based on field research in six villages representing four districts adjoining the LOC. The study shows that the frontline communities are extremely vulnerable to any security incidents involving the Armenian and Azerbaijani militaries in the area. Lack of a joint investigative mechanism and absence of proper international oversight have created a dangerous environment whereby civilians, and civilian properties, have been repeatedly targeted.

There are practically no jobs in the area; therefore the impoverished communities near the frontline depend on land and cattle for their living. Most of the crop fields and pastures of the frontline villages are on open land, which are exposed to weapon fire from the Armenian side. As a result, people have to work on their fields at night for fear of being shot at. The presence of minefields in the outskirts of the villages further increases the daily risks that these people have to face to earn their living, putting their health and lives in danger. Problems over water access and limiting of existing water supplies as well as fire risks in the fields (deliberate or accidental) are also cited as major factors undermining the economic livelihoods of these frontline communities.

The Azerbaijani government has tried to address some of the conflict-born impacts and has achieved some modest, but demonstrable, success. Thus, it has built protection walls in the most exposed villages to reduce risks to the civilian population. It is also engaged in massive reconstruction efforts in these villages, rebuilding destroyed houses and social infrastructure. But in spite of seemingly well-intentioned motives, these activities have been mismanaged and were implemented with little consultation and regard for the opinion of its direct beneficiaries. Thus, for example, communities complained of poor quality and embezzlement when building protection walls, and sometimes even the wrong location of the construction of such walls. They also expressed astonishment at the fact that the government has provided them free materials for rebuilding their destroyed houses, but did not supply sufficient materials and offered no assistance with the rebuilding effort per se. Because of discrepancies in government decision making on granting IDP status, which is enjoyed by most of these frontline communities, some communities who did not receive such status, like those in Gapanly, felt they have been abandoned and discriminated against by the government.

There are virtually no security arrangements to ensure preventive and protective action on the ground in case of escalation. The government has not done enough to prepare contingencies to protect the civilian population. It does not have an evacuation plan in case of large-scale hostilities. The OSCE Chairman-in-Office PR and his staff, with a limited mandate, is the only international security mechanism for conflict prevention that has been in place practically unchanged since the 1994 ceasefire agreement. When discussing ways forward, Yerevan prefers a focus on military measures to strengthening the ceasefire regime. Baku ties up these measures to a parallel political progress in the peace talks. However, irrespective of progress on political and military issues, both sides can and should agree to take up measures to reduce targeting of civilians. (See Recommendations section in Chapter 6).

Introduction

The analysis here focuses on the security needs of the population living along the LOC around Nagorny Karabakh (NK). It looks into factors that undermine the security and livelihoods of these conflict-affected communities and how their concerns have been addressed by the local communities themselves, the government and the international community. Based on locally-informed insights the recommendations included at the end of the report suggest possible measures to improve the safety and livelihoods of these communities. This report is premised on an understanding that a closer look at the security needs of the frontline communities, on each side, and finding locally appropriate ways to respond to these needs can serve both as an effective early-warning mechanism and also an information channel for national and international actors to tailor their assistance strategies to better address local needs.

The findings of this study are mainly based on qualitative data derived from individual and group interviews, as well as observations conducted in January 2012 in six villages close to the LOC in Agdam, Fizuli, Tartar and Goranboy districts.

The individual and group interviews were conducted to provide insights to the following general questions:

- What are the impacts of the conflict on people living near the LOC?
- How are these impacts managed at the local, national and international levels?
- How could management of these impacts be improved?

The interviews were held with a range of respondents, some randomly selected and met spontaneously in the villages visited during the survey. To ensure that a spread of local viewpoints and issues is covered, between 10 and 20 people were interviewed both individually and in groups in each of the villages.¹

The six villages were chosen due to their location in direct proximity to the LOC to focus on the communities that experience conflict-borne impacts on their daily lives. These villages are: **Chiragly** (*Çıraqlı*) and **Orta Garvand** (*Orta Qərvənd*) in the Agdam district; **Alkhanly** (*Alxanlı*) and **Mirzanagili** (*Mirzənağılı*) in the Fizuli district; **Gapanly** (*Qapanlı*) in the Tartar district and **Tapqaragoyunlu** (*Tapqaraqoyunlu*) in the Goranboy district. All of these villages, except for Tapqaragoyunlu, were briefly occupied by Armenian forces during 1993 or 1994.

Chiragly: The village has a small population of some 300 people. This is one of the most vulnerable Azerbaijani-controlled inhabited villages along the LOC. Roughly one-third of the village is in ruins and is not inhabited due to proximity to the Armenian forward positions, which overlook the village from two sides some 500–600 metres away.² Two women were wounded in and around Chiragly in January and December 2011.

Orta Garvand: The village has a population of 400 people. The distance between the outlying homes in the village and the Armenian positions is some 700–800 metres. Like Chiragly, the village is situated on a flat area, which makes the civilians very vulnerable. The village hit the headlines when a nine-year-old boy, Fariz Badalov, was killed in March 2011 by sniper fire.

Alkhanly: The village stretches some 2km from the relatively more secure east to the more exposed west. The distance from the westernmost edge of the village to the Armenian outposts is some 1.5–2 km. Following brief occupation in 1993, the population fled and began to resettle in the village only since 1996. In subsequent years, as the government has developed social infrastructure, many people returned and today it officially has a population of some 1600 people. Part of the village facing the Armenian positions continues to remain in ruins and access there is restricted by an Azerbaijani

¹ The only exception was Alkhanly, where only two people could be interviewed.

² The closest distances between the residential areas of the Azerbaijani villages and the Armenian frontline positions in the LOC are described in this report based on local accounts verified and adjusted by measurements from the satellite imagery available from the Google Earth, and where possible, by personal observations.

military outpost. No civilian casualties have taken place in the village within the last two years.

Mirzanagili: The village was until recently seriously war-damaged and was not inhabited. The government began reconstructing homes in 2011 and currently, as of early 2012, some 150 inhabitants have returned. Armenian positions are located some 1.5–2 km away in the nearby hills and overlook the flatland area of the village. Mirzanagili adjoins another destroyed and uninhabited village – Djodjuk Marjanly – where a shepherd was killed in a mine blast in April 2011.

Gapanly: Along with Chiragly, Gapanly is one of the most exposed and dangerously-located villages along the LOC. The distance between some outlying houses and the Armenian positions is only 400–600 metres in a flat area. In October 2011 a resident of the village was wounded when working in the fields. The village has a population of some 300–400 people. Unlike the frontline villages already mentioned, Gapanly residents do not possess IDP status, and thus do not benefit from the state-provided assistance and exemptions provided to many other frontline villages.

Tapgaragoyunlu: This is one of the biggest villages near the LOC with a population of some 2,500 people. The village is located within a kilometre from the Armenian positions and is separated from them by the Inja-chay River. The village is on a hillside, but is an easy target from the nearby Armenian positions located in the nearby heights. Most of the houses in the outskirts, which overlook the Armenian positions, are half-destroyed and abandoned. A shepherd was killed in a mine explosion in April 2011 in the village.

Living with the conflict

Due to their location in direct proximity to the LOC (sometimes less than 500 metres, on flat exposed land) the civilians living in the frontline villages are extremely vulnerable to any security incidents involving the Armenian and Azerbaijani militaries in the area. Azerbaijani troops are dug in just outside these villages and, therefore, ceasefire violations – even if not directly aimed at civilian population – represent a lethal threat to them.

Shootings regularly take place in all the frontline villages visited during the field research and are commonly perceived as the biggest threat to physical security. During 2011 five civilians were killed and five wounded. Of them, four were shot in incidents in the LOC around NK, including a nine-year-old boy, killed in March 2011 in Orta Garvand village. Among the villages visited, civilian casualties have been reported during the past year from among the residents of Chiragly, Gapanly and Tapgaragoyunlu.

The security environment

When asked about the frequency of the shooting incidents, the most common answer was that the shootings take place three to four times a week. At the same time, according to the respondents, there appears to be no specific pattern regarding the intensity or timing of the shootings:

“It does not matter whether it is daytime or night-time, they [Armenians] shoot whenever they want.”³

“They shoot almost every day. Sometimes they do not shoot for a week, and then they start shooting ten days in a row.”⁴

³ Focus group interview, Chiragly (Agdam), January 2012. Similar assessments were given by an interviewee in Alkhanly.

⁴ Focus group interview, Tapgaragoyunlu (Goranboy), January 2012.

A particular characteristic observed among the majority of respondents living near the frontline is their careless and even somewhat fatalistic attitude to the conflict-borne security challenges, such as shootings or mine hazard. Years of life in a dangerous environment have numbed their sense of danger and they treat these risks as a daily life experience.

“We have lived for so long under such conditions that we became accustomed to [regular] shootings. Sometimes we do not even pay attention to them.”⁵

Another respondent quipped:

“When there are no shootings, we become wary – they must be planning for something big.”⁶

Some respondents said they feel more insecure at night, because they are afraid of possible incursions by Armenian soldiers. Some even claimed to have seen them or have found evidence of their presence in the vicinity, such as stubs of Armenian cigarettes.⁷ They alleged Armenian intelligence deliberately left traces to send a message to Azerbaijani military and civilians that they can penetrate behind their lines.

In all the villages visited, however, the respondents unanimously said that in spite of regular ceasefire violations, the security situation has significantly improved in recent years in comparison to the mid-1990s or early 2000s.⁸ As explained by an interviewee, in that context, “the frontline was not stabilised and memories of war were fresh. Now the situation is much calmer.”⁹

Interestingly, these local perceptions appear to contradict numerous Armenian, Azerbaijani and international media reports about a worsened security situation in the LOC in recent years, compared to previous years. Such discrepancy between media and local community reports may be explained by the fact that official and media reporting about ceasefire violations from both Armenian and Azerbaijani sides has improved in recent years and both sides now release daily information about the details of the ceasefire violations. These mostly officially-provided reports constantly blame the other side for initiating the attacks, and data about the ceasefire violations is actively used by both sides as part of an ongoing information war.

The local insights about relative decline in frequency of the ceasefire violations, however, should not be read as a steady trend towards gradual normalisation. In a sign of active preparations for a future possible war, Armenia and Azerbaijan are engaged in an ongoing arms race, diplomatic and information warfare and last but not least, in a barely noticeable but dangerous “trench war”, advancing their fortifications closer to each other. In the context of the stalled peace negotiations, these broader trends make the security situation in the conflict area increasingly volatile and increase the risks that a frontline incident may easily escalate into wider-scale hostilities.¹⁰

Given the political instrumentalisation of the reports about ceasefire violations, it would come as no surprise that the local respondents claimed most of the shootings are initiated from the Armenian side. According to several accounts heard independently from each other in Agdam and Fizuli districts, as well as in Gazakh and Tovuz districts bordering Armenia, Azerbaijani soldiers, unless there is a specific threat or instruction, are ordered not to shoot and the field commanders have to provide written explanations for every bullet shot by their soldiers. Hence, it was claimed by local

⁵ Interview, Alkhanly (Fizuli), January 2012.

⁶ Interview, Chiragly (Agdam), January 2012.

⁷ Interviews, Chiragly (Agdam), January 2012.

⁸ It should be noted that during the daytime field visits to the frontline villages along the LOC, which lasted several hours each, the author personally encountered no ceasefire violations.

⁹ Interview, Alkhanly (Fizuli district), January 2012.

¹⁰ For an analysis of the risks of the renewed escalation of the NK conflict and its potential ramifications see, *Armenia–Azerbaijan: Preventing War*, Crisis Group Europe Briefing No 60, 8 February 2011.

respondents, the Azerbaijani military mostly responds to the shootings initiated from the other side.¹¹

“Armenians are free to shoot, but our soldiers have no permission, because we have settlements [near the NK section of the frontline] and Armenians don’t... Even if they do not hit someone, they can still damage a house of some poor villagers.”¹²

It is not possible to verify whether ceasefire violations are indeed initiated more from the Armenian side, and in any case, a shooting incident itself can be a reaction to certain actions (e.g. advancing trenches) from the opposite side, which implies that the distinction between the party initiating the violation and reacting to it is not so clear in such contexts. But the fact that several respondents in different locations communicated this claim independently from each other – and, most importantly, without specifically being asked about this – draws attention to such reports. While it is hard to accept these claims at face value, these reports may suggest that, in the Azerbaijani military, decisions on using force in conditions of a formal ceasefire regime are more centrally controlled and the lower-ranked field commanders have arguably less autonomy in deciding on the proactive use of force.

Targeting of the civilians and their properties

Because there are virtually no on-the-ground contacts between the conflict sides and no proper international supervision, there has been no joint or third-party investigation into the incidents targeting civilians. This has seemingly created an environment of impunity whereby civilians, including women and children, and civilian properties have been repeatedly targeted. In an incident which sent shockwaves across Azerbaijani society, a nine-year-old boy, Fariz Badalov, was killed by gunshot in March 2011 when playing with other children in his house’s backyard. At the time the present study was produced (March 2012), the most recent direct targeting of a civilian took place in December 2011, when a woman was wounded when visiting her father’s grave in a cemetery near Chiragly and Orta Garvand.

In Tapgaragoyunlu, the village cemetery is located some 300 metres away from the Armenian positions. Because of fear of being shot at in an exposed area, they had to bury their dead at night and in small groups, contrary to Muslim tradition requiring burial before sunset and wider community participation in the ceremony.¹³ In early 2011 the village elders decided to establish another cemetery in a less exposed area.¹⁴

During the field research there were numerous complaints about the Armenian military deliberately shooting at people, tractors and combine harvesters working in the fields, as well as animals grazing in the vicinity. Thus, the residents of Tapgaragoyunlu complain:

“They have shot our cows a month ago... Because of shootings we can use only 20–30 percent of our pasturelands. We mostly use the pastures of the [neighbouring] Hajialili and Zeyva villages.”

To minimise the risks people in most of the frontline villages work on their fields only after sunset. This is particularly the case in Gapanly where, due to proximity to the Armenian positions and flat landscape, all of the fields are exposed to shootings. In Orta Garvand, Chiragly, Tapgaragoyunlu and relatively less so in Alkhanly there are also significant land plots, which the villagers have to work at nights for fear of being shot at.¹⁵

11 Similar claims have been communicated independently and without being specifically asked by local villagers in Chiragly (Agdam), Alkhanly (Fizuli), Mirzanagili (Fizuli), as well as in the villages along the Armenia–Azerbaijan border in Jafarli (Gazakh) and Agdam (Tovuz).

12 Focus group interview, Mirzanagili (Fizuli), January 2012.

13 Focus group interview, Tapgaragoyunlu (Goranboy), January 2012.

14 Shaban Ahmadov, 35 year-old shepherd from Tapgaragoyunlu, who was killed in April 2011 in a mine explosion, was the first person to be buried in this new cemetery. “Minaya düşən Goranboy sakini dəfn olundu” [The Goranboy resident who hit the mine was buried – in Azeri], *Anspress.com*, 26 April 2011, www.anspress.com/index.php?a=2&lng=az&nid=97673

15 In Tapgaragoyunlu, for example, respondents said since all of their wheat fields are in an exposed area, they work on them only at night. In Alkhanly, the local interviewee said, only a beetroot field is in an exposed area.

“We cultivate our land at night. The tractors [working in the field] cannot even turn on their lights.”¹⁶

“There were seasons when we could not harvest our crops at all [because of the shootings]. Once they see a tractor or a combine harvester working in the field, they shoot it... We have to work on our lands at night, like thieves...”¹⁷

A few quiet days without shooting incidents may be deceptive. In Gapanly, for example, a man who was wounded in October 2011 said he was shot after he decided to work in his field in the daytime:

“Sometimes when the intensity of the shootings declines, people start working during the daytime and then they start shooting again. This is how I myself got wounded.”¹⁸

His is not the only example within the last year: in June 2011 an Azerbaijani shepherd was shot and killed near Chemenli village in Agdam district when grazing his cattle.

In Mirzanagili the new returnees to the village said they graze their cattle only in areas to the south, near the Iranian border, because the fields to the north and the west are exposed to Armenian fire. The village is still being reconstructed, and once more people return, the scarcity of land may force people to go to more exposed areas, thus rendering them more vulnerable.

The civilians living in the outskirts of the frontline villages overlooking the Armenian positions are particularly vulnerable both because they are more exposed and because they are closer to the Azerbaijani military positions dug out just outside these villages:

“Whenever there is a problem, they shoot at our house. We cannot turn on lights on half of the house, because of these shootings... A few days ago a cow passed from the Armenian side to our positions and our troops shot it. After that the Armenians took it out on our house [by shooting at its direction]... Because of this gunfire I have problems with my heart and health.”¹⁹

In spite of the widespread sense of insecurity and frequent attacks on civilians, a number of respondents admitted that most of the incidents occur between the opposing military forces, and that Armenian forces usually refrain from targeting civilians. As an interlocutor in Alkhanly said,

“If they [Armenians] wanted, they could hit anyone here, but they do not. They rather want to keep people in fear.”²⁰

Mine hazard

The presence of minefields around the frontline villages is the second biggest threat to the civilian lives after the shootings. In April 2011 two shepherds were killed in separate mine blasts near Tapgaragoyunlu and the ruined and presently uninhabited village of Djodjuk-Marjanli. In the first three months of 2012, already three civilians, two shepherds and a tractor driver were wounded by mine explosions when engaged in agricultural activity.

As seen from the statistics above, shepherds are usually more exposed to the mine hazards than those working in the field. Since the end of the active phase of hostilities, ANAMA, the Azerbaijani mine action agency, has cleared much of the settled areas from mines and unexploded ordnances, but vast minefields remain in the no man's land around the LOC between the Armenian and Azerbaijani militaries. Because of the unresolved conflict, clearing these fields is neither possible, nor desirable for the government at the moment. Since most of the pasturelands of the frontline villages are under occupation, the scarcity of land forces the shepherds to take risks in grazing

¹⁶ Interview, Orta Garvand (Agdam), January 2012.

¹⁷ Interview, Gapanly (Tartar), January 2012.

¹⁸ Interview, Gapanly (Tartar), January 2012.

¹⁹ Interview, Gapanly (Tartar), January 2012.

²⁰ Interview, Alkhanly (Fizuli), January 2012.

their cattle in areas close to these minefields and in dangerous proximity to Armenian positions. According to respondents, in many instances, the shepherds hit the mine when having lost their way in overcast weather.²¹

The Azerbaijani military formally forbids people from grazing cattle in these dangerous areas, however understanding that for many families this is the only source of income, the military has in practice allowed local shepherds to graze cattle freely in these front-line areas.

“Civilians cannot go to places, which are controlled by the military. But what they can do if they have no other source of income? The [military] officer tells them they cannot go, but they still go...”²²

While ANAMA has cleared most of the settled areas, civilians are not fully secured from the mines and unexploded ordnances in the area. Just two days before the visit to Alkhanly, a local family found a mine detonator in their yard.²³

Another reason for mine risk in the frontline villages is the purported floating of mines down the rivers, particularly during the high season water. This issue was particularly mentioned by respondents in the Agdam district, who claimed the Armenian side floats light infantry mines made of capron down the Khachinchay River with the explicit purpose of harming locals and sabotaging their agricultural activity.²⁴ In Orta Garvand, people claimed an anti-tank and an infantry mine had been brought several months ago to their area from the Khachinchay River.²⁵ ANAMA has reportedly conducted educational campaigns among the civilians to raise their awareness of mine risks during rainy seasons.²⁶

Environmental conflict and water distribution

A frequent complaint heard in particular in Gapanly, Alkhanly and Tapgaragoyunlu was that the Armenian side limits the flow of water and sets fires in the nearby dry grasslands in the summertime, which undermine the livelihoods of the Azerbaijani villagers.

“In summer, just before the harvesting, they set fire to the grass in the neutral zone and as a result all pests and vermin move to our fields... They shoot blazing bullets and shoot at a time when the wind blows towards our side.”²⁷

Since the people in the frontline villages earn their living from working on the land, access to water is key for sustainable livelihoods. All rivers flowing into the villages along the LOC come from the upper territories under Armenian control. There have been some proposals in the past, albeit under-reported, for Azerbaijani government and *de facto* authorities in NK to co-ordinate use of water from rivers, but the sides could not overcome the political obstacles to engage in more substantive discussions about the modalities of such co-operation.

In Gapanly and surrounding villages of Tartar district, access to potable and irrigation water is a major community problem. The villagers in Gapanly said the Armenian side limits the flow of water from the Tartar-chay River in summertime, when it is most needed in the downstream Azerbaijani-controlled areas. As a result, the villagers complain they have insufficient water to work in their fields and they even have to pay

21 This was, in particular, the case with the shepherd from Tapgaragoyunlu, who was killed by a mine in April 2011. Interviews with locals, Tapgaragoyunlu (Goranboy), January 2012.

22 Interview, Alkhanly (Fizuli), January 2012.

23 Interview, Alkhanly (Fizuli), January 2012.

24 Interviews, Orta Garvand village and Guzanly settlement (Agdam), January 2012.

25 Interviews, Orta Garvand (Agdam), January 2012. In February 2011 an infantry mine was found floating downstream from the Khachinchay River in the Azerbaijani-controlled part of the Agdam district. “Армяне по реке Хачен сплавляют мины в сторону азербайджанских сел” [Armenians float mines down towards the Azerbaijani villages through the Khachen river – in Russian], *1news.az*, 8 February 2011, www.1news.az/society/incidents/20110208021016324.html

26 “Burda bir səhv ölüm deməkdir...” [Here a mistake entails a death... – in Azeri], *Lent.az*, 24 June 2009, www.lent.az/news.php?id=55034

27 Interview, Alkhanly (Fizuli), January 2012.

for potable water, which is regularly brought to the village in trucks.²⁸ The problem apparently stems from the fact that the *de facto* authorities in Nagorny Karabakh accumulate the water in the Sarsang reservoir to generate electricity and release it only in winter and spring.²⁹ In addition, two small channels – Yarimdja and Seysulan – used to bring waters of the Tartar-chay to the village during Soviet times. These channels were destroyed during the years of conflict.³⁰

A similar problem exists in Alkhanly, where the Armenian side has limited water flow from the Kondelenchay, the only river in the area. There is a small artificial lake near the now-occupied town of Fizuli, which used to regulate the water level and meet the demand of the nearby villages during Soviet times. Now, according to Alkhanly village head, the Karabakh Armenian authorities, who effectively control the area, redirect the water to cultivate their fields in the occupied part of the Fizuli district some 3 km away from the village.³¹

In the neighbouring Mirzanagili, the residents said Armenians have similarly obstructed water flow from the “Maralyan” channel in the occupied Jabrayil district, which used to supply the village and the surrounding area with water during Soviet times. But since the village has a small population and thanks to the ICRC, which drilled a borehole and put a 16-tonne water tank on it, the water needs of the villagers are met for the time being.³² The problem may become more acute as the reconstruction continues and more and more people return to the area, thereby increasing demand for water.

In Tapgaragoyunlu, the local population depend on the nearby Inja-chay River for irrigation. The villagers have manually constructed an irrigation channel from the river into the village. However, it often needs repair, particularly after rain or flood and therefore, the residents frequently have to go to the riverside at night to repair the waterway.³³ The residents also accuse the Armenian side of polluting the river.³⁴

An agreement on joint monitoring of the water quality, equitable water sharing and repairing of the irrigation channels between the respective water management agencies of Azerbaijan and the Karabakh Armenian authorities could significantly improve the livelihoods of the Azerbaijani population of the frontline villages. The Azerbaijani government has consistently rejected any bilateral involvement with the Nagorny Karabakh *de facto* authorities, fearing such an engagement may confer a degree of legitimacy on them. To reduce politicisation of such bilateral contacts, the Azerbaijani government and the *de facto* authorities could engage local district executive officials, relevant representatives of the water management agencies and even NGOs to work out the terms of equitable distribution, prevention of floods and contamination of water resources. However, such a water agreement may be difficult to achieve in isolation from broader political issues. This aspect goes beyond the scope of the present field study. Any overall progress in the peace talks could greatly facilitate an agreement on equitable distribution of water between the Karabakh Armenian side and the Azerbaijani villages further downstream.

28 Interviews, Gapanly (Tartar), January 2012.

29 According to Armenian sources, the Sarsang water power plant located on the reservoir currently provides for some 40–60% of the demand for electricity in Armenian-controlled Nagorny Karabakh. “Artsakh Hydroelectric Power Plant realises the first IPO in Armenia”, *Mediamax* news agency, 3 March 2009, accessed from: www.banks.am/en/news/newsfeed/3188. In October 2011, *de facto* authorities in NK claimed they planned to commence electricity supply to Armenia following several investment projects in the energy sector, which includes revamping the Sarsang hydroelectric power plant. “Artsakh will supply electricity to Armenia – Karabakh PM”, *News.am*, 5 October 2011, <http://news.am/eng/news/76721.html>

30 Interview, Gapanly (Tartar), January 2012.

31 Interview, Alkhanly (Fizuli), January 2012.

32 Interviews, Mirzanagili (Fizuli), January 2012.

33 Sabuhi Mammadli, “Grim night life of Azeri villagers”, *Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR)*, 13 August 2010, <http://iwpr.net/report-news/grim-night-life-azeri-villagers>

34 In November 2010 the Tapgaragoyunlu residents observed a bubbling flow of the Inja-chay waters. According to Azerbaijani media reports, the measurements conducted by the Ministry of Ecology revealed serious contamination of the water. “Nazirlık: Ermənilər İnciçay çayını çirkləndirir” [Ministry: Armenians pollute Injichay – in Azeri], *Milli.az*, 22 November 2010, <http://milli.az/news/karabah/27070.html>

Addressing the security and protection needs of the people

Local-level security and protection measures

Building protective walls

Until recently, the populations of the frontline villages were sheltered from the Armenian positions by mud embankments. Over the years, these embankments wore down, thus exposing people to greater danger. In March 2011, during a visit by this report author to some of the frontline villages, it was evident that the poor condition of these mud embankments was a major concern for the locals. To secure themselves, people living in most exposed houses used to close off their windows overlooking the Armenian positions or put blocks of concrete from the inside on these windows. They could not live in the rooms facing the exposed area and at best, could only use them as storerooms.³⁵

The death of a child in Orta Garvand in March 2011 prompted the government towards a decision to start construction of protective stonewalls in these villages to minimise the risks for the civilian population. Construction of these walls started in October 2011 from Orta Garvand and in early 2012 (the time of this field research) construction was ongoing in all the villages visited, except Alkhanly and Mirzanagili.³⁶ The construction is administered by the Agency for Reconstruction and Rehabilitation of the Territories, a government body responsible for co-ordinating reconstruction activities near the frontline, supporting the resettlement of IDPs and refugees in these areas and funding income-generation activities for vulnerable populations. The agency has hired the local villagers to construct the walls. Because of security considerations, the construction has been done at night.

All respondents agreed the construction of the protective walls has improved their safety. Some respondents said they could return to their homes located in the outskirts of the villages only after the walls were constructed recently.

“They shot my animals, [after a while] I got wounded myself. It was impossible to live here, so I had to leave. I lived for some five to six years in Tovuz, and another five to six years in Baku and now that they have constructed the wall, I could return. I will bring back my family too once I repair the house.”³⁷

But there were also numerous criticisms and complaints about the way this protective measure has been implemented. Thus, in Orta Garvand people complained that their wall was built only three metres high and its thickness was only one stone block, whereas in Gapanly the walls were four metres high and made up of double blocks.³⁸ Given the fact that the security environment and the risks facing Orta Garvand and Gapanly are similar, discrepancy in the way the construction was carried out in these two villages remains an open question. Some respondents complained of corruption, saying that part of the construction materials for the walls was used for simply building backyard fences in parts of the village which did not need protective walls.³⁹

Another major criticism, particularly vocal in Gapanly, was about the placing of the walls. Most of the respondents said that since the purpose was to improve their safety, the walls should have been built in a continuous line along the perimeter of the village, and not in fragments built just outside of their houses.

“If this wall is to protect us, it should have been built further forward in one line. This wall protects us from bullets only at home, but as soon as we go out to our backyards, we

³⁵ Research observations in the frontline villages, March 2011, October 2011 and January 2012.

³⁶ Research observations, frontline villages along the LOC, January 2012. In Alkhanly and Mirzanagili there are no plans to build such walls as of now. The houses are relatively further away from the Armenian outposts and the outlying lands are easily visible from the Armenian positions, which occupy the higher ground overlooking the flatland areas of these villages. Therefore, such local topography renders protective walls ineffective.

³⁷ Interview, Gapanly (Tartar), January 2012.

³⁸ Interviews, Chiragly (Agdam), January 2012. Same wall parameters as in Orta Garvand were in Chiragly. In Tapparagoyunlu, on the other hand, the parameters of the wall were the same as in Gapanly. Interviews and personal observations, January 2012.

³⁹ Interviews, Chiragly and Orta Garvand (Agdam), January 2012. In Orta Garvand some interviewees even showed recently constructed backyard walls further inside the village, which they claimed were built using materials allocated for the construction of the protective wall.

*become targets again... But then Armenians said such [continuous] walls have some political meaning..."*⁴⁰

The announcement about construction of protective walls in October 2011 stirred up some emotions and gave rise to politicised speculations in both Azerbaijani and Armenian societies. In Azerbaijan some people, while recognising the humanitarian goals behind the effort, expressed concern about its political and symbolic ramifications.⁴¹ Some respondents shared these concerns. As one resident of Tapgaragoyunlu, who himself was involved in construction of the local wall said:

"A fence and a border are similar things. Yes, we build it here for our security, but Armenians say had we not recognised their border we would not build this fence."

These concerns were further reinforced by the fact that the Armenian media has widely publicised and propagated this humanitarian effort as an implicit Azerbaijani acceptance of the *de facto* border.⁴² It is possible that these sentiments and speculations have ultimately influenced the government decision not to build continuous walls in Gapanly and elsewhere.

In Chiragly, Orta Garvand and Gapanly respondents complained the protective walls did not cover some houses in the village, thereby complicating the repair of these houses. Thus, in Chiragly two ruined houses, whose inhabitants live in the village, were left outside facing the Armenian positions, when constructing the wall.⁴³

In a particularly dramatic example, a single mother in Orta Garvand in spite of her repeated requests could not get the authorities to build a protective wall in front of her house. This is perhaps the most dangerously situated house in the village: it is located near a military barracks and overlooks several Armenian outposts in a flat area without even a mud embankment to protect them.

*"I have written to six different places – (including to) the president, the first lady, the ministry of defence... They have built walls in places where bullets do not reach, but did not build it in front of my house, even though I live here with my children... In two months my son is due to be called to the army, but I will not let him go. If they cannot defend me, I refuse to send my son to serve."*⁴⁴

Reconstruction of homes and social infrastructure

In parallel to building of the protection walls, the government reconstruction agency has also engaged since October 2011 in a massive reconstruction effort in the frontline villages. Residents whose house was destroyed or damaged are provided with free construction materials to rebuild their homes. Significant construction works were observed in all six villages visited during the field research.

Most of the respondents spoke approvingly of the government efforts, but once again, many have also pointed to certain problems in the implementation. A major complaint was that while the government provided free construction materials, it did not cover the salaries of the workers who would rebuild the house. The government apparently assumed that the villagers would simply help one another out. But still, some respondents said that building a two-room house would cost them up to 5000 AZN (over 6000 US dollars), which is a huge amount for these impoverished communities.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Interview, Gapanly (Tartar), January 2012.

⁴¹ The Azerbaijani sentiments were expressed at the time by an Azerbaijani journalist: "This construction has one real name: we fence off our land with our own hands. As if it was not enough for Armenians to occupy our lands, by building these fences, we say 'farewell' to our lands." Malahar Rzayeva, "Qarabağ a yol müəafizə divarlarından keçir?" [Does the road to Karabakh pass through a fence? – in Azeri], *Sharg* newspaper, 14 October 2011.

⁴² See, for example, "Строительством стены вдоль линии соприкосновения с НКР Баку фактически признает его границы – депутат" [Building of a wall along the contact line with NK Baku in fact recognises its borders-MP – in Russian], *Novosti-Armenia* news agency, 17 October 2011, www.newsarmenia.ru/konflikt/20111017/42543122.html

⁴³ The local authorities refused to provide them a land plot freely elsewhere in the village and the reconstruction agency has offered them free construction materials for rebuilding their homes in those exposed areas. Once built, the only protection these houses would have in a flat area is the two-metre-high mud embankment.

⁴⁴ Interview, Orta Garvand (Agdam), January 2012.

⁴⁵ Interviews, Chiragly (Agdam), January 2012.

The respondents gave mixed accounts as to the distribution of the free construction materials provided to them. For example, in Chiragly respondents argued that they have received exactly the amount of construction materials they signed for, while in Gapanly respondents said they were asked to sign for these materials before they were actually provided and once received, the amount was less.⁴⁶ But in all the villages visited, the respondents agreed that the amount of the materials provided for rebuilding of homes is not sufficient for completing and putting the finishing touches to the houses. A local resident in Chiragly questions:

“They have allocated 2,500 stone blocks for a two-room house, but we need 3,000–3,500 blocks. People sell their cows and sheep to pay for the construction workers. But if I do not have any, what should I do?”

The government is also actively rebuilding social infrastructure in the frontline villages, including from scratch in some places like Mirzanagili. There have been noticeable and commonly acknowledged improvements. All the villages receive uninterrupted electricity. At the time of the field visit, in practically all villages the government was in the process of drilling new artesian wells. New roads were recently built in Tapgaragoyunlu and Alkhanly, although bad roads remain a major community problem in all other villages.⁴⁷ Also, at this time, natural gas pipelines were being built to Chiragly, Orta Garvand, Mirzanagili and Gapanly and according to a local official new roads are due to be built after the pipelines installation is complete.⁴⁸

National-level security and protection measures

IDP status and discrepancies in its application

The population of most of the frontline villages along the LOC have IDP status. It has been accorded to them based on the fact that many of these villages were either occupied briefly during the active phase of the conflict, or their population had to flee because of the military operations in the vicinity. Subsequently, following their return, the government has retained their IDP status given that they continued to live in ‘IDP-like’ conditions and also to ensure that they do not discourage the return process by denying such status and corresponding benefits to the returnees.

The two major benefits of IDP status are the receipt of so-called “bread money” – a monthly allocation equivalent to roughly 20 USD per person in the family for the purchase of basic foodstuffs – and virtual exemption from utility payments. In some rural areas, where there is no natural gas, including most of the frontline communities visited, the government also provides IDPs with some 40 litres of diesel fuel per month during the winter season. Given the general poverty and lack of income-generating opportunities, these benefits and exemptions are extremely important for the remote villages near the frontline.

However, there is an apparent discrepancy in the way the government has applied the IDP status and corresponding benefits among the frontline communities. Thus, while the frontline communities in Agdam and Fizuli districts, including some which are more remotely situated (like the residents of the town of Horadiz) enjoy an IDP status, the residents of Tapgaragoyunlu and of Gapanly, two of the most exposed frontline communities in the LOC, do not. The case of Gapanly is even more remarkable, because the village was even under Armenian occupation briefly in May 1994, whereas some villages which do have IDP status in Agdam (such as Ahmadagali, near Chiragly) have never been under occupation.

In Gapanly the respondents shared their grievances, particularly in connection with the land tax, which has apparently had a big symbolic meaning for them:

⁴⁶ Interviews in Chiragly (Agdam) and Gapanly (Tartar), January 2012.

⁴⁷ Research observations and interviews, frontline villages along the LOC, January 2012.

⁴⁸ Interview, Mirzanagili (Fizuli), January 2012.

“I am a soldier [by virtue of living] here. The military barracks are located behind my house. But the government provided no benefits/privileges for us... We have to pay taxes for land on which people get killed.”

“We have repeatedly raised the question of land taxes. We have worked on this land for years in spite of the shootings. The men of this place are not feeble people. But the government should also support us to come alive.”

Access to social protection

By law IDPs, and by extension most of the frontline communities, are entitled to a number of social protection measures, including preferential loan terms, free medicines and healthcare. However, none of the interviewees confirmed the availability of such services to them.

To assist in poverty reduction, the government has established a so-called ‘means testing’ of 84 AZN (app 107 USD) per household member in deciding on the eligibility and amount of the state-provided targeted social assistance.⁴⁹ According to official statistics, as of 2011, some half-a-million people received targeted social assistance.⁵⁰

The issue of social assistance often surfaced during conversations with the frontline communities. Many complained their applications were denied even though they did not work and had no income. There also were claims of corruption in virtually every village visited, whereby local corrupt officials offered to provide assistance in return for a half-a-year share.

“They told me I am not eligible, because I took a loan from the bank. But I took it for medical treatment of my child. I ask [the government] for assistance for my child’s treatment but they provide no assistance either.”⁵¹

“We [in the family] have no source of [monetary] income. None of us work... They did not give me social assistance saying I have land. But [because of lack of irrigation water] we sometimes harvest even less than we plant.”⁵²

It appears that the government should improve the transparency of social assistance provision by enacting clear requirements and procedures. However, there is another side of the coin as well. As explained by the village head in Alkhanly:

“The negative side of the social assistance is that it disengages people from work. A person who receives such assistance does not want to go working on the field. We even have to bring workers from outside of the village... This assistance brings about addiction and dependency among the population.”⁵³

This statement appears to be partly grounded. Some aid recipients prefer to remain formally unemployed, because they are afraid of losing their state-provided assistance once they take up a temporary job.⁵⁴ Therefore, a middle ground should be found in order to ensure that targeted social assistance serve as temporary measure before the government and/or other donors involve the vulnerable groups in income-generating activities.

⁴⁹ This criterion was increased on a yearly basis from 65 AZN in 2010, to 75AZN in 2011 and 84AZN in 2012. “Критерий нуждаемости повышен до 84 манатов” [Need criteria is increased to 84 manats – in Russian], APA news agency, 24 October 2011, accessed from: <http://echo-az.com/index.php?aid=16429>

⁵⁰ “Кто в Азербайджане получает адресную социальную помощь?” [Who receives targeted social assistance in Azerbaijan? – in Russian], Day.az, 1 November 2011.

⁵¹ Interview, Mirzanagili (Fizuli), January 2012.

⁵² Interview, Gapanly (Tartar), January 2012.

⁵³ Interview, Alkhanly (Fizuli), January 2012.

⁵⁴ During the field research, an IDP woman living in Baharli IDP settlement in Agdam district said she did not work as a teacher and preferred to receive her “frozen” salary instead, because if she had worked she would receive less money due to small number of working hours available, which itself is due to the abundance in the number of teachers in comparison to number of schoolchildren in that settlement. Interview, Baharli IDP settlement, January 2012.

Civil defence

The Azerbaijani government has in recent years relocated nearly 100,000 IDPs to areas within some ten kilometres of the LOC, particularly in Fizuli and Agdam districts.⁵⁵ Given the increase in the number of people living in direct proximity to the LOC, the Azerbaijani government needs to ensure that it has undertaken contingency planning to protect the civilian population in case of escalation or resumption of full-scale hostilities.

There are very few signs of such preparation for now. The government does not have an evacuation plan in the event of large-scale hostilities.⁵⁶ Respondents in different villages said their village “was not given a guarantee”, in a sense that the military authorities deployed in the area told the local civilian authorities that they cannot guarantee the safety of the population.⁵⁷ This statement is remarkable, because it hints that the military authorities appear to be against large civilian resettlement in these areas, whereas the civilian authorities actively support such relocation. The government’s practice of relocating IDPs to areas close to the frontline is based on a premise that keeping the IDPs closer to their original homelands would preserve their social cohesion and desire to return. The military’s apparent opposition to such relocations seems to be based on the fact that in the event of a resumption of hostilities, which given the unresolved state of the conflict is a real possibility, the presence of a civilian population would significantly hinder the manoeuvrability of the military. In any case, in the absence of adequate security guarantees, the government should refrain from resettling more IDPs in proximity to the frontline.

With the exception of mine-awareness events occasionally mentioned by some respondents, it appears that population has not been trained in civil defence. In March 2012, however, the Ministry of Emergency Situations, which is responsible for the organisation of civil defence, held the first civil defence trainings in the schools in Tartar and Agdam.⁵⁸

There is a need to further develop inter-agency co-operation to ensure smooth co-ordination of activities in the event of a threat to the civilian population in the front-line areas. The government should also increase and expand training opportunities to the local population in civil defence and thus give them a greater role in addressing their safety concerns. However, these humanitarian efforts should be carried out in such a manner as not to be perceived by the opposite side as a hostile act or military preparation.

International arrangements

The role of the OSCE

The OSCE monitoring mission, consisting of a Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office and his five field assistants, is the only international arrangement for conflict prevention and early warning that has been in place practically unchanged since 1994. This mechanism has a very limited mandate: its members conduct monitoring usually once a month after agreeing with the parties about the time and date.

The Personal Representative with his team has no mandate to investigate incidents and does not publicise its findings. That said, the mechanism is important in that it ensures some sort of international presence on the ground.

⁵⁵ Most of these IDPs, who previously lived in tent camps, are from the occupied parts of Fizuli and Agdam. As of 2011, some 25,000 people were relocated to Agdam and 65,000 people to Fizuli. Yulia Aliyeva-Gureyeva and Tabib Huseynov, “Can you be an IDP for twenty years?: A comparative field study on the protection needs and attitudes towards displacement among IDPs and host communities in Azerbaijan”, The Brookings Institution, December 2011, p. 37.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ This was in particular communicated by a local in Mirzanagili during the January 2012 field research. Previously, when the author conducted field research along the frontline in March 2011, another local official confided the same thing to the author.

⁵⁸ “Tərtərdə Mülki Müdafiə Günü münasibətilə təlim keçirilib” [A training exercise to commemorate Civil Defence Day has been carried out in Tartar – in Azeri], Salamnews news agency, 1 March 2012; “Ağdamda Dünya Mülki Müdafiə Günü qeyd olunmuşdur” [Civil Defence Day was observed in Agdam – in Azeri], *Azertag* state news agency, 1 March 2012.

Armenians generally perceive time to be on their side, while there are those Azerbaijanis who consider that (notwithstanding the build-up in the defence budget over the years) time works against them, producing exasperation with the status quo. The conventional view at elite levels in Baku is that time, and the build-up of frustration, is in fact on Azerbaijan's side. Baku says if talks do not produce an Armenian withdrawal from the territories surrounding NK, it retains the right to resort to force. Azerbaijan argues Armenia is in violation of the non-use of force principle, as it continues to exercise force by having troops in Azerbaijan's occupied territories. Proceeding from this position, the leadership in Baku has so far resisted most of the proposals to consolidate the ceasefire regime, fearing that in the absence of parallel progress in the peace talks such measures could consolidate the status quo.

The OSCE Minsk Group, which spearheads the international mediation efforts and is chaired by the US, Russia and France, has come up with a number of military and humanitarian CBMs in recent years. In terms of military measures, the Minsk Group proposed in December 2008 that both sides withdraw their snipers from the frontline. While Yerevan and Karabakh Armenian authorities agreed, Baku rejected the proposal. According to Azerbaijani foreign minister Elmar Mammadyarov,

*“The international community should not settle for only dealing with technical aspects of the ceasefire, which was actually intended in 1994 as a temporary means to speedily proceed to an agreement on the conflict settlement. ... a solution to this protracted conflict is the best and the only 100 percent guarantee against young soldiers dying on the LOC, as well as civilians from areas adjacent to the frontline being killed near their homes.”*⁵⁹

In March 2011 the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents agreed in principle to allow for joint investigation of the incidents under the auspices of the OSCE monitoring mechanism,⁶⁰ but because of the stalemate in political negotiations, Baku has been reluctant to agree on the modalities of such joint investigations.

Thus, it appears that Baku ties military CBMs aimed at strengthening the ceasefire regime specifically to progress on a parallel political process of peace talks. That in turn stymies progress on CBMs on their own merits. However, both sides may at least agree to jointly investigate, under the OSCE monitors' auspices, any incidents involving civilian populations near the frontlines. Such humanitarian co-operation would serve to reduce risks for the civilians near the frontline and, since they would involve civilians, would not be interpreted in Baku as consolidating the status quo, while at the same time establishing a co-operative relationship between the conflicting parties.

The role of the EU

In spite of the stated goals in its partnership documents with Azerbaijan prioritising conflict resolution,⁶¹ the EU has so far maintained a low-profile role in the NK conflict resolution efforts. This position has been partly dictated by lack of internal interest and strong external demand from the relevant partners. The leadership in Baku, in particular, has opposed direct EU involvement in the on-the-ground confidence-building projects in Nagorny Karabakh, fearing that its direct involvement may strengthen and legitimise the breakaway territory's authorities. As a result, there is still no consensus either within the EU or between its partners – Armenia and Azerbaijan – about what value-added contribution the EU could make by its direct involvement at the present stage.⁶²

⁵⁹ http://mfa.gov.az/eng/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=595&Itemid=1

⁶⁰ See, Sochi statement of the presidents of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia, 5 March 2011, http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/882

⁶¹ The text of the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan for Azerbaijan has listed “Contribut[ing] to a peaceful solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict” as the first priority.

⁶² For more detailed discussion, see, Tabib Huseynov, “The EU and Azerbaijan: Destination Unclear”, in Tigran Mkrtchyan, Tabib Huseynov and Kakha Gogolashvili, *The European Union and the South Caucasus*, Bertelsmann Stiftung, June 2009, pp. 73–80.

The EU has been an important donor supporting numerous conflict resolution and confidence-building projects, but it still has to realise its full potential in a situation where a final political settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan is still elusive. It should actively discuss with both Armenia and Azerbaijan the CBMs that they could accept, and support these arrangements. In this regard it should support the idea of joint investigations of the incidents involving civilians in the LOC and pledge participation at the level of its Special Representative (EUSR), who, faced with the different objective challenges, is yet to maximise the full scope of a mandate for contributing to the settlement of the regional conflict, including through supporting CBMs. One area where the EU could offer possible support is on co-operation with regard to missing persons i.e. allowing the remains to be exhumed when they are found along the LOC. That would be an important, and more humanitarian, CBM.

Conclusion

The communities living near the LOC require special attention from both the government and the international donors, because these communities face a double vulnerability. They are particularly exposed to any escalation of the conflict, regular shooting incidents, and landmines. At the same time, the unresolved conflict not only poses a lethal threat, but also undermines the livelihoods of the population in these impoverished conflict-affected areas.

Irrespective of progress in political talks and military CBMs, the conflict parties can and should agree to take up joint measures together with international stakeholders to reduce targeting of the civilian population and their properties. Such co-operation would not only reflect the sides' adherence to the requirements of international humanitarian law, but could also serve as a first step to prepare grounds for subsequent expansion of on-the-ground co-operation and CBMs.

The Azerbaijani government has taken steps recently aimed at improving the safety and livelihoods of the frontline communities. However, the government's policies have often been mismanaged, because they were implemented with little transparency, oversight and consultation with its direct beneficiaries. The government should be more considerate of the local needs and engaging the frontline communities in regular consultations prior to the making of the decisions aimed at improving their safety and livelihoods. This way it could not only drastically increase the efficiency of its assistance programmes, but would also help improve self-reliance of these communities. A self-reliant community would be better positioned to overcome the challenges of living in the conflict area and instead of a burden on the government's shoulder, become a contributor to the common wellbeing.

Putting people first: the security needs in Azerbaijan's frontline villages on the border with Armenia

Tabib Huseynov

Summary

THIS PART OF THE REPORT discusses the impact of the unresolved NK conflict on the Azerbaijani rural communities living on the immediate borderline with Armenia. It looks into how these needs have been addressed by various security providers and proposes recommendations (highlighted at the end of this chapter and also set out as part of a fuller list in Chapter 6) to improve the physical security and livelihoods of these conflict-affected communities. The findings there are based on field research in seven villages in Gazakh and Tovuz. The study shows that communities living on the border with Armenia appear to be relatively less concerned about their safety than their compatriots living along the LOC around Nagorny Karabakh. Unlike the NK context, on the Armenia–Azerbaijan border both sides have substantial civilian settlements and, therefore, they usually avoid escalating the situation in order not to put their own civilians at greater risk. Such a situation on the border also conforms to Yerevan's official position of depicting the conflict as between Azerbaijan and the Karabakh Armenians, in which it only plays a secondary role.

However, the challenges which the unresolved conflict poses to the physical security and livelihoods of these border communities should not be underestimated. The communities report frequent shooting incidents, which have occasionally targeted civilians and their properties. Because of the shootings and mine hazard these communities cannot use substantial parts of their farmlands and pastures. There are virtually no employment and income-generating opportunities. Small-scale subsistence farming is the only means of earning one's living and this opportunity is also undermined by the unresolved conflict and poor social infrastructure.

The government has mainly focused on responding to the livelihood needs of these communities by rebuilding social infrastructure, such as providing uninterrupted access to electricity, natural gas, drilling new artesian wells and building new roads.

However, as in the case with the communities living near the NK LOC, chronic lack of transparency, of public oversight and consultation mechanisms reduces the effectiveness of the state-provided assistance policies. The government policies in these border villages also lack consistency, as some communities enjoy greater privileges than others living in a similar situation. Therefore, the government needs to come up with more coherent criteria, and perhaps even a separate special status, different from IDP status, to address the protection needs of the vulnerable border communities.

According to this analysis, the focus needs to be on CBMs primarily aimed at the safety and security of the civilian populations. These measures can and should be implemented irrespective of progress in political negotiations. The study finds that CBMs involving militaries and civilian administrations on both sides of the Armenia–Azerbaijan border can be relatively easier to realise in the first stage. If successful, the cooperative relationship that could emerge from such military CBMs on the Armenia–Azerbaijan border could then be used to set up similar arrangements in the NK context as well.

Introduction

The analysis here is on the security needs of the Azerbaijani rural communities living on the immediate borderline with Armenia. Similar to the earlier assessment which focused on the communities living along the LOC around NK, this narrative looks into factors that undermine the security and livelihoods of these conflict-affected communities and how their concerns have been addressed so far by various local and international security providers. Based on locally-informed insights, the report also proposes some recommendations on possible measures to improve safety and livelihoods of these communities.

The findings of this section of the report are derived from individual and group interviews, as well as observations held in January 2012 in seven villages close to the international border with Armenia in Tovuz and Gazakh districts. Ten to twenty people were interviewed both individually and in groups in every village using the same methodology as in the first part of this report.

The seven villages chosen for field research are: **Gaymagly** (*Qaymaqlı*), **Kemerli** (*Kəmərli*), **Jafarli** (*Cəfərli*) and **Abbasbeyli** (*Abbasbəyli*) in the Gazakh district; **Alibeyli** (*Əlibəyli*), **Hajjalili** (*Hacıəlili*) and **Agdam** (*Ağdam*, not to be confused with the Armenian-occupied city of Agdam near Nagorny-Karabakh) in the Tovuz district.

Gaymagly: The village is located on a hillside and has a population of some 2,000. To the south-west, some 4 km from the village, sits the Armenian village of Barekamavan. The distance between the Armenian forward positions and Gaymagly is some 2.5 km.⁶³

Kemerli: The village similarly has a population of some 2,000. It adjoins Gaymagly to the east and stretches in a thin line for over 4 km to the west towards the Armenian border, which surrounds it from the south, the west and the north-west. Armenian positions are located some 2 km away and control most of the commanding heights around the village. Some 3 km to the south is the Armenian village of Barekamavan, and a further 3 km to the west lies another village – Dovegh.

Abbasbeyli: The village is located some 3 km from the Armenian positions. To the west lies a water reservoir bearing the same name and also the ruins of the village of Gizilhajili, one of the seven occupied villages in the district.⁶⁴ Abbasbeyli was abandoned briefly during the war in 1992. Today it has a population of some 250 people.

⁶³ The closest distances between the Armenian frontline positions along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border and the residential areas of the Azerbaijani villages (i.e. the closest inhabited house) are again described in the report based on local accounts verified and adjusted (usually towards increasing the locally-reported distances) by measurements from the satellite imagery available from the Google Earth and, where possible, by personal observations. The data on the population of the villages are based on local accounts.

⁶⁴ The seven Armenian-occupied villages of the Gazakh district are Yukhari Askipara, Ashagi Askipara, Barkhudarly, Sofulu, Baganis Ayrim, Kheyrimli, and Gizilhajili.

Jafarli: The population of the village is 1,100 people. It borders Armenia to the west and the south, and neighbours the Armenian village of Kayan, some 2.5 km to the south. The closest distance to the Armenian positions is some 1.5 km. The village was abandoned briefly during the war in 1992. Unlike the above-mentioned villages, Jafarli residents enjoy IDP status.

Alibeyli: The village has a population of some 3,800 people. The closest Armenian positions lie just 700–800 metres away on higher ground overlooking much of the village. Alibeyli is just 1 km away from the Armenian village of Aygepar to the west, and also neighbours an additional three villages in Armenia. No civilian casualties have resulted from shooting incidents in recent years. However, in a highly-publicised incident, a 13-year-old girl, Aygun Shahmaliyeva, was killed and her mother wounded in July 2011 by an explosive device built in a toy, which was floated down the Tovuz River from the Armenian side.

Hajjalili: The village lies immediately to the north from Alibeyli and has a population of some 300 people. The closest Armenian positions are located 1 km to the west and overlook an open southern part of the village. It neighbours the two Armenian villages of Nerkin Karbiraghbyur and Aygepar, some 2–2.5 km to the west and south-west respectively.

Agdam: The village has a population of some 2,000 people. The distance to the closest Armenian positions is 1 km. Some 3 km to the west, on the opposite side of the mountain, the village neighbours the Armenian village of Mosesgekh, and the village of Chinari some 5 km to the south in a valley. Similar to the villages already mentioned, no civilian casualties have been suffered in recent years, although shootings have targeted civilians and their properties.

The field research did not include a visit to the villages of **Bala Jafarli** (*Bala Caḡarlı*), **Mezem** (*Məzəm*), **Gushchu Ayrim** (*Quşçu Ayrim*) and **Farahli** (*Fərahli*), all located in the Gazakh district and where access is restricted by military checkpoints. Permission to travel to these areas was not granted by the local authorities. The four villages are among the most exposed in the Gazakh district. With due respect to the administrative inhibitions and acknowledging the sensitivities, the picture compiled on the security needs of the most vulnerable communities in this region is constrained to be a less than complete one. Furthermore, in none of the other regions visited, including similarly exposed communities along the Nagorny Karabakh frontline, have there been such restrictive measures which would disrupt the field research. That said, the information collected from other borderline villages in Gazakh nevertheless gives a good understanding of the security needs of the district's frontline communities as a whole.

Living with the conflict

Safety concerns and livelihoods

Security environment

Overall, the population of the Azerbaijani villages on the border with Armenia appear to be less concerned about their safety than their co-citizens living near the LOC around Nagorny Karabakh. The shooting incidents mainly involve the military-to-military engagements. Direct targeting of the residential areas in the villages occasionally takes place. Thus, a woman was wounded by a sniper in Mezem village of the Gazakh district in July 2011. However, judging from the number of civilian casualties (only one since the beginning of 2011) and local assessments, it appears that shooting incidents involving civilians are not as frequent an occurrence in the borderline villages as they are in the LOC.

The main factor distinguishing the security environment in the Armenian–Azerbaijani de jure border from the LOC around Nagorny Karabakh is that in the border areas both sides have civilian settlements. Armenian and Azerbaijani forces control different

heights which overlook their respective villages. This creates an awkward interdependency between the opposing forces deployed in the area, because both sides avoid escalating the situation in order not to put their civilians at greater risk. During the field interviews, some respondents confirmed that there appears to be an oral “gentlemen’s agreement” between the Armenian and Azerbaijani sides to try to avoid targeting each other’s villages.

“We have houses in the exposed areas. But we do not have a serious concern for our security... They [Armenians] do not shoot [at the village], because they also have villages and land plots close to our positions. So, in a way, we are acting by the principle ‘you do not touch me, and I do not touch you.’”⁶⁵

“If we did not have this position on the top of the Garagaya mountain [shows a nearby height above the village] they [Armenians] would have displaced us from here long ago. From that mountain [the Armenian village of] Chinari can be openly seen. As soon as Armenians shoot, our side responds in kind. Our soldiers do not shoot unless there is an instruction from above. But the [Armenians] drink vodka and shoot at their will.”⁶⁶

Another major reason for a relatively more stable security situation in the border as opposed to the LOC around Nagorny Karabakh may be connected with the Armenian official policy of depicting the conflict as one between the Azerbaijani government and the NK local authorities, in which Armenia plays only a secondary role. The extent to which that depiction of a secondary role matches reality is another matter. But the upshot, it appears, is that a combination of such military and political considerations have made the security situation of the Azerbaijani civilians living along the Armenian–Azerbaijani border less volatile.

Shooting incidents

Similarly to the LOC context, the respondents said the security situation has improved and the intensity of the shooting incidents has decreased in comparison to previous years. The respondents gave mixed accounts as to how frequently they hear shootings, ranging from every day to twice a week. They also said they have become accustomed to frequent shooting incidents and did not pay attention to them:

“Sometimes friends and relatives [living elsewhere] become worried having heard on TV about the ceasefire violations in Kemerli. But when they call us to inquire about the situation we tell them that everything is normal.”⁶⁷

“Five years ago they used to shoot more. Now the situation is relatively calmer. They do not usually shoot at people, but there are shootings between the outposts every day. We are used to such shootings and do not even pay attention to them.”⁶⁸

In Hajjalili, the residents said that because the Azerbaijani military positions are located just outside the village, bullets often fall on the village during shooting incidents. In Gaymagly and Kemerli, the respondents said the shootings increase in intensity in spring and autumn when the shepherds graze their cattle in the nearby open fields. They said most of the shootings are aimed at the cattle to discourage the shepherds from grazing in these fields.

Some respondents, particularly those living on the edges of the villages, said they felt more vulnerable at night, recalling memories from the years of active hostilities when Armenian scouting groups used to kill or kidnap people. In Kemerli, a resident said his father was tortured and killed by such a group in 1996 when working in his backyard.

Understandably, the residents on the edges of the villages felt more insecure than others living further away or in areas less exposed to the Armenian positions. In Agdam, a

⁶⁵ Group interviews, Kemerli (Gazakh), January 2012.

⁶⁶ Interview, Agdam (Tovuz), January 2012.

⁶⁷ Interview, Kemerli (Gazakh), January 2012.

⁶⁸ Interview, Jafarli (Gazakh), January 2012.

family living on the edge in an exposed area said their house was targeted just a few days prior to the interview:

“Bullets struck my house just three days ago. Now we do not live in the house, but have to live in a dugout in our backyard. They’ve shot and broke our windows four times and now we do not even repair them... We have two young daughters, and we had to move them to our relatives in Sumgayit [near Baku].”⁶⁹

In Agdam the residents also complained that they cannot visit their graveyard, which now falls within a no-man’s-land between the Armenian and Azerbaijani forces:

“We cannot visit to put some flowers and say some prayers on our family graves. My mother’s grave is there and since 1992 I could not visit her.”⁷⁰

Mine hazards

As is the case in the LOC around NK, mines represent the second major security threat after shootings. Practically all the borderline villages visited had minefields in their vicinity. Owing to the unresolved nature of the conflict, these minefields are not being cleared. Consequently, to earn their living, local shepherds have to take on a lethal risk in grazing their cattle.

Even though there were no casualties since 2011, respondents in Kemerli, Jafarli, Hajjalili and Alibeyli said their farm animals have been killed in mine explosions in recent months. Landmines represent not the only explosive hazard in these villages. A 13-year-old girl, Aygun Shahmaliyeva, was killed and her mother wounded in Alibeyli in July 2011 by an explosive device built in a “dog-like” toy. The toy was picked by the victim’s brother from the Tovuz River, which runs through the village from the Armenian side, and exploded when she was playing at home, killing her and wounding her mother.

According to the village head, a similar tragic incident took place in the same village in 1993 killing two children, of ten and two years old.⁷¹

Impact on livelihoods

Overall, the impacts of the unresolved conflict on livelihoods are similar to those faced by the communities living near the LOC around Nagorny Karabakh. One of the most frequent complaints is that people cannot use large parts of their pastures and farmlands because of exposure to shootings from the other side. Thus, to minimise exposure to snipers, people in Alibeyli said they had to work on their fields at night. In Gaymagly, residents said their farmlands to the north are in a secure area; but pastureland to the south is exposed to shooting, as a result of which they cannot use one-third of their lands. In Kemerli, respondents similarly said they cannot use some 25–30 percent of their lands, which is in a “no man’s land”, a valley between Armenian and Azerbaijani positions. They also recalled that parts of the village’s traditional summer pasturelands located in the nearby heights were ceded to Armenia by the Soviet authorities in 1984, and that now Armenian forces can target their village from these lands.⁷²

Aware of the minefields, the shepherds often let their cattle graze freely in the nearby fields. As a result, sometimes their cattle move to the Armenian side. In Jafarli, the local village head claimed the Armenian forces captured 24 livestock of the village in December 2011, as they were grazing near the neutral area between the two forces.

⁶⁹ Interview, Agdam (Tovuz), January 2012.

⁷⁰ Interview, Agdam (Tovuz), January 2012.

⁷¹ Interview, Alibeyli (Tovuz), January 2012.

⁷² In 1984 the then Soviet leader of Azerbaijan Kamran Bagirov ceded to Armenia some 5,000 ha of lands from the territories of the villages of Kemerli, Gaymagly, Jafarli, Yukhari Askipara and Ashagi Askipara in the Gazakh district. Interviews, deputy head of the Gazakh district and local residents in Kemerli and Jafarli (Gazakh district), January 2012.

Accusations about the Armenian side denying Azerbaijani villages access to water were common in most of the villages. In Kemerli the need to repair a spring pipeline which is situated between the Armenian and Azerbaijani positions, and which used to provide the village with potable water, was a major community problem. The pipeline was broken some three to four years ago either by Armenian forces or because of natural erosion or an accident (the views in the village differed on this account). Now the villagers want to repair it:

“The water from the artesian wells in the village is salty. We want to go and repair the pipeline at night, but our military does not let us, because the area is mined.”⁷³

The villagers expressed dissatisfaction with the way the military has handled the situation in the past, relinquishing most of the strategic heights to the Armenian forces:

“Had we placed our outposts where the [international] border lies, everything would be good – we would have the spring and our pasture lands would be more secure.”⁷⁴

Access to potable water was identified as a problem in all the villages visited, except for Alibeyli. Respondents in Jafarli, Abbasbeyli and Agdam said the water flowing from the rivers in Armenia and accumulated in the dams near the village was not clean, because of the pollution on the Armenian side, but they had no other option but to use it.

Lack of irrigation water seriously undermines the livelihoods of the villagers and was mentioned as a major community problem in every village visited. In Alibeyli the residents complained that the Armenian side deliberately limits their access to water from the Tovuz River.

“The Armenians have a [Tavush] water reservoir [on their side built on the Tovuz River]. During Soviet times there was an agreement to give 35 percent of the water from that reservoir to Alibeyli and [the neighbouring village of] Yukhary Oysuzlu. But now they hold the water during the summertime.”⁷⁵

In Jafarli and Alibeyli, the residents also said that they had their irrigation canals broken and they could not repair them because of the conflict. In Jafarli, the canal used to come from the neighbouring village of Sofulu (now occupied), which redirected the waters of the nearby Agstafa River to the farmlands. In Alibeyli, the broken irrigation canal begins under a bridge right on the border, which is controlled by the Armenian side. The villagers said they need a pump station, but the place it should be set up is too close to the Armenian positions.⁷⁶

However, it appears that the problem is not entirely connected with the conflict and government mismanagement is also to blame. A number of water reservoirs and irrigation dams were built under Soviet rule in many of these villages to facilitate agricultural activity and prevent seasonal floods. There are, for example, Soviet-built water dams in Kemerli, Abbasbeyli, Jafarli and on the border with Armenia in Agdam. In all of these dams, the residents said, there were problems with the water pumps. In Kemerli respondents said:

“The upper [western] part of the village gets [irrigation] water from the dam and the lower part used to get water pumped from the Kura River [further to the east]. But now the water pumps no longer function, neither on the dam nor on the Kura, ... I harvested 1.5 tonnes of wheat from 1 hectare of my land [last summer]. If there was irrigation, I would harvest at least 2–2.5 tonnes.”⁷⁷

⁷³ Interview, Kemerli (Gazakh), January 2012.

⁷⁴ Interview, Kemerli (Gazakh), January 2012.

⁷⁵ Interview, Alibeyli (Tovuz), January 2012.

⁷⁶ Interviews, Alibeyli (Tovuz), January 2012.

⁷⁷ Group interview, Kemerli (Gazakh), January 2012.

Locals in Jafarli similarly talked about the water as a nearby but inaccessible resource:

“We have both a lake and a river nearby, but we have no irrigation water [system]. They have put a pump, as if they have solved the problem, but it is weak and meets only the needs of 10–15 houses... All of Gazakh uses water from our [Didivan] dam and [Agstafa] river, but we sometimes do not even find water to wash our hands.”

In many communities, respondents even claimed that they sometimes harvest less than they actually plant and as a result, they cease cultivating much of their lands.

“During Soviet times, all of our farmlands were irrigated and we used to yield at least 3.5 tonnes per hectare... I planted wheat and barley for three years in a row, but there was no rain and I could grow nothing, only 500 kilos per hectare. [As a result] This year I have not planted at all.”⁷⁸

In Abbasbeyli and Agdam, the pumps do work, but only briefly during May and August.⁷⁹

“I harvest my crops in August and I want to prepare for the autumn, but there is no water, because they turn the pumps off in August. If the pumps worked until October, we would harvest crops not once, but twice a year.”⁸⁰

In Hajjalili, residents in the upper part of the village complained the pump supplies irrigation water only to the lower part of the village and did not reach them. As a result, they said, they have to buy most of their agricultural products from the district centre in Tovuz.

“We live in a village but we have to buy our agricultural products from the markets. We have to go some twenty kilometres to Tovuz to buy a few kilos of potatoes. If I had water, I would plant the potatoes in my backyard, instead of paying one manat (1.20 USD) per kilo... When we have no water, we have nothing. If they would put a pump, people would revive here.”⁸¹

In all the communities visited, the respondents reported major outmigration of young people as a result of unemployment:

“There are no jobs at all in our village. Many people work on a seasonal basis in Russia, others go to work as manual workers in Baku. If we had our youth in the village, our village could withstand any enemy.”⁸²

Because there is virtually no paid work in these communities and the villagers are engaged only in small subsistence farming, some interviewees said that they have difficulty in finding cash for paying the utility bills.

“We pay some 30–35 AZN for gas, 10–15 AZN for electricity [per month]. People have to sell their chickens to pay these bills.”⁸³

⁷⁸ Interview, Jafarli, January 2012.

⁷⁹ Interviews, Abbasbeyli (Gazakh) and Agdam (Tovuz), January 2012.

⁸⁰ Interview, Agdam (Tovuz), January 2012. It was not clear from the communication with the local villagers whether such usage restrictions were conditioned by water shortage in the reservoir or some other reasons.

⁸¹ Interview, Hajjalili (Tovuz), January 2012.

⁸² Interview, Alibeyli (Tovuz), January 2012.

⁸³ Interview, Kemerli (Gazakh), January 2012.

Addressing the security and protection needs of the people

Government policies towards border communities

Social infrastructure

Most of the respondents agreed that their lives had somewhat improved in comparison to previous years. Much of that improvement is linked to the ongoing government-financed reconstruction of social infrastructure. Thus, all of the villages have uninterrupted electricity supply. Natural gas supply was restored from 2005 onwards, thereby greatly relieving the rural communities of the need to buy expensive wood for heating during the winter season or risk their lives by going to the nearby mine-filled woodlands on the border.

“It has been the second winter that we have the [natural] gas supply restored [since the start of the conflict]. Our road was built just two months ago. We have an electronic automatic telephone system (ATS), mobile networks, TV and radio. We only lack internet.”⁸⁴

The authorities have drilled eight artesian wells in Gaymagly and improved residents’ access to water.⁸⁵ There is a public transport communication three times a day to the district centres in most of the villages.

However, while acknowledging the recent improvements, most respondents also spoke about mismanagement of the funds.

“They conducted a fake official opening of the irrigation pipeline two years ago but the fact is the pump does not work. They spent three for the work and put ten in their pockets... The new road was poorly built. Look, it already has cracks in the surface and the traffic lines are rubbed out... We are thankful to the state for allocating money [for the construction of the road], but it is embezzled locally.

When you complain, they say go and tell whomever you want. When you insist, they start to threaten that if you talk too much, they’ll get you into prison...

There is no organisation in the village to raise an issue on its behalf. And when someone raises an issue individually, they do not even respond.”⁸⁶

Agdam, a large village with a population of some 2,000, was the only village among those visited where there was no public transport. Those residents who do not have a car have to hire a local taxi to communicate with the outside world. In combination with other local problems, particularly lack of potable water, this has created a feeling of abandonment among the villagers. A local resident asked rhetorically:

“This village has given the country one National Hero [during the Karabakh war] and one Hero of the Soviet Union [during World War II]. And what has the state given to this village?”

In Alibeyli and Hajjalili, the residents complained the gas supply that they had restored since 2005 did not cover the whole village because the pipelines were old. Those who could not access gas said they had to cut trees, burn cow dung or pay 200 AZN per winter season for wood to heat their homes.⁸⁷ A local village head said the government plans to renew the gas pipelines and old electric poles by the end of 2012.⁸⁸

Social protection policies

Two major issues that draw attention when analysing the government’s social protection policies are decision making on granting IDP status and widely-reported irregularities in accessing the targeted social assistance benefits.

⁸⁴ Interview, Kemerli (Gazakh), January 2012.

⁸⁵ Interview, Gaymagly (Gazakh), January 2012.

⁸⁶ Interviews, Kemerli (Gazakh), January 2012.

⁸⁷ Interviews, Alibeyli and Hajjalili (Tovuz), January 2012.

⁸⁸ Interview, Alibeyli (Tovuz), January 2012.

From the seven communities visited only one – Jafarli – had IDP status. In addition to Jafarli, such status was also extended to several other villages in the Gazakh district.⁸⁹ The government's decision to grant IDP status to some villages was apparently dictated by the fact that local populations in these villages were displaced during active hostilities. Apparently the government subsequently kept the IDP status in order to provide an incentive for people to stay in these border villages once they had returned.⁹⁰ However, the government's selective approach to granting IDP status and corresponding benefits has caused consternation in other border villages. A resident in Kemerli expressed this sentiment:

“We have repeatedly raised the issue of [IDP-like special] status. Our village is surrounded by Armenians on three sides. When other villages were fleeing, we stood our ground. And this is why they did not [feel the need to] give us any status.”

Similar to the communities living near the LOC around Nagorny Karabakh, the border communities have reported widespread irregularities in the distribution of targeted social assistance – the government's major policy instrument to assist the most needy in the population. Practically in every village the respondents, both those few who received such assistance and the majority whose application was rejected, said obtaining this benefit involved corruption and they often had to agree to sharing the benefits “fifty-fifty” with the local officeholders. The reported irregularities were so widespread that in several villages the respondents spoke ironically that the targeted social assistance is a benefit designed for the rich and well-connected.

A widower who was father to two adolescent girls in Agdam complained:

“I receive only 90 AZN (115 USD). I cannot leave my daughters and go to work somewhere. They tell me [at the district social protection administration] that I am not eligible because I receive a pension. I have no animals, not even a chicken.”⁹¹

Some respondents also claimed there is an unofficial limit for each district and applications beyond that limit are automatically rejected.⁹²

Respondents also complained of corruption and administrative hurdles when accessing other benefits. In one of the villages, a respondent who lost his leg in a mine blast said he had to go through commission every year to prove his disability. His neighbour said:

“Is he going to grow another leg? It is not something that can be cured. He has to go through the commission every year and give one month of his [disability] allowance to them. If he does not do that he will be moved from the second disability category to the third one [and thus, will receive less].”

In Alibayli respondents also complained that about a hundred of their community members who fought during the war in local self-defence detachments in the early 1990s now cannot receive war veteran certificates and corresponding benefits. The widely-reported irregularities in access to social protection benefits show that the government has a lot to do to improve its performance in providing social protection to its intended recipients. To achieve this, it needs to ensure transparency at all stages and provide clear documentation and guidance to the applicants.

⁸⁹ These are Bala Jafarli, Mezem, Gushchu Ayrim, Farahli, access to which were restricted, as well as the former inhabitants of the seven occupied villages in the Gazakh district.

⁹⁰ Unlike the communities who have IDP status and live along the Nagorny-Karabakh LOC, however, since 1999 the government has abolished the so-called “bread money” for these communities. But they still have a form of exemption from utility payments. Interview, Jafarli (Gazakh), January 2012.

⁹¹ The decision on the eligibility to the targeted social assistance is based on the so-called ‘means testing threshold’ of 84 AZN (app 107 USD) per household member. In this particular instance, if to accept the reported financial situation of the family as true, the family composed of three household members is definitely eligible for the targeted social assistance.

⁹² Interview, Kemerli (Gazakh), January 2012.

Opportunities for cross-border co-operation and international involvement

As in the NK context, the OSCE Monitoring Mission has a mandate to regularly monitor the frontline positions of the Armenian and Azerbaijani troops along the international border. These monitoring missions usually take place several times a year. Since the monitors have no mandate to investigate incidents through visiting places without a pre-notification to the respective authorities, their presence in the area was viewed to be largely of symbolic importance. From the discussions it was clear that the respondents did not think the monitors have had any positive effect on their safety conditions. In fact, the OSCE monitoring missions tended to be simply absent from the local discourses on safety and security.

Regardless of the unresolved conflict, there are humanitarian issues of importance to local communities on both sides of the border that Armenia and Azerbaijan could usefully co-operate on, thereby improving the safety and livelihoods of their border communities.

The primary issue is that of increasing the physical safety of the civilians on both sides of the border by taking measures to prevent targeting of civilians and setting up a procedure for joint internationally-facilitated investigations into incidents involving civilians and their properties. As in the NK context, such a measure requires priority consideration given that it is a purely humanitarian measure and, as such, is politically less controversial and more doable. Such an agreement would simply reaffirm the adherence by Armenia and Azerbaijan to the fundamental norms of international humanitarian law and the laws of war. The efficient implementation of such an agreement requires an international facilitation. Given their existing mandates, and subject to agreement in Baku and Yerevan, the OSCE Monitoring Mission and the EUSR would be the most appropriate international actors to engage in this joint humanitarian effort.

Official policy in Baku, as already mentioned, is to link military CBMs aimed at strengthening the ceasefire regime specifically to progress in the parallel political process of peace talks. However, if one looks at the Nagorny-Karabakh LOC and the Armenia–Azerbaijan border as two different contexts, certain military CBMs could be feasible in the latter context irrespective of progress in the peace talks, which seems unpromising, given the election cycle in both Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2012 and 2013.

In spite of the fact that Armenia and to a lesser degree Azerbaijan occupy small patches of each other's territory along the international border, neither country lays active claims on the other's territory beyond NK and, by dint of that, they implicitly recognise the Soviet-era borders of these boundaries. This fact implies that some military CBMs aimed at strengthening the ceasefire regime could have better chances of being implemented as a first step in the Armenia–Azerbaijan border as opposed to the LOC around Nagorny Karabakh. These measures could involve *inter alia* withdrawal of snipers and joint investigation of military-to-military incidents, as proposed by the OSCE Minsk Group mediators.

This scenario would not be an ideal solution, but it would ensure some cross-border military confidence building and as a result, reduction in military tensions, which usually rise during the stalled negotiations. If successful, the co-operative relationship that could emerge from such military CBMs on the Armenia–Azerbaijan border could then be used to set up similar arrangements in the NK context as well.

CBMs certainly are not and should not be limited to military arrangements, but could also involve civilian administrations. In particular, the sides need to co-operate on the level of relevant specialised agencies, local administrations and NGOs to agree on a range of locally-important issues, such as the terms of water sharing, reconstruction of irrigation canals on the border, joint action against environmental pollution, fighting forest fires or even handling in a civilised manner the situations when grazing cattle

accidentally cross the border. The Minsk Group mediators, the EU, and independent NGOs could provide creative ideas and expertise on international experience in addressing such conflict situations. Such community-focused measures would engender over time mutually respectful attitudes, which are a precondition for building trust.

Conclusion

The study of the Azerbaijani communities living along the border with Armenia reveals some notable differences from the NK context. A major finding, by way of generalisation, is that these communities appear to be less concerned about their safety than their co-citizens living near the LOC around Nagorny Karabakh. As a result, they generally tend to prioritise their livelihood problems more than hard security concerns. However, at the risk of reiteration, the study also reveals numerous similarities – particularly in the way the unresolved conflict undermines livelihoods – as well as chronic lack of transparency, of public oversight and of consultation mechanisms that reduce effectiveness of the state-provided assistance policies. Similar to the LOC context around NK, the government policies in these border villages lack consistency, as some communities enjoy greater privileges than others living in a similar situation. Therefore, the government needs to come up with more coherent criteria, and perhaps even a separate special status, different from IDP status, to address the protection needs of the vulnerable border communities.

A key conclusion the study comes to is that under present circumstances military CBMs stand better chances of being agreed and implemented in the context of the Armenia–Azerbaijan border, as opposed to the NK LOC. These points have already been partly covered but bear repeating: the Azerbaijani government is concerned that by engaging in any way on a bilateral basis with the *de facto* authorities in Nagorny Karabakh, they may somehow be seen to confer legitimacy on them. From that perspective, Azerbaijan’s potential engagement with the Armenian side in the context of the Armenia–Azerbaijan border is less burdened by such political (or rather, politicised) considerations, which mar effective communication where NK is concerned. Therefore, from a practical stance, it seems reasonable to initially focus more on the Armenia–Azerbaijan border with a view to applying adaptively the successful CBMs later on in the NK context.

Highlights of recommendations based on research in the Azerbaijani frontline villages:

The OSCE and the EU should extend the respective mandates of their Monitoring Mission and Special Representative respectively to include closer work with the conflict-affected populations in border areas, including regular visits and facilitating joint internationally-supported investigations of the incidents involving civilians and their properties.

- The governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan, in co-operation with the OSCE monitoring mechanism and possibly with the involvement of the EUSR, should agree to jointly investigate incidents which involve the targeting of civilians and their property.
- The governing authorities on both sides of the divide need to find ways to co-operate on the level of relevant specialised agencies, local administrations and NGOs to agree on a range of locally-important issues, such as the terms of water sharing, reconstruction of irrigation canals on the border, joint action against environmental pollution, fighting forest fires or returning each other’s grazing cattle when it wanders across the border.

- The governing authorities on both sides of the divide need to discuss the possibility of engaging in broader military CBMs in the context of the international Armenia–Azerbaijan border. These measures could involve but are not limited to sniper withdrawal from the LOC and joint investigation of ceasefire violations in the border areas.
- The Azerbaijani government should develop emergency evacuation plans in the event of a threat to the civilian population in the frontline areas. The government should also increase and expand trainings of population in these areas in civil defence and, thus, give them a greater role in addressing their security concerns.
- The Azerbaijani government should engage in wider and regular consultations with the affected populations to ensure that its existing assistance strategies are not mis-managed and are effectively implemented to meet local needs. In particular, this relates to the distribution of targeted social assistance, rebuilding the social infrastructure and improving access of these communities to potable and irrigation water.
- The Azerbaijani government should also consider designing a new special status separate from the IDP status for these communities, formulating coherent criteria for eligibility to the benefits under this special status. These benefits may include reduced payments for the utility bills and simplified access to preferential loans.

4

Karabakh Armenian perspectives: Assessing the Nagorny Karabakh conflict impact in NKR's frontier regions

Contents of Armenian analysis

Karabakh Armenian perspectives – key findings

- Living with conflict
- Security situation
- How to improve governance arrangements
- The role of the local population
- Sub-set of recommendations

Local Armenian perspectives from Tavuzh Region (marz)

- Conflict impact on regional communities
- Post-Soviet issues
- Security perceptions and local priorities
- Current management of conflict impact
- The need to improve managing conflict impact
- Enhanced role of local population
- Highlighted recommendations

Key findings

THIS SECTION OF THE REPORT presents a study of public opinion and assesses the impact of the conflict and the security priorities of NK citizens, 20 years after the declaration of independence. Analysis of the research results shows that, two decades later, the effects of war still impact to a considerable extent on the lives of citizens. People consider that the most difficult issue is the refusal of the international community to recognise NK's independence. Society is mostly concerned with the aggressive rhetoric and other indicators coming from Baku; and the threat of some form of escalation between the US and Iran. People associate most socio-economic problems with the consequences of the collapse of the Soviet system. By the end of the armed stage of the conflict in 1994, Karabakh had not only to restore a collapsed economy, but do it within the framework of a completely different economic system, which made the implementation of reforms and transition to a market economy very much harder than it was in other regions of the former Soviet space.

The main consequences of the conflict

As a result of military actions in the area of NK the economy of that region was seriously damaged: with more than half of the housing stock destroyed (16,590 private houses alone destroyed, Stepanakert not included); 200 pre-school and school buildings damaged or wrecked, 170 medical centres, more than 50 industrial and service enterprises, hundreds of cultural centres, communication, kilometres of power transmission lines, cable communication, and so on.

- **Human losses:** Almost every family lost relatives. The number included several thousand victims within the local civilian population, 200 of them children under the age of 16. The broader casualty figure for losses on each side is well over double that figure.
- **Destroyed infrastructure,** houses, hospitals and schools. To date, 70 percent have been restored. The problems of housing and the restoration of cultural and childcare facilities remain urgent. Among the partially-solved issues are gas, power and water supply, still not resolved everywhere.
- **Economic reforms** and socio-economic programmes do not always correspond to real possibilities. As a result, the most pressing issues are: lack of jobs, difficult conditions for agricultural work in the frontier zone (rodents, locusts, mines, sniper attacks on civilians). The absence of recognised status for the NKR is the most serious obstacle to full economic development.
- **Loss of confidence in international institutions:** The lack of concrete results from the multilateral process over two decades has eroded faith in those institutions and lowered expectations of what can be achieved.

Most people believe in their physical security; and they have full trust in the NK forces and believe in support from Armenia's armed forces. The population of the frontier areas is quite calm and confident that the army is an absolute guarantor of their safety. As noted above, certain concerns stem from the socio-economic situation. But in the event of resolution of Karabakh's key problem (the conflict), some reforms to the system of governance, equitable laws and their implementation over a specific period could help to resolve existing problems in that area.

To achieve progress in settling the NK conflict it is crucial to establish a normal information environment in the region:

- Condemn and prohibit war propaganda
- Insist on withdrawing snipers from the contact line
- Include NK official representatives in the negotiation process
- Intensify work and engagement with NK civil society
- Start negotiations with the NK authorities on implementation of humanitarian and economic programs in the Republic.

It is also important to strengthen the role of society in tackling broader problems. This requires extensive work of NGOs in NK regions to build civil society institutions and increase civic participation and awareness.

Living with conflict

The conflict followed by armed resistance and the severe post-war situation when incidents on the LOC through regular violation of the ceasefire regime brought about human casualties, were all understandably reflected in local people's perceptions and daily concerns. The research carried out in NK (see also Methodology section, at Annex I) indicates how people who live in frontier regions of Karabakh currently assess the conflict consequences and the level of their own security.

Conflict consequences

Survey participants expressed a range of views:

- 'We won our freedom and independence. Perhaps we now live in economically hard times, but we are free.'
- The conflict after-effects had a notably strong impact on women. Many lost those who were breadwinners, went through hunger and destruction. Life is still hard but slight improvement is felt every year.
- Economic hardships that beset the region after the war mostly stemmed from the collapse of the Soviet Union and the old economic system. The consequences of war made the process of economic reconstruction and development even more complicated. However, 'our life is not worse than in any other rural regions in the post-Soviet area.'
- Memories of the war are still sharp and vivid, but 'we live much better compared to during the military period (and..) we are going through a revival of our national culture and changes in mentality.'
- The economic blockade by Azerbaijan and Turkey still strongly hampers the development of the economy.
- People went through war and their life today has not become substantially better. The socio-economic situation in recent years has even deteriorated. And the negative effects of the wider international financial crisis inevitably play their part too.
- The non-recognised status of NKR eats away at people's self-perception and psychology. People live in constant stress. Unemployment also compounds problems, sometimes leading to wrong life choices, disappointment and migration.
- The unresolved nature of the conflict makes life planning impossible. 'We have to resolve many issues. We need to raise the level of education, medical service and so on.'
- In spite of a birth rate increase, the demographic indicators are still low compared to Soviet times. One of the reasons is the impact of Western values; girls are now more interested in their careers and do not hurry to start families.
- Many social support mechanisms, and things like cultural centres have still not been reconstructed; there are too few nursery schools and administrative institutions.
- 'Human losses are the hardest after-effects of the conflict. But the time has come when we must think of the living.' Today people achieve the minimum level of necessary living conditions though their incomes do not match the level of necessary outgoings and expenses. On the other hand, people's needs grow as well.

The viewpoints of the discussion group participants on the legacy of the conflict offered the following perspectives on the situation: Significant human losses have become the hardest consequences of the conflict. Almost every family lost a member. Many people became disabled. Migration problems also influenced family life. Many children live without fathers who went to work in other countries as a way to support

their families. Many aged people were left alone because younger family members had left to earn a living. At the same time, all respondents said it was a common way to make ends meet for Karabakh Armenians: namely, for the young to leave and send back remittances.

“The national liberation movement solved the most important issue: we regained freedom and we live without fear for our existence and for preserving our traditions, values and culture”.

Respondent in Mardakert, January 2012

The shattered economy and infrastructure are considered to have the most tangible impact on communities.

“The war brought about a large number of victims and destruction, many buildings and facilities still need to be restored. Our village had a rich cultural life, great economic success, now we have nothing”.

Resident in Krasniy Bazar, January 2012

Only two of the settlements visited in the field research had not suffered destruction from military assaults. Such a situation, specifically the scale of destruction, added further to the complexities in rebuilding households. Apart from economic difficulties, people are also concerned about cultural life. Many regions had well-equipped cultural facilities. Villagers were engaged in creative work. There were libraries. Now they feel an urgent need for such facilities. Discussion group participants also believe that owing to the conflict and the outflow of the educated part of the population from the regions the level of education and medical services all suffered, though they note that education and health care issues constitute widespread problems elsewhere in the post-Soviet context. However, Karabakh has always been noted for a highly educated local population. Now, a lack of skilled professionals restricts the development of many sectors of the economy. In some non-vacated villages young people express their wish to live in their native land, so long as there are employment opportunities.

“The conflict or war led to outflow of the population, mainly young people, then for a long time it stopped. We managed to avoid direct destruction of the village, just some economic damage. But rather it was the result of the collapse of the Soviet Union and its economic system.”

Young respondent in Gishi, January 2012

People appreciate their newly regained freedom. They believe that self-determination of NK was the only way of ensuring survival, even though people are still unable to make long-term plans. The tough post-war economic situation was caused by the collapse of the Soviet system and Soviet economy just as much as by the effects of war and the destruction that brought. In terms of reconstruction, recovery in other post-Soviet regions made quicker gains because of foreign investments. NK is still considered a risk area, therefore investments are rare, and these are mainly provided by the Armenian diaspora.

“We hardly believe that the EU is ready to help us. The only real assistance comes from the Diaspora.”

Respondent in Mardakert, January 2012

Sense of safety. Priorities in the security system

Some of the views expressed by the survey participants in this regard are as follows:

- The main issue is to ensure peace, as the threat of war still remains. All economic problems can be solved. There is constant tension at the LOC, ceasefire violations every day, and also victims.
- 2011 was more intense compared to 2010. This feeling limits our life seriously, we cannot plan for the future, there is no guarantee that the war will not start again.

- Ordinary villagers, peaceful residents, continue to feel in danger. ‘We do work in the fields with fear and apprehension as compared to previous years.’
- Shootings at the LOC became more targeted and aimed at causing destruction. ‘We cannot make long-term plans, we live one day at a time. We feel constant worry for the future of our children. We live by relying on our army alone.’
- The broader geopolitical situation is the greatest threat to life. Any changes in the global political scenario have a bearing on the situation in NK. An escalation between the US and Iran could provoke a war in our region.
- Unemployment leads to forced migration. Young people tend to leave in search of work and a better life, to places where their family would be more secure.
- The unresolved conflict makes all other concerns more acutely felt. ‘Recognition of NK by the international community would solve many issues.’

Thus, the main threat to people living in frontline areas is the possibility of renewed military actions. This threat will remain so long as the conflict is left unresolved.

According to focus group participants, 2011 saw the most intense spate of ceasefire violations since the signing of the ceasefire agreement in 1994. They believe that tension is increased by Azerbaijani propaganda. Many people watch Azerbaijani television and are dismayed by the hate narrative it contains directed against Armenians. Many claim that the shooting incidents on the LOC increase in the build-up to or after summit meetings of the Azerbaijani and Armenian presidents. This can tend to feed the impression that negotiations do more harm than good.

Questions, in turn, are posed about the efficiency and the results achieved during these summits, especially that they take place without the direct participation of NKR representatives. On the other hand, several held to the view that the negotiation process within the OSCE Minsk Group provides relative peace in the region. Almost all were unequivocal in their assessments of the broader geopolitical situation and dependence of NK status on global processes. People believe that a possible war in Iran is one of the major threats to their security. In the view of survey participants, the economic interests of regional actors and larger world powers also play a crucial role on the Karabakh question.

Some express the view that, among the major threats to economic development in frontier districts, there was still no possibility of using more land because even 18 years after the war many frontier areas have not yet been cleared of mines. Tragic incidents occur each year as people and animals, and also agricultural machines are blown up by mines. In addition, huge populations of breeding rodents destroy crops in neutral territories between Karabakh and Azerbaijan. Often people have to burn fields to eliminate the rodents, thus further degrading the available land. Furthermore, the ongoing blockade of Armenia by Azerbaijan and Turkey means that in NK it is not possible to get materials needed for work or other goods in a timely and effective way.

“We were waiting for seeds to start planting, which the government acquired from Krasnodar. Cars got stuck on the Georgian–Ossetian road and broke down.”

Resident in Nor Maragha, January 2012

Several cases were described when agriculture suffered serious losses because of the blockade and the August 2008 war in and around South Ossetia which made the delivery of goods more difficult. Apart from direct physical safety, respondents also talked about other issues regarding the internal situation in NK. Among the main challenges, people indicated specifically socio-economic issues, as well as legal problems. Risks and concerns also included reforms in education that need time to bed down, as they affect the quality of education. Changing the system always results in a certain regression, and this is where the lack of skilled human resources is felt.

Diplomas of higher education in NK are not accepted anywhere else in the world, except for Armenia, which can deprive many talented young people of the possibility

of continuing their education in universities in other countries. Also one of the priority security issues is the question of employment. Lack of jobs is one of the key factors leading to migration, which has a detrimental effect on the potential and the economic development of the Republic. Serious problems exist in the field of medical care as well, which fell behind in terms of development. Many people have to be treated in Armenia, which is quite expensive. However, it was also noted that a lot has been improved in this area: building hospitals, supplying state-of-the-art equipment, and doctors attending training courses in Armenia and Russia.

As an internal challenge, many pointed to the obvious social stratification, the division between rich and poor. This can make the poorest part of the population feel social and psychological inferiority. Monopolisation in some sectors of the economy limits competition, thus limiting prospects for equal and uniform economic development. In addition, a noticeable imbalance of living standards can be discerned among different social groups, in towns and villages. Some participants are also alarmed by the increasing number of different religious sects.

“We are concerned about the increase of various religious sects. This is the negative influence of the West which (it is claimed in NK) finances the sects. This is disastrous for our Republic.”

Respondent in Mardakert, January 2012

Many sects ban the use of weapons. Followers of these beliefs do not wish to serve in the army. People are worried that if the number of sects grows, it would affect the potential of the NKR military forces. Besides, sometimes joining sects may destroy families, as it takes people away from real life, and makes relatives and friends suffer. Local residents perceive this as a desire to weaken society and to disunite the people.

“The West has no money for socio-economic assistance, but for sects funding always seems to be available.”

Respondent in Gishi, January 2012

Security

The NKR armed forces and law enforcement authorities which provide internal security

Some of the views expressed by survey participants:

“We rely only on ourselves and on the army. Also, in case of a military threat to any community, there are mechanisms for intercommunity mobilisation and organisation of defence before the arrival of the main forces of the NKR Defence Army.”

“Our Army is the most reliable guarantor of our security. A man in uniform, a soldier, should be the most respected person in society.”

“We trust our army. While it’s that strong, we can sleep in peace.”

“We pay great attention to the army. We organise holidays for them, visit their posts at the LOC to morally support our defenders.”

In all issues of physical security or threats of renewed hostilities people consulted in NK refer to a strong army. Local people express their confidence in the defence forces and seem to believe they are the only reliable guarantor of security.

“Militaries should be the most respected people in our society. And in our society they are.”

Respondent in Shahar, January 2012

In the past, the Karabakh military proved its fighting efficiency and the high level of preparedness. In society attitudes to the military are not merely positive, but expressly respectful and deferential. People are ready to undergo certain hardships for the sake of the army’s wellbeing. They agree that significant allocations of funds should be disbursed on proper maintenance of the army. Furthermore, every community has its mechanisms of internal resource mobilisation and organisation of self-defence.

Almost all male survey respondents show no hesitation in confirming that, if necessary, they would be prepared to play their part and come to the defence of NK. There were opinions that, if war erupted again, people would certainly appeal to international organisations, the UN, the European Union. But practically no-one had any confidence they would receive meaningful assistance. A few people said that only Russia would hold out its hand to help.

Survey findings in NK suggest that conflict regulation activities by local responsible stakeholders are unable to yield positive results without involving a third party, and the “third party” is exclusively perceived as Russia. On the other hand, survey participants found it quite necessary and appropriate to involve international organisations in regional social development projects. Russia is expected to use its political and diplomatic levers, while European or other international organisations are expected to provide financial, material or professional support.

Most were sure that Karabakh itself was able to provide its own security. Spiritual power and a sense of purpose are the only things they say they need. And all they expect from international organisations is to urge restraint from Azerbaijan.

“The world must stop this aggressive propaganda.”

Discussion group participant in Krasniy Bazar, January 2012

The problems of internal security in communities are not particularly critical. In four of the six towns visited by local researchers there was virtually no crime. In other places criminality is on a very low level. Many issues are being resolved by methods of self-regulation.

Work of the Republican and local authorities

Whereas defence capacities are not in doubt for the population, attitudes differed on whether favourable conditions were secured for normal, day to day life. A number of problems were highlighted. These are some of the views expressed by survey participants:

- A fund for agricultural development has been created. Credit terms take into account the conditions of the frontier zone, but not all people dare to take credit.
- Key issues related to the construction of infrastructure are being dealt with. Almost the whole area is provided with gas and power, though the problem of water supply is still urgent.
- Local authorities are always available and open to dialogue, but they are not always of sufficient authority and means to solve such a complex set of problems.
- Industrial enterprises dramatically improve the population’s standard of living.
- There is a general trend towards economic development, though it is not strongly reflected in citizens’ overall sense of wellbeing.
- Employment and the challenge of unemployment are the fundamental issues to be overcome to develop and improve living standards.

Each of the settlements has its own specific problems but in general the major issues of social and economic development seem to be as follows:

The new Agricultural Development Fund created further conditions for the development of rural regions. Frontier villages are provided with favourable credit terms and taxation. Those living in frontier districts can use most lands for cultivation and crop gathering for free. Even so, agricultural credits are associated with high risks, since unstable weather conditions, fire risks and damage to crops can lead to insolvency. There is also a system of penalties if payments are not made on time.

“We often do not want to take risks for other reasons – civilians can be hit by sniper fire or caught in a mine explosion.”

Respondent in Gishi, January 2012

Also, there is a shortage of agricultural machinery. The Agricultural Development Fund provides equipment, but it is not enough for all. Agricultural operations require certain work in strictly limited time; and while the Fund's equipment handles some lands, others are delayed and cannot handle their parts within the required timeframe.

“There are private entrepreneurs with their own machinery, but they are too few to cover all demands. Maintenance of the equipment is costly and they try not to overuse it to avoid deterioration.”

Resident in Shahar, January 2012

In some places the problem of water supply still remains unsolved and it also hampers agricultural works. There are examples, on the other hand, of successful development of some settlements. Thus, many cite Drmbon (near Mardakert), where gold-bearing ore has been mined for several years. Over the past three years living conditions in that village improved significantly.

“Mining in the region contributed to the development of the regional economy – new jobs, as well as the involvement of workers from parts of Armenia is also a source of income.”

Resident in Mardakert, January 2012

One of the villages (Krasniy Bazar) included in the survey has a winery. It almost solves the employment problem not only for this village but for the nearby villages as well. And such production stimulates viticulture development in the region. Most villagers have their own household and breed cattle. They provide themselves with food. Additionally, there are milk reception points for dairy production, where the residents take home surplus dairy products. There are a few farms, but farming is not as well developed.

A swine flu epidemic nearly wiped out the population of pigs. That has meant there is a large deficit of pork in Karabakh. There is also a shortage of lamb.

“The village is supplied with gas, gradually the water problem will also be solved, but not everyone can use gas because of very high prices, while wages barely cover daily bread. They invest a lot of money in agricultural development and fundamental construction, but often it has no influence on the growth of personal welfare. Self-interest is above public interest.”

Resident in Martuni, January 2012

Interaction with the local authorities and heads of rural and regional communities do not raise any questions. Almost 100 percent of respondents said that local authorities are always available and open to them. But they do not always have sufficient resources to solve the daily problems of the community.

Fellow villagers who live and work abroad in other countries play an important role also in community life. Many help to repair schools, hospitals, support the families of the bereaved, including through remittances. It was also noted that the government is actively helping these families. However, many veterans who were seriously injured and suffered a disability, today were denied disability benefits because they can work and are operational. According to survey participants, this is an unfair decision.

Most people consider unemployment the most difficult issue. They are convinced that young people do not start families for this precise reason. Many of the older generation spoke of the need to restore collective farms. But young men think it is a pipe dream and believe that only the private sector has a future in the countryside. Unemployment is particularly acute in winter when agricultural work stops. Young people do not know where to gather, since in most communities there are no cultural centres.

“All problems are solvable in the countryside, people are willing to invest their own resources and skills just to have jobs; young people do not want to leave the village and the country, if they have jobs.”

Respondent in Shahar, January 2012

Much has been said about health care. Hospitals in many districts are supplied with sufficient facilities for the medical care of the patients, but treatment is expensive and not everyone can take advantage of these services. Almost all respondents noted that the increase in salaries and pensions does not correspond to the rise in prices for goods and services, and they believe that the standard of living has slightly declined over the past three years.

Among other problems that require government involvement the survey participants identified issues of more efficient use of natural resources, simplifying bureaucratic procedures, and approximation of laws to the real needs of people.

“There is the possibility of using more land, but we have no fuel. High loan interests, penalties, heavy taxation system.”

Resident in Shahar, January 2012

The general view expressed in these communities is that forms of partnership or other economic relations with the frontier villages in Azerbaijan will be possible only after the major security issues are settled and progress on political resolution is achieved.

How to improve governance arrangements

According to discussion group participants local authorities must be more empowered to improve governance mechanisms. They should have more resources for the operative solution of community problems.

“The Republic authorities visit our village and we speak about our problems. Local voices in society must be heard. We hope that the authorities take our views into account.”

Resident in Krasniy Bazar, January 2012

Villagers say that state programmes should be discussed at the community level before they are accepted. Investments in the economy are also very necessary. However, it is more desirable that the investments are made by Armenians, especially diaspora Armenians, as investors from other countries are mainly focused on profit for themselves only.

The role of the local population

Speaking about their own role in improving life in frontier areas, people expressed confidence that they are ready to invest a lot of effort and resources in the development of their native village provided that the NK conflict is resolved and NKR itself “gets international recognition”. They mentioned as well that much depends on personal initiative and often people do not have the courage, determination and readiness to work hard to solve daily social and economic issues and improve their wellbeing.

“You cannot run to the authorities for help on every issue. Once we had an emergency situation in a residential building. We picked up all the tenants, organised what had to be done and did the whole work ourselves. Sometimes we just need a leader, a man who can organise and take responsibility.”

Resident in Mardakert, January 2012

People understand that they have to take their own initiatives to solve most situations. Most problematic situations can be resolved with self-organised and highly active communities. In self-organisation, the majority of problem situations can be resolved involving active civic engagement. People noted that local government generally listens to community initiatives and tries to provide possible assistance.

Some highlighted recommendations

- International actors should explore and define ways in which the population living in NK today could be more involved and engaged in international processes. (NK)
- Urge governments to drop militant rhetoric.

- Promote a policy to lift the blockade from Armenia, imposed on parts of the country's border.
- Establish open communications.
- Intensify work to attract support in key governance domains (such as the judiciary etc.) from the international community.
- Address problems to tackle the lack of agricultural machines and fuel for farmers.
- Review and improve the criteria of state support to people with disabilities, especially disabled veterans; and attend more seriously to their general situation and perception in wider society.
- Focus on the creation of new jobs for example through establishment of new enterprises for processing agricultural products.
- Official support is needed to support sales of agricultural products, as the internationally unrecognised status of NK status is an obstacle to the export of their products.

Local Armenian perspectives: Assessing NK conflict impact on Tavush Region (Marz) frontier villages

Tevan Poghosyan

General information

TAVUSH REGION (MARZ) is situated in the north-eastern part of Armenia.

The population of Tavush marz, as of 1 January 2011, totalled 134,600, with an urban population of 52,700 (39,1 percent) and a rural population of 81,900 (60,9 percent).⁹³ Ever since Soviet times, Tavush has been considered an agricultural region due to its predominantly rural population, along with Armavir, Ararat, Aragatsotn, Gegharkunik and Vayots Dzor marzes.

Tavush marz incorporates Ijevan, Tavush, Noyemberyan and Dilijan districts with 62 communities (5 urban and 57 rural communities). The regional centre of Tavush is Ijevan. The total length of borderline between Tavush marz and Azerbaijan is about 300 km.

A region that experienced conflict

“Throughout the wartime period we used to have our shoes on for days and sleep with one of our eyes open.”

A resident of Voskepar village, January 2012

People in all the frontier villages surveyed considered the period of 1990–1992 as the start date of the conflict and mostly mentioned the hardest moment for the rural population as the day the conflict escalated. That moment came either with intense bombing or a sudden incursion of Azerbaijani forces into villages that led to killing, burning of property, and kidnapping of civilian residents.

According to locals, bomb attacks mostly affected the frontline villages included among those surveyed: Kirants, Nerkin Karmir, Dovegh, Aygehovit, Vazashen, Paravakar and Voskepar.

⁹³ www.armstat.am/file/article/armenia_11_17.pdf, citing *Brief Social and Economic Characteristics of Republic of Armenia marzes and Yerevan City*.

“The village school was bombed, and the local recreation centre was destroyed only five minutes after people had left it. The village centre looked burnt out.”

Resident of Voskepar village, January 2012

Conflict impact on regional communities

The NK conflict coincided with comprehensive post-Soviet processes and accompanying legacy problems that contrived to create even more ‘ripe’ conditions for more far-reaching and long-term post-war consequences. Acute problems common to all Republic of Armenia marzes over the past decade, such as depreciation of agricultural equipment, housing problems, emigration, worn-out irrigation and drinking water supply systems all appear even more striking in Tavush marz. Additionally, frontier village residents also face a number of other issues as direct consequences of the conflict. These include the following:

■ Cessation of commercial relations

Frontier villagers were and are deprived of a basic consumer market for their produce. Throughout Soviet times, Tavush marz frontier villages used to have well-developed commercial links that maintained and promoted regional economic growth and relations. The Azerbaijani market town of Ghazakh and small retail outlets there acted as food purchase and vending centres.

According to focus group participants, Armenian frontier village residents mostly sold their meat products in Azerbaijan and more rarely in central regions of Armenia. On the other hand, vegetables ripened too quickly to be sold in Azerbaijani villages and were mostly consumed in Armenian frontier villages.

In addition, the main road to Georgia went through Ghazakh by crossing some villages and thus also promoted trade in the villages.

“We used to have regular trade contacts with Azerbaijanis. We mostly bought fruits from them and sold them our cheese, ghee and other products, as well as flour and even pork. We used to sell them 80 percent of our meat products.”

Respondent in Kirants village, January 2012

Nowadays, the parties have lost all contact and that has had an adverse effect on the economic situation of frontier villages. In part, this comes down to a lack of business initiative and skills capacity locally for enterprise, and unfair market conditions. Despite their limited crop, the villagers are still unable to regularly sell it at the local market, i.e. in Ijevan, Berd and Yerevan. In the meantime, the conventional trade model is proving unworkable, while the new model is still under construction and in need of co-ordination. Since a new model calls for novel approaches, villagers prefer to wait rather than initiate its development. Besides, frontier villages face some further problems, namely enhanced market competition in other regions. That is especially the case in the Ararat region, with its remoteness from key consumer markets, limited number of food outlets within the region or, as stated by participants, “unfavourable terms”.

■ Restrictions on agricultural land use

Fifty to eighty percent of agricultural lands in almost all the villages included in focus groups were recognised by the Government as uncultivated frontier land either because it was mined or because of its proximity to the border. According to survey respondents, the situation meant that there was no cultivation of land within a distance of 500 metres of the border. Previously, the lands in question mostly used to be rather fertile and also served as pastures. Some villagers have almost no opportunity to

cultivate a plot of land in the village and thus have no source of income. In such cases, small allotments or plots of land are the only way for villagers to support their families.

Even until recently some people ignored the warnings and tried to cultivate the frontier lands, and there were instances when people doing this were blown up by mines. Some cattle shared the same fate. Hence, the land resources available are not used to their full extent.

■ Significant restriction of pastures/mined pastures

The issue of limited land availability for pastures has already been mentioned. Cattle grazing is prohibited near mined lands or lands close to the border. Such lands are controlled by the military. Other pastures are mostly located farther away, and to reach them villagers have to incur more expense.

“At present, servicemen forbid us to graze our cattle on such lands, but they are our main pastures. Consequently, our cattle population has fallen sharply; that is quite awful as people here live by keeping cattle; in fact, we all live by our land. Given lack of agricultural land, many people left the village.”

Resident of Dovegh, January 2012

Villagers mostly use their own allotment or private lands as pastures. But these are generally too small for that purpose. While villagers can graze only one or two cows there, they say that the Azeris have the confidence to keep bigger stocks of cows in areas under their control.

■ Incomplete restoration of bombed houses

All frontier villages underwent destruction. Among the villages surveyed, Nerqin Karmir suffered the most bombing attacks. Some of the houses were restored, and some families received new houses; however, some housing areas still remain half-destroyed.

“Many houses were bombed, but their owners have not received any compensation from the Government so far and gradually repaired their houses themselves. Nowadays, the Government intends to provide compensation for about 20 houses on a waiting list. It will take two months to resolve some of these issues, prepare the relevant papers and sign contracts. Both the state, and the village, seem to take the path of development, and people gradually feel greater trust. As for young people, they do not even try to rebuild such houses, since they are not sure about the future, allegedly because of the absence of a final resolution of the Nagorny-Karabakh conflict.”

Respondent in Voskepar village, January 2012

■ Mental problems

Focus group participants repeatedly noted that people in the frontier areas more often suffer from various illnesses, both physical and mental. It is difficult to get precise statistics to back this up. But a number of illnesses and ailments are common among people of younger age. Today's youth, particularly those in their early twenties, are the people who once as children witnessed the war that exerted a dramatic impact on their life, according to participants.

“The enemy fired volleys, and several generations experienced a stress which has, of course, impacted our children's mental stability. The children were still young, they hid in shelters and missed school for months. People were caught in shooting on their way to school and nursery school or just at their homes baking bread, even on New Year's Eve, and felt rising panic.”

Resident of Berdavan village, January 2012

The participants observed that as a consequence of the conflict, people in some communities became more self-contained and introverted, while people in some others seemed to become more united by their previous experience and strived to restore their communities through joint efforts.

“We are not afraid of war, once we survived and will manage to survive again. The war united us, and we came to know each other on the frontier line.”

Resident of Tavush village, January 2012

■ No willingness among businessmen to make any investments within the area

The conflict has also rendered this region vulnerable in terms of business investments. According to the participants, community mayors and businessmen palpably avoid making any particular investments in the region, especially its frontier villages. Banking loan principles also suggest limited opportunities for applicants from such regions. Banks fail to accept as collateral any houses or lands in frontier districts.

“Once I wanted to take an agricultural loan to develop animal breeding. Let us suppose that I asked for one or two million. The bank officers asked me what I could pawn. I said that I came from Dovegh and had large lands there, and they said they could not give me a loan as my lands were located in the frontier zone. Then I said that I would be able to mortgage my big house, and they again said it was impossible. When I asked what I could pawn, they mentioned a flat in the city. It becomes quite clear that other people as well see that our security is by no means assured.”

Resident of Dovegh community, January 2012

■ A shift towards deep distrust

The previous co-operative relations have shifted to profound distrust. Of course, no extreme hostility towards the civilian population is observable. However, according to participants, hostility has been promoted among Azerbaijanis since childhood in recent years. In contrast to such a policy, Armenians by no means incite their children to hatred against Azerbaijanis.

“Our nation has a typical characteristic not to warn our children even after seeing all these hostilities; we never tell our children that Azerbaijanis are not good people.”

Resident of Aygehovit village, January 2012

However, along with such thinking, both elderly and young people realise that any aggression should be prevented and channelled in a more constructive way. Such tendencies are generally noted in all villages and lead to the conclusion that the need for a policy or even “order” to counteract the enemy stems from the public at large. At the current stage, it is still very hard to imagine any improvement in bilateral relations. In fact, such improvement calls for long-term reforms. In view of the participants, a change of generations will make it somehow possible to find a different way of looking at the conflict. The participants used to quote the Armenian saying: “Make friends with the dog and still hold a stick in your hands.”

“How can we stay in contact with Azerbaijanis, if we see on TV that they are filled with hostility? Sure, Azerbaijani and residents of Voskepar might share a business abroad, but we are still enemies here.”

Resident in Voskepar village, January 2012

It is worth mentioning that in the villages close to the border people can watch the TV channels of the other side, as the signals are broadcast over the border. In addition, there are many people who understand Azerbaijani and they are able to watch and understand what Azerbaijani television broadcasts. They are aware of the hate propaganda the latter use against Armenians, as they get it from the original sources, in contrast to people from the major cities where only Armenian TV channels are broadcast.

Post-Soviet issues

In addition to these outstanding problems, numerous post-Soviet issues appear quite striking in this region. These include:

■ Poor irrigation and drinking water supply systems

Poor irrigation is, of course, quite common throughout the country. In some villages, the problem is solved fully, and in some others – partially. Drinking water supply is provided in almost all villages; the key problem lies in its limited access; drinking water is supplied according to a fixed schedule, and water supplies are often insufficient to irrigate the land that needs it. Such problems were observed in Paravakar, Aygehovit, Berdavan, Kirants and Vazashen villages.

“We currently use Debed River four-level system with 12 pumping facilities. Better access to water will ensure a great deal of jobs; today, we can irrigate only 150 hectares out of 1300 hectares available; the rest of the land is dry.”

Resident of Berdavan village, January 2012

Various international organisations, such as “Difadin Shen”, “World Vision” and so on continue to try and find a solution to this issue.

■ Depreciation of agricultural equipment

Most of the land set aside for cultivation is not used as the agricultural equipment available in villages is either damaged or worn-out.

“50 percent of frontier lands are not cultivated (...) and no relevant equipment is available for people to hire and do their work. The technical equipment is out of order. It was back in 1990 that we got a tractor and a grain combine harvester. Last year a tractor was bought by the community municipality, but we still lack the relevant tools to operate it.”

Resident in Berdavan village, January 2012

■ Urbanisation

According to participants, young people in villages have avoided both land cultivation and cattle breeding in recent years. Heavy agricultural and livestock activities are no longer attractive for young people as they consider that human and material resources invested fail to yield expected results. It is more attractive to earn more money in shorter bursts through migrant work; such views eventually lead to increased emigration.

“Young people wish to make money every day, and the elderly people are patient enough to gain profits from their agricultural activities at the end of the year. Animal breeding is laborious and time-consuming.”

Resident of Berdavan village, January 2012

■ Emigration/seasonal migration

According to participants, the main emigration flow dates back to the time immediately after the war when families who lived by seasonal migration permanently left their villages. In recent years, emigration is mostly seasonal in nature; however, the number of families living on such incomes continues to grow.

■ Unemployment

Many of those living in villages, for objective and subjective reasons, believe that the land is unable to ensure a stable source of income. Therefore, village residents seek such a source of income which they relate to job openings in the community (factories, plants). Young men are particularly concerned about unemployment.

■ Gas supply to villages

While villagers also raised this question, they did not include it within priority issues. This problem has already been solved in some villages through state funding or support by deputies.

The situation in all villages surveyed showed that learned helplessness syndrome partly results from failing to do any agricultural and animal breeding work for a long time or stems from an attitude shaped by the state social policy. Such a policy has developed into a psychological survival tool to meet a family's minimum needs.

“Creative Armenians have been turned into beggar Armenians.”

Resident of Dovegh village, January 2012

Security perceptions and local priorities

In a final section, the report looks at local security perceptions in Tavush marz and at issues of conflict-impacted districts in the region.

The participants generally expressed the view that while the lack of a political resolution to the NK conflict makes for a permanent sense of danger among the local population, recent years have brought about, from certain perspectives, a stronger sense of safety. Such a sense depends heavily on the appearance of contract servicemen on the border. The village population is quite sure that the army has become sufficiently professional i.e. sufficiently disciplined and well-trained.

However, shootings on the border and near civilian population areas have not ceased completely. Furthermore, according to local people, the number of attempts to target civilian residents has grown, they claim, in the last two years. Such cases certainly occur more often during harvest time when the villagers are easily visible from the border.

“The vineries in our village are located at a distance of 200–300 metres from the border. The enemy has started to fire at grape harvest time over the past two years, and we take all our children to help us.... A “Gazel” minibus runs the itinerary Berd-Nerkin Karmir-Aygepar twice a day, a distance of 200 metres from the border, and every time they fire at the car. It is the only road.”

Resident in Nerkin Karmir village, January 2012

“Last year we had some shootings here, as I and some four or five other people cultivated a garden near the border area. We could already feel the bullets above our heads and had to either lie on the ground or find a safer place.”

Resident in Dovegh village, January 2012

“The situation in the nearby village is even worse; people might be killed while drinking tea. A 22-year-old young man was watching TV at his place when he was suddenly shot and killed.”

Resident in Kirants village, January 2012

Local people in the survey were unable to trace any causal link or explanation to the frequency of shootings or targeting civilian residents and find such trends quite unexpected. At the same time they have developed a sense of adapting to dangerous living conditions. As a result, the population in some villages gave up the idea of land use and adopted elusive tactics, while others ignored the danger and developed alternative approaches to land cultivation. One of these approaches is found in the statement below:

“Nowadays, the conflict reaches its peak in summer at harvest time, when we hear shootings every day. Therefore, people collect their grapes at night. Once we had some quiet times as compared to the past 3 years. They did not fire on the technical equipment

then. Perhaps, they had some mutual arrangements, and people could do their work, but now they do fire.”

Resident in Nerkin Karmir village, January 2012

Such a situation causes uncertainty and alarm among the local population, especially the younger generation, who are unable to make any future plans. While elderly people are quite sure to stay on their own land and, if necessary, fight for it again, young people still doubt whether to settle down on their father’s land or seek other prospects.

“I have a young family and wish to stay here and build a house. All my relatives and friends say I have gone crazy. So I have no idea what to do now; should I build a house or not? Suppose I build one, and the enemy fires and bombs it tomorrow or the day after?”

Respondent in Dovegh village, January 2012

“My house was also destroyed, but I have not even tried to put one stone on the other so far, as we do not enjoy peace yet. I have two rooms now, why should I add the third one? We live to meet our minimum needs. Nowadays, most young people are depressed. Our village has no future. We see our future abroad both in terms of security and employment.”

Respondent in Kirants village, January 2012

Along with the security issue, frontier community populations also prioritise finding a necessary solution to other issues. These challenges are outlined in an earlier part of the Tavush section. It should only be added that resolution of the NK conflict and other legacy social and economic issues relate to different levels of challenges. In other words, the solution to the Karabakh issue is a necessary yet insufficient condition for resolving other problems in the frontier areas. And vice versa, resolution of social and economic issues is not enough in itself to improve living conditions in the region. All such issues must be resolved simultaneously.

According to participants, both the Government and NGOs have initiated large-scale activities in the frontier zone to restore recreation centres, libraries and clubs. Hence, it can be assumed that the issue of ensuring physical security has lost its high priority in recent years and was replaced by the need to solve other issues.

Current management of conflict impact

Conflict impact management includes two types of measures, as outlined below:

- Physical security measures
- Social security measures.

Physical security measures

The Government has taken the following key steps:

Ensuring more specialised border protection by contract servicemen. The local population would mention that they could sleep relatively calmly and were confident enough that the army would urgently respond to any attacks. Contract servicemen are perceived as more skilled, mature and knowledgeable, qualities that, according to them, cannot be ascribed to conscripts. Contract servicemen are mostly village residents who protect their own village and house along with the state border.

Preventing cattle theft. Two years ago appropriate steps were taken to prevent live-stock theft. Special unit servicemen dug 1.5 m deep trenches, using tractors, along the border to make the section almost impassable. The action also helped to prevent the Azerbaijani policy of deliberately damaging Armenian lands.

“Their harvest time starts sooner than ours, and after gathering their crops they set their lands on fire; the fire also spread to our lands. Over some years, our fields were all burnt out.”

Resident in Berdavan village, January 2012

The construction of a new road to Noyemberyan – that is more remote from the border and thus will make the passing cars invisible – has also increased the security level. Additionally, further reconstruction plans also include a few mountain roads.

The **level of public general military preparedness** has been increased. Military exercises are regularly held in all villages, and village men are well aware of the regiments each of them is attached to. At schools, children take Defence Studies and learn where to hide at school in case of any dangers.

Village municipalities have well-established contacts with the population in terms of security issues.

“Today, we all stay in direct contact with our regiment commander; we are informed of any danger and warn the people. We give them a call and tell them to keep away from their gardens, roads or not to graze their livestock in nearby areas for a week.”

Resident in Nerkin Karmir village, January 2012

“In case of any frontier tensions, the authorities warn us and even close the roads. In the event of any danger, all the people take their children and hide in their cellars.”

Resident in Nerkin Karmir village, January 2012

As for the role of international organisations in physical security, the participants mentioned that no international organisation performs such a role. All relevant measures are taken by national authorities. The participants felt it somehow difficult to detail separately the measures taken by state structures (police, justice, security).

Focus group participants defined the role of international organisations in physical security as that of observers and found it quite normal. They also mentioned UN and Red Cross making frequent visits which happened to coincide with the tasks undertaken in spring.

All such physical- and social security CBMs dull the sense of danger and alarm. However, participants consider renewal of hostilities as the biggest threat that will dramatically aggravate the current situation.

Social security measures

The introduction and realisation of social security and development programmes are no less important than confidence building. Among key programmes in the region, the participants notably highlighted the following:

Decree on Tax Exemption of Landowners in Mined Areas. All the lands considered unfit and dangerous for agricultural use are not taxed. This Decree does not apply to the lands close to the border that are not mined, yet dangerous to use.

Land or livestock ownership should not be considered as a factor for means testing/ eligibility to qualify for family benefit support for those residents in the frontier districts in question. This means that the eligibility level for the benefits system is lower and does not depend on whether the family has or does not have livestock or land unlike other marzes of the Republic of Armenia. In this respect, the region's villages enjoy an individual and tailored approach.

State construction works to **re-establish social infrastructure** (repair and, if necessary, re-equip nursery schools, recreation centres and libraries).

Regional authorities offer **fuel and fertilisers** at affordable prices.

The region deputy supports the region on a number of issues, such as gas supply and assistance to first grade students.

The Republic of Armenia (RA) Government **Emergency Project** provides for the renovation of some more houses damaged by bombing attacks.

The RA Government currently conducts **livestock development projects** in 53 communities. Furthermore, the “Hayastan” All-Armenian Fund is also involved in various frontier zone projects.

A **co-operative society project** with investment of \$250,000 will be implemented to include some frontier villages.

Along with national and local agencies, a number of local and international NGOs are also involved in social development projects.

World Vision NGO is involved in various construction and pipeline projects.

The need to improve the management of conflict impact

The past three or four years resulted in more effective conflict impact management mechanisms as they already included all the entities responsible at all levels: national, regional (marz) and local: Such entities closely co-operate with frontier area commanders and residents. In this respect, participants believe that such mechanisms operate quite properly.

In tackling and eliminating the consequences of conflict it is important first of all to focus on a final resolution to the NK conflict. Participants believe no programme to be complete so long as fears and concerns persist that the issue of peace remains unsolved.

“We do not feel safe in the village as we know that peace is not established, and we live on the frontier. Whether they shoot or not, at present we have only a ceasefire. Hence, it would be wrong to say that we are very safe. We will be safe when peace is established.”

Resident in Dovegh village, January 2012

The NK issue should be resolved at diplomatic and political levels. As for the military level, the participants believe the issue had been already resolved and subject to no other unacceptable changes. However, such resolution is still in need of legalisation and legitimisation.

“We need to achieve reconciliation at the national level to prevent renewal of hostilities. (For that to happen) the foreign diplomatic policies of both parties have to function well. Our intentions alone are unable to yield positive results; consent of both parties is needed.”

Resident in Berdavan village, January 2012

The current ceasefire status is not considered the optimal solution to the issue. The locals interviewed in the survey consider it necessary to look ahead and seek some kind of economic or cultural co-operation with the Azerbaijanis. On the other hand, they do not think Azerbaijan will go for such an option. Therefore, it appears quite necessary to involve a third party in the negotiations, and the “great powers” can change the situation. In that regard, respondents consider exclusively Russia as a “great power”. They assume the initial steps requiring withdrawal of Azerbaijani snipers by 500 metres to comply with what was stipulated back in 1994, and they consider that, unlike Azerbaijanis, the Armenians showed more readiness to comply with the provision.

“There must be a neutral area, but it seems quite impossible. There is such an area on our territory; however, it must include neutral territories of both sides, not just one. If we had such an area, we would be able at last to use our own lands to keep our livestock.”

Resident in Nerkin Karmir village, January 2012

According to local people surveyed, further social protection and development actions must have the following aims:

- Attach a special status to the border area to allow local people to be eligible for various privileges and subsidies.
- Pursue an incentive policy to ensure the flow of residents to the region.
- Pursue an incentive policy to attract investments.
- Create a friendly environment to process and consume agricultural products. This is implied by special status.
- Review the banking system principles to ensure an individual approach to residents of the region in question.

International organisations must take a more active part in supporting various social development projects.

Enhanced role of local population

The findings of focus groups identified the following ways of communication between the local population and local self-government bodies:

- Written communication
- Direct contact
- Telephone (partly electronic) communication
- Meetings.

Written communication

The local population communicates its problems and needs to both local authorities, and delegates and regional authorities (marzpetaran) through written applications and letters.

Direct contact

Almost all the villages demonstrate well-established communication with the village mayor and other village municipality employees. Particularly, mayors who live in the same village are well aware of all problems of the villagers, keep on walking around the village, and know whatever happens there.

Village residents apply to the mayor with any problem, mostly dwelling on poor social conditions or health problems. However, not all villages proved to have a local population ready to join their efforts to find a solution to a particular problem.

Telephone communication

In some villages, the village municipality contacts remote houses by telephone and even electronic communication.

Meetings

All the villages traditionally hold regular meetings to inform the population about current activities and further plans. The Council of Elders also provides relevant information.

Thus, the political accountability is firstly ensured by local authorities through direct contact with the local Council of Elders or village mayor meetings as well as regular meetings with region deputies.

“We have a deputy elected through a majoritarian system, and he usually meets us. As for the deputy elected through proportional system, he never visits us. Why should he come and see us? They were elected for their own benefit, not the benefit of the people.”

Resident in Berdavan village, January 2012

It should be noted that the findings and observations of the present survey show the following trends: If the village mayor had active business positions, as well as principles to initiate and use available resources, the population of the villages tended also to be more actively involved in agriculture, cattle breeding and consumption. Hence, such villages had larger budgets and deeper sense of independence and self-confidence. Such a state of affairs is most typical of Voskepar and Tavush villages.

On the other hand, if the village mayor had a more passive stance and was less inclined to take initiative, village residents just ended up waiting for others to make a decision. No village residents perceived that they had an identifiable role of their own in NK conflict resolution considering that the issue was to be resolved only at the political level; and others would have to accept the final decision (still hoping that Armenia would not lose any of its territories). Unlike the early 90s, when the frontier zone residents of both parties used to maintain contact with each other and resolve some issues at the relevant level, nowadays, any such communication is perceived as a state issue.

Local people perceived their more active involvement in border protection through increasing the number of contract servicemen only in cases where they served near their place of residence, i.e. if they were attached to their own village borders. In such cases, local residents will be more motivated to become contract servicemen themselves, and the number of applicants will grow. (For Methodology, see Annex I).

Some highlighted recommendations based on Armenian research:

- International actors at multiple levels should discourage the use of militant rhetoric, demonstrating the damaging impact this has on specific policy fields of mutual interest, as well as the wider rhetorical climate.
- Ensure that both sides fulfil commitments to withdraw snipers to a distance of 500 metres from the border.
- Co-ordinate landmine clearance.
- Retain an open attitude to economic or cultural co-operation with Azerbaijan.
- Conduct projects to renovate war-damaged properties.
- Facilitate centre-periphery integration processes across a range of different social, political and cultural domains.
- Ensure a tailored approach by the banking system to border zone residents (review the terms of land or house collateral in the area).
- Provide more effective solutions to community social and economic problems (irrigation, drinking water supply system, gas supply, schools, recreation centres, sports schools and libraries).

6

Recommendations

TWO BROAD GROUPS OF ACTORS BELOW are responsible for tackling and eliminating the consequences of the NK conflict:

- **National and local government policy makers**, on the one hand, responsible for drafting and implementing policies capable of delivering both significant socio-economic development and the resolution of the Karabakh conflict;
- **International governmental and non-governmental actors** perceived as facilitators within the framework of social development projects and negotiations on the NK issue.

To state authorities

- Reconsider current understandings of CBMs in order to achieve their potential as a device for establishing predictable protocols of behaviour on issues and in contexts independent of headline (and currently intractable) political issues.
- The governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan, in co-operation with the OSCE monitoring mechanism and possibly with the involvement of the EUSR, should agree to jointly investigate incidents which involve the targeting of civilians and their property.
- Governing authorities, working together with local government, specialised agencies (such as the Halo Trust) and NGOs, should separate out locally-relevant policy areas where co-operation resulting in practical benefits for local populations may be possible; these areas may include water sharing, reconstruction of irrigation canals on the border, joint action against environmental pollution, fighting forest fires or returning each other's grazing cattle which wanders across the border.
- The governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan may benefit from an internal process of reconsidering the possible value and benefits of CBMs. The specific context of the international Armenia–Azerbaijan border may offer opportunities to pilot certain kinds of measures and initiatives with no loss of strategic military advantage. These measures could involve, but are not limited to, sniper withdrawal and joint investigation of ceasefire violations.
- Governing authorities are recommended to focus specifically on the issue of sniper deployment and to accept the mediators' proposal to withdraw snipers to a distance of 500 metres or further from the border.
- Governing authorities in control of different patches of territory are recommended to co-ordinate landmine clearance.
- The Azerbaijani government should engage in wider and regular consultations with the affected populations on its side of borders and the LOC to ensure that its existing

assistance strategies are not mismanaged and are effectively implemented to meet local needs. In particular, this relates to the distribution of targeted social assistance, rebuilding the social infrastructure and improving access of these communities to potable and irrigation water.

- The governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan should also consider designing a new special status for citizens in border areas (in Azerbaijan's case separate from the IDP status for these communities) formulating coherent criteria for eligibility to the benefits under this special status. These benefits may include preferential terms for land cultivation, reduced payments for utility bills and simplified access to preferential loans.
- The above recommendation could be developed into a framework of subsidies or privileges for businessmen and people who would like to invest in the border zone.

Some of the analysis put forward specific recommendations focusing on ways to eliminate secondary (social, economic and cultural) consequences of the conflict, addressed also to relevant authorities:

- Retain an open attitude to economic or cultural co-operation with Azerbaijan.
- Conduct projects to renovate war-damaged properties.
- Facilitate centre-periphery integration processes across a range of different social, political and cultural domains.
- Ensure a tailored approach by the banking system to border zone residents (review the terms of land or house collateral in the area).
- Provide more effective solutions to community social and economic problems (irrigation, drinking water supply system, gas supply, schools, recreation centres, sports schools and libraries).

To political authorities in Nagorny Karabakh

The research there highlighted the following recommendations:

- Intensify work to attract support in key governance domains (such as the judiciary, etc.) from the international community.
- Consider the possibility of a special agricultural insurance programme for various risks.
- Address the lack of agricultural machines and fuel for farmers.
- Review and improve the criteria of state support to people with disabilities, especially disabled veterans; increase social benefits for war veterans and attend more seriously to their general situation and perception in wider society.
- Focus on creation of new jobs, for example through the establishment of new enterprises for processing agricultural products.
- Official support is needed to support sales of agricultural products, as the internationally unrecognised status of NK is an obstacle to the export of their products.
- Allocate more credit for the development of the livestock sector.

To the EU/international community

- The OSCE and the EU should extend the respective mandates of the CiO PR and of the EUSR to include closer work with the conflict-affected populations in border areas, including regular visits and facilitating joint investigations of the incidents involving civilians and their properties.
- Practical co-operation is urgently required around missing persons and facilitating ways to achieve co-operation when remains are found in the frontline areas.

- International actors at multiple levels should discourage the use of militant rhetoric, demonstrating the damaging impact this has on specific policy fields of mutual interest, as well as the wider rhetorical climate.
- The international community is recommended to find ways to provide assistance in relevant human rights and development domains irrespective of the legal status of territory, for example in the fields of child rights, gender and the freedom of expression.
- International actors should explore and define ways in which the population living in NK today and those who were displaced from it as a result of conflict could be more involved and engaged in peace talks and decision-making directly affecting them.
- Promote conditions for lifting of all economic embargoes imposed as a result of the conflict, and open communication between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as between Armenia and Turkey.

ANNEX I: Methodology

Azerbaijani villages close to the Line of Contact around NK:

The findings here are mainly based on qualitative data derived from individual and group interviews, as well as observations held in January 2012 in six villages close to the LOC in Agdam, Fizuli, Tartar and Goranboy districts.

The individual and group interviews were conducted to provide insights to the following general questions:

- What are the impacts of the conflict on people living near the LOC?
- How are these impacts managed at the local, national and international levels?
- How could management of these impacts be improved?

The interviews were semi-structured and were held with randomly-selected respondents met spontaneously in the villages visited. To ensure that a range of local viewpoints and issues is covered, between 10 and 20 people were interviewed both individually and in groups in each of the villages.⁹⁴

The six villages were chosen due to their location in direct proximity to the LOC to focus on the communities that experience conflict-borne impacts on their daily lives. These villages are: Chiragly (*Çıraqlı*) and Orta Garvand (*Orta Qərvənd*) in the Agdam district; Alkhanly (*Alxanlı*) and Mirzanagili (*Mirzənağılı*) in the Fizuli district; Gapanly (*Qapanlı*) in the Tartar district and Tapqaraqoyunlu (*Tapqaraqoyunlu*) in the Goranboy district. All of these villages, except for Tapqaraqoyunlu, were briefly occupied by Armenian forces during 1993 or 1994.

Azerbaijani villages on the border with Armenia:

Individual and group interviews, as well as observations held in January 2012, in seven villages close to the international border with Armenia in Tovuz and Gazakh districts. Ten to twenty people were interviewed both individually and in groups in every village using the same methodology as described above.

The seven villages chosen for field research were: **Gaymagly** (*Qaymaqlı*), **Kemerli** (*Kəmərli*), **Jafarli** (*Cəfərli*) and **Abbasbeyli** (*Abbasbəyli*) in the Gazakh district; **Alibeyli** (*Əlibəyli*), **Hajjalili** (*Hacıəlili*) and **Agdam** (*Ağdam*, not to be confused with the Armenian-occupied city of Agdam near Nagorny Karabakh) in the Tovuz district.

Armenian villages on the border with Azerbaijan:

The survey on NK conflict impact on the Tavush region (marz) frontier villages targets the following issues:

- Assessing security needs of the frontier population
- Identifying to what extent security and early-warning mechanisms meet such needs
- Proposing ways to further improve such mechanisms to make them more tailored to human needs, and estimating EU contribution to such improvement.

Focus group

The focus group method was chosen to find solutions to the problems below. Such method makes it quite possible to get an idea of priority needs in the community, identify current moods, fears and the most realistic directions of further steps based on different views expressed by community residents under the same context and clashes of opinions.

Ten villages in Tavush marz located most closely to the border were chosen for this part of the survey. The nearest point is located at a distance of 200 or 300 metres, and

⁹⁴ The only exception was Alkhanly, where only two people could be interviewed.

the farthest – at a distance of one or two km from the border. The following frontier villages were included in the survey:

1. Berdavan
2. Dovegh
3. Kirants
4. Voskepar
5. Kayan
6. Aygehovit
7. Nerkin Karmir
8. Tavush
9. Paravakar
10. Vazashen

Each focus group included six to eight participants, both women and men of the age group above 25. The overall number of focus group participants totalled 70.

Interviews

Along with the focus groups above, five interviews were held with representatives of local self-government bodies in order to ensure impartial assessment of the issues raised.

Methodology in NK

Research conducted in NK: To study how residents of the frontier regions assess the consequences of the conflict and the level of security, six communities were selected, located at different distances from the LOC. The selection was partly shaped by the necessity to follow if there is a difference in perception of safety between those who live closer to the border and those who live in the frontier area, but further away from the border.

Four villages and two towns were chosen, as it was important to understand the difference in the socio-economic situation of the villagers and the town residents.

The six locations visited in January and February 2012 were the villages of Nor Maragha (see note below), Gishi and Krasniy Bazar, and the towns of Mardakert, Martuni and Shahar.

The survey was held in discussion group format. Discussion groups were formed with the assumption of age and gender balance, representation of different social groups: workers, the unemployed, the disabled, war veterans, intellectuals and peasants. Also, representation of various professions was considered: doctors, teachers, private entrepreneurs, civil servants and farmers.

Each participant had the opportunity to respond to each of the questions suggested. Before beginning the conversation the group participants were provided with information including the purposes of this research.

ANNEX II: Outline of Basic Principles

The **Basic Principles** reflect a compromise based on the Helsinki Final Act principles of i) Non-Use of Force; ii) Territorial Integrity; and iii) the Equal Rights and Self-Determination of Peoples.

The Basic Principles call for *inter alia*:

- Return of the occupied territories surrounding Nagorny Karabakh to Azerbaijani control
- An interim status for NK providing guarantees for security and self-governance
- A land corridor linking Armenia to NK
- Future determination of the final legal status of NK through a legally-binding expression of will
- The right of all IDPs and refugees to return to their former places of residence
- International security guarantees that would include a peacekeeping operation.

ANNEX III: A note on casualty figures

The yearly death toll on the LOC has been over 30 people killed per year in recent years with higher figures for some periods. That was broadly the case in 2011. Casualties are mainly military on either side but also include some civilians. There has also been a spike in incidents at times before or after some of the summit meetings between the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents. As described in this report, shootings and other incidents occur too in the vicinity of tense areas (Tovuz and Gazakh districts and in frontier areas of Tavuzh marz) on the international border. The number of those injured or killed in the first quarter of 2012 fits into roughly the same pattern as the previous few years. Both sides have a tendency to claim that their actions are retaliatory and allege that they have inflicted higher casualty figures on the other side than officially announced.

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: A group of shepherds from the village of Agdam in Tovuz district grazing their cattle on the border with Armenia, January 2012. Shepherds are among the most vulnerable population groups in the frontline villages.

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