Empowering conflict-affected communities to respond to security problems in South Ossetia

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Introduction

The 2008 war over South Ossetia was the dramatic culmination of years of conflict that has affected communities living there since the early 1990s. Although the situation has stabilised since the 2008 ceasefire, on-going violence during the previous nineteen years has left lasting infrastructural, economic, and psychological damage. Local residents face a range of daily challenges, from reduced opportunities to earn a living to concerns around unexploded ordnance, which undermine perceptions of security and peaceful development of communities. Largely isolated from the outside world, and with few opportunities available to them, local people struggle to see how they can positively influence the situation in their community.

Moving beyond this situation requires partnership between communities and a range of security actors[1] to respond to the complex and often inter-connected problems undermining communities' feelings of security. To this end, Saferworld and the Association of South Ossetian Women for Democracy and Human Rights (the Association of South Ossetian Women) have been working with conflict-affected communities in Dzhava and Znaur/i districts since November 2011 and in Tskhinval/i district since April 2012 to support communities to work with local security actors to improve security at the local level. Work in South Ossetia is part of Saferworld's regional programme to support the adoption of community-based approaches to security across the Caucasus.

This publication presents the approach taken by the partners and outlines a vision for taking this work forward. This section outlines the theory behind community-based approaches to security and the objectives of the partners' work in South Ossetia. The second section looks at the practical steps taken to apply this approach in South Ossetia, while the final section presents the achievements of the project and sets out our vision for the future.

[1] The term 'security actor' is used throughout the publication to refer to any actor with a role in ensuring the welfare of communities – i.e. those responsible for the human security of communities. For example, it could include any of the following: local or central authorities, health or education services, law enforcement organs, the military and religious groups.

Understanding 'security'

Security is often understood to refer to the protection of state interests, rather than the protection of ordinary people. To counter this, the concept of 'human security' was developed during the 1990s, although to this day there is no fixed definition of what 'human security' encompasses. The approach articulated in this report allows communities to themselves define factors undermining their security; as such, it can encompass different issues in different contexts.

Community-based approaches to security in post-conflict contexts

Saferworld has developed 'community-based approaches to security provision' or 'community security' projects in a range of fragile and conflict-affected countries. This approach seeks to improve security at the local level by bringing communities together with local authorities and security providers to develop joint solutions to causes of insecurity. While there is no strict definition of the specific activities that a community-based approach to security entails, it relies on three broad 'pillars' of activities:

1. **Understanding what makes people feel insecure.** This requires identifying local people's perspectives on causes of insecurity, for example, through meetings with communities or conducting household surveys.

2. **Supporting security actors to more effectively respond to communities' needs.** This includes ensuring security actors are aware of communities' needs, but can also involve more direct support, such as providing access to best practise from other contexts with stronger traditions of community-based security provision or supporting coordination between security actors.

3. **Strengthening the capacity and confidence of communities.** This involves training communities to (a) analyse their needs; (b) articulate these needs to security providers; and (c) plan responses jointly with relevant actors and providing opportunities to do this in practise.

The approach taken is different in every context and in South Ossetia the partners have adapted the methodology to take into account local social, cultural, political, and security dynamics. What this approach looks like in practise in South Ossetia is described in detail in section two.

Aims and rationale

A community-based approach to security seeks to create an environment in which people feel safe and secure. This means supporting the establishment of strong, cooperative relationships between communities and security providers, which allow for the resolution of communities' security problems.

There are a number of reasons why Saferworld has sought to develop this approach in conflict-affected societies. First, we believe that everyone, no matter where they live, has the right to live free of fear, and enjoy access to security provision that is responsive to their needs. In societies that are still engaged in or have recently experienced conflict, promoting community-based approaches can ensure that security provision responds to communities' needs, while balancing 'hard' security needs related to the conflict. Second, this approach plays a role in the development of conflict-affected communities. Security problems are often deep-rooted and connected to exclusion, poverty, and unemployment as well as crime, ethnic division, and past conflicts. As such, unresolved security problems tend to inhibit

community development, including business activities and economic development. Finally, it contributes towards conflict prevention, because more secure communities who know they can rely on local security actors are less vulnerable to external shocks and are less likely to be the source of incidents that can trigger conflict at a higher level.

Saferworld and the Association of South Ossetian Women worked with community representatives from South Ossetia to agree why we believe it is important to work on this approach in South Ossetia. The results of these discussions – demonstrating the change needed and the desired result – are captured in figure 1.

Figure 1: Changes that community representatives hope to achieve by implementing community-based approaches in South Ossetia

Type of change	Result
Change within communities	Communities take an active role in responding to problems, resulting in: ■ Increased dignity and self-respect ■ Confidence in the future ■ A better understanding of principles of citizenship ■ A sense of stability and security from external aggression
Change in relationships between communities	Communities support each other to respond to problems, resulting in: ■ Mutual respect for neighbours ■ Decreased isolation between different communities
Change in relationships between communities and authority representatives	Security actors prioritise local needs, resulting in: ■ Positive cooperation between communities and authority representatives ■ Mutual understanding ■ Joint work to protect human dignity

It was recognised that the partners would not be able to make a significant impact on the overall security situation or completely transform the behaviours and relationships outlined above during the initial stages of work. Nevertheless, we hoped to build the foundations for more extensive work in this direction by demonstrating that both communities and security actors were able and willing to work together to resolve communities' priority issues.
In doing so, we hoped to open up space for discussion between communities and security actors on what security would mean for communities and how best to achieve this within South Ossetia.

2

Empowering communities to respond to security problems in South Ossetia

The first phase of work in South Ossetia has been focused on increasing availability of information about communities' security needs and developing communities' capacity to work with security actors to respond to those needs. The project partners sought to achieve this by creating a network of ordinary community representatives – the Community Reference Group (CRG) – who were supported to map the security needs of their communities; articulate these to security actors; and then work with security actors and their wider community to plan and implement responses to prioritised problems. The project partners followed a five-step process, illustrated in figure 2. This section explains the methodology behind each stage and describes the concrete steps taken during implementation.

Identifying communities and selecting representatives

Given limited resources available, the partners decided to pilot work in selected districts, before expanding to cover most of South Ossetia. The partners started work in Dzhava and Znaur/i districts in November 2011, before including Tskhinval/i district from April 2012. In 2013, we also hope to work in Akhalgori/Leningor district. Priority was given to rural communities that suffer from greater feelings of isolation and have less access to security provision than urban communities.

Figure 2: Five-step process for developing community-led responses
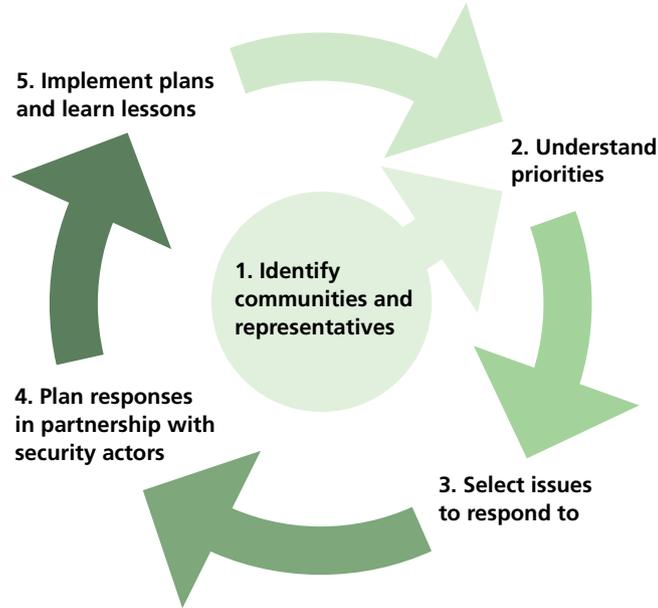
The first step in all districts was to identify target communities in which we would work. Each community is made up of a several villages, grouped together according to (a) shared needs, such as economic opportunities, level of physical insecurity, or basic livelihood needs (e.g. access to water); and (b) shared views and interests, such as schools, relatives, and friends. The process of grouping villages into larger communities with shared needs and interests allows people living in those areas to work together and support each other to respond to common problems. The next step was to select a representative from each community to form the volunteer network of community representatives, the CRG, to provide support to their communities and act as a contact point on community security issues: (a) between the community and the programme partners; (b) between individual community members; and (c) between the community and security providers.

The selection of communities and CRG representatives was made according to recommendations from the heads of rural councils and local residents. By engaging with both authority representatives and local people from the outset of the project, and explaining our approach and aims, the Association of South Ossetian Women was able to build support for the project and ensure that both parties would be supportive of our work at a later stage. It was also essential that the CRG members, who would be responsible for organising activities and leading their communities in responding to security problems, were respected both within their respective communities and by the local authority representatives, with whom they would cooperate.

CRG meeting to develop project methodology, Pyatigorsk, January 2012.

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Once selected, the CRG were invited to a meeting with Saferworld and the Association of South Ossetian Women in Pyatigorsk in the North Caucasus, Russia to develop a joint vision for understanding and responding to communities' needs in South Ossetia. This initial meeting was the start of a series of meetings designed to develop the capacity of the CRG to become a sustainable resource for responding to communities' needs.

Understanding problems

In order to understand the safety and security needs in each community, the Association of South Ossetian Women supported each community representative in conducting meetings in their community, during which they asked local people to identify the key issues under-mining feelings of security in their village and the surrounding area. They were also asked to identify their security priorities and the amount of assistance that would be needed to respond to their priorities. The information from these group discussions was captured in 'community profiles', which include a brief description of the community; the impact of the conflict; local security priorities; how the community already responds to these priorities; and how security actors respond to them. These brief profiles are then used to clearly explain communities' problems to security actors with a role in responding to communities' needs. They can also help communities to categorise their needs and identify priority issues to resolve.

The findings from these meetings, summarised in figure 3, demonstrate that many problems faced by communities in South Ossetia are interrelated. People are concerned that poor living conditions often related to the conflict situation – for example, through war-time destruction of utilities infrastructure – are driving people to leave the area, increasing feelings of isolation and causing uncertainty for the future.

Figure 3: Communities' security concerns (listed alphabetically)

Dzhava	■ **Economic/trade issues:** associated with the agricultural sector, including destruction of the bee-farming industry during the 2008 war bombings and the African Plague that decimated the pig population ■ **Isolation:** caused by poor condition of roads, lack of transport to some villages (particularly in the Roka Pass), and poor telephone network coverage ■ **Utilities infrastructure:** damaged sewerage and water supply systems, which limit access to drinking and irrigation water; lack of electricity supply, particularly in outlying villages; no gas supply – all of which communities fear accelerate depopulation
Eastern Tskhinval/i	■ **Access to health care:** poor emergency response and general provision of health care, including limited access to pharmacies ■ **Access to water:** poor access to drinking and irrigation water in certain villages ■ **Isolation:** caused by poor condition of roads, particularly in winter ■ **Lack of opportunities for youth:** related to poor job and recreation opportunities and leading to social alienation ■ **Perceived threats of violence:** these include fears of Georgian border guards, rumours of armed groups on the other side of the dividing line, radiation from bombing during the 2008 war, and fear of a resumption of hostilities ■ **Unexploded ordnance (UXO):** People do not know where UXO are located
Western Tskhinval/i	■ **Damaged infrastructure:** limited access to shops, water mills, medical care/medicines and drinking water, affecting quality of life; and inadequate sewerage systems, leading to illness – all of which communities fear induce resettlement to urban environments ■ **Depopulation to towns and cities:** (particularly among young people) due to poor living conditions and lack of employment opportunities ■ **Inability to control attacks by wild animals:** the community is unable to shoot wild animals and is concerned by attacks on cattle ■ **Isolation:** caused by poor condition of roads, particularly in winter ■ **Lack of information about missing persons:** a consequence of the 2008 war and earlier conflicts ■ **Movement of cattle across the dividing line:** cattle cross the line and villagers cannot have them returned ■ **Perceived threats of violence:** people are concerned by rumours of a resumption of violence ■ **Stray dogs** ■ **UXO:** incidences of cattle blown up by UXO and fears for safety as people do not know where UXO are located
Znaur	■ **Access to water:** poor access to drinking and irrigation water in certain villages ■ **Inability to control attacks by wild animals:** the community is unable to shoot wild animals and is concerned by attacks on cattle ■ **Lack of opportunities for youth:** during the 18 years following the initial outbreak of conflict, young people had limited educational and professional opportunities and now face poor prospects for employment and recreation, driving some to alcohol abuse ■ **Obstacles to movement of people:** including roads and bridges destroyed during the conflict ■ **Poor socio-economic infrastructure:** lack of social centres, for example, kindergartens, schools, youth centres, and lack of functioning watermills ■ **Utilities infrastructure:** lack of electricity supply in some villages

Selecting priorities

Following the process of understanding communities' needs, the community representatives met to compare the situation in communities in different parts of South Ossetia and to develop a shortlist of specific communities and priority problems to which the CRG could support responses. The selection process took place against the following criteria:

- The problem should be resolvable: (a) in a short time, and (b) with limited resources.
- The problem should be essential for community security, in that: (a) its existence undermines the community, and (b) it is linked to the conflict.
- The problem should be general, in that: (a) it is shared by people in the community, and (b) also exists in other communities – so that its resolution would provide a positive example.
- The problem can be resolved through active participation of communities: (a) by themselves, and (b) in partnership with authority representatives.

It is very important that the selection of communities in which to implement initiatives is made transparently by community representatives on the basis of discussions with local people, the rest of the community network, and partners. Accordingly, following the meeting the shortlist of possible communities and issues was discussed with community members to update them on progress and get their agreement on the recommended locations and issues.

During the first phases of work in Dzhava, Znaur/i and Tskhinval/i districts, the following priority problems were identified:

- **Buzal community, Dzhava district:** lack of access to drinking and household water
- **Teregevan community, Znaur/i district:** lack of mills in Znaur/i district, leading to insecurity milling grain
- **Dmenisi community, Tskhinval/i district:** lack of a functioning water mill, leading to insecurity milling grain
- **Rustav community, Tskhinval/i district:** destroyed water lines, leading to insecurity collecting drinking water

In all four cases, the problems were fuelling fears of depopulation of young people.

Planning responses in partnership with authorities

The next stage was to plan responses to the selected problems. To ensure a comprehensive response to the problems, the CRG members analysed the root causes of individual problems and identified who or what was responsible for them. They were then supported to formulate a description of the problem: who it affects and why it is of importance to the affected community. This process is essential to support communities to effectively explain both the problem and the need to work on it to relevant security actors.

On the basis of these problem statements, the CRG members drafted solution strategies. These included an overall vision of the change the communities hoped to initiate; a description of the key preconditions for achieving this; and a list of concrete steps and activities that they intended to take to achieve their vision of change. The CRG members then met separately with (a) people in the selected communities and (b) authority representatives, in order to consult on the plans and agree their roles in implementation. Before implementing the plans, the CRG members organised a final, joint meeting between communities and authority representatives to agree the ultimate plans to be implemented. This was essential to promote one of the major goals of the work: changing relationships between communities and security actors to ensure they view each other as willing and able partners in solving security issues.

The project partners only provided the communities with very small sums of money (300 euros per initiative) for the implementation of strategies. This increases the sustainability of the approach by compelling communities to think of creative ways of responding to problems with limited resources, either by attracting resources from other sources (e.g. security actors) or developing innovative, low-cost solutions to identified problems.

Implementing plans and learning lessons

The final stage was to implement the plans and learn lessons. Throughout 2012, CRG members supported local people to realise four initiatives in Dzhava, Tskhinval/i and Znaur/i districts, responding to the prioritised problems outlined above. Although the work was led by community members, they were supported by local authority structures, which provided technical equipment to assist implementation. Community members in Dzhava and Znaur/i are currently working on two larger-scale initiatives which will be implemented in the first half of 2013.

Members of Dmenisi community renovating the water mill building, Tskhinval/i district, October 2012.

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Case study one: Buzal community, Dzhava district

The problem: Following damage to the water system during the conflict, people living in Buzal were unable to access drinking and household water. Although the main water pipe was being renovated, there were no plans to connect this to Buzal, causing the community to feel neglected and raising concerns about the sustainability of the community.

Vision of change: Work with the local authorities responsible for renovating the water system to ensure that Buzal was also provided access to drinking and household water.

Steps taken:

■ The CRG members met several times with representatives and the head of the local administration to present the problem and agree a plan for responding. A joint meeting was then organised between the community and local administration to finalise the plan and agree roles.

■ Four members of the community used the micro grant to buy plastic piping to bring water from the main pipe to Buzal.

■ The administration provided technical equipment to dig a channel from the main pipe to the village.

■ The villagers then agreed with the construction workers working on the main pipe to connect the new pipe to the main pipe. The villagers themselves laid the pipe in to the channel and using their own resources purchased hoses to bring water from the central pipe in the village to their homes.

CRG representatives are shown equipment provided by the local administration during the implementation of the initiative in Buzal community, April 2012.

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Community members lay plastic piping to bring water to Buzal community, Dzhava district, May 2012.

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Community members in Buzal turn on the tap after successfully laying a pipe to bring water to the village, Dzhava district, May 2012.

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Case study two: Teregevan community, Znaur/i district

The problem: Following damage to water mills located in the community during the 2008 war, people have had to travel to the city to grind grain. Poor public transport meant that many had to return home late at night, and faced attacks by wild animals from a forest bordering the community.

Vision of change: Community members work with representatives of the local administration to restore at least one watermill. As a result community members are able to mill grain, removing the need to travel to the city, which undermines peoples' feelings of security. Successful restoration of the mill can act as a precedent to repair other mills in the community.

Steps taken:

■ Community representatives met with local people and the head of the local administration to agree a plan for rebuilding one of the water mills in the area. Although the CRG had initially planned to renovate an existing mill, the state of the mill meant they had to rebuild the mill from scratch.

■ The community used the 300 euro micro grant to buy an old wooden house, which they disassembled to provide wood to rebuild the mill. The local administration provided a vehicle to transport the material, as well as concrete piles and an excavator to set the foundations. Additional wooden posts were provided by a private company.

■ The community undertook voluntary work to rebuild the mill. During implementation of work, the villagers provided those working with food and refreshments.

■ Once the mill was functioning, the community organised an opening ceremony and invited along representatives from local and Tskhinval/i authorities to celebrate the success of their joint work.

TOP LEFT: The mill in Teregevan community prior to being renovated by the community, Znaur/i district, April 2012.

TOP RIGHT: The mill in Teregevan community having been successful renovated by the community, Znaur/i district, February 2013.

BOTTOM LEFT: A man looks at photographs of work implemented by the community at the opening of the mill, Znaur/i district, August 2012.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Preparations for the opening of the mill, Znaur/i district, August 2012.

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"The mill in Teregevan community was practically built from scratch. The initiative sets a precedent not just for other communities in Znaur/i district, but for all South Ossetia, demonstrating that a community can take the initiative to resolve a problem."

CRG member

Results of initiatives

All four planned initiatives were successfully implemented, providing communities with access to drinking water (Buzal and Rustav communities) and functioning water mills (Dmenisi and Teregevan communities). Further to these concrete results, the initiatives set a precedent in the post-war period, since this was the first occasion of people coming together since the initial outbreak of violence to actively resolve a problem, despite limited resources available. This has set a positive example for other communities and proved a stimulus for further independent action by communities: for example, following the successful work in Rustav community, residents in the village of Khetagurovo, at their own initiative and using their own funds, laid water lines in the streets of the village. The initiatives have fostered a willingness to take an active part in society, suggesting movement beyond the 'victim syndrome' and disengagement from civic processes. Furthermore, the initiatives provide a unique example of people cooperating with the administration and vice versa, allowing for the growth of mutual trust and partnership in responding to problems.

3

Achievements and vision for the future

This section sets out achievements of the work to date, before looking ahead to the partners' plans for the future.

Achievements

As noted in section 1, during the initial phases of work the partners hoped to demonstrate the potential for facilitating joint responses between communities and security providers to communities' security needs. Work to date has provided a strong foundation for this, demonstrating concrete achievements:

Successful responses to communities' priorities. The initiatives have been successfully implemented, demonstrating that it is possible to respond to communities' priorities with very limited available funds.

Increased access to information on communities' needs. The mapping of communities' safety concerns was the first survey of needs since the 2008 war. As such, the results have been sought by actors within South Ossetia with a role in ensuring communities' safety and welfare.

Work has also led to developments within the three key change areas identified by communities at the outset of the project:

1. **Change within communities.** Following years of social degradation arising from almost two decades of violent conflict, people living in the selected communities have demonstrated willingness and enthusiasm to participate in developing and implementing solutions to problems. For example, they provided physical labour to implement initiatives without any financial incentive, and even provided communal food and refreshments during implementation.

2. **Change in relationships between communities.** By creating a committed, enthusiastic volunteer community network, the project has created a potentially sustainable resource for sharing information and providing mutual support between representatives of communities from different parts of South Ossetia.

3. **Change in relationships between communities and authority representatives.** The implementation of joint initiatives provided an example of constructive cooperation between communities and authority representatives. Local authorities have demonstrated a willingness to work with communities to respond to problems, for example, by providing technical equipment and materials.

To consolidate these achievements and move to the next stage in ensuring security for communities, the partners have identified two key areas for future activities.

Vision for the future

1. Strengthening CRG and facilitating greater engagement between communities and security actors

In the next phase of work, we plan to extend our work and identify communities and representatives in Akhalgori/Leningor district, to allow the project partners to support communities throughout South Ossetia. We will seek to provide additional support to the community members, helping them to articulate their security needs more clearly to security providers; and to build their confidence to work on other security issues, beyond those related to infrastructure destroyed during the conflict.

A key objective of a community-based approach is to strengthen relations between communities and security actors, to develop mutual trust, and to ensure that security actors prioritise local needs and use whatever resources are available to respond to them. We therefore hope to see closer cooperation between our community network and security actors beyond consultation over specific plans.

"After the initiatives, people in the community felt more confident in themselves and in the future."

CRG member

2. Increase information available on communities' needs

Security providers must have access to accurate information on local security issues to be able to ensure an appropriate response. While security actors tend to have information on the problems communities' face, it is also important that they understand how this affects communities' perceptions of security, in order to respond to those problems that most undermine communities' feelings of safety and stability. Accordingly, Saferworld and the Association of South Ossetian Women intend to conduct in-depth research among local communities in order to measure their perceptions of security. This research will be shared with communities and security actors to encourage discussions about how best to respond to these problems.

Profiles of implementing partners

Saferworld

Saferworld works to prevent and reduce violent conflict and promote cooperative 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.

In the present project, Saferworld provides the 'community-based approach to security' and is responsible for overall project management, including analysis of impact.

For more information, visit: **www.saferworld.org.uk**

The Association of South Ossetian Women for Democracy and Human Rights

The Association of South Ossetian Women for Democracy and Human Rights is an NGO based in Tskhinval/i. It was founded in 2002 to contribute to the establishment of a diverse civil society in South Ossetia and promote the rule of law and protection of human rights. Its main activities include conducting trainings, seminars and round tables on human rights, gender issues, conflict resolution and peace building, as well monitoring of human rights in South Ossetia and taking subsequent legal action.

The Association of South Ossetian Women has primary responsibility for implementing the project, including acting as the primary point of contact for the Community Reference Group and liaising with security actors inside South Ossetia.

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

ABKHAZIA

BLACK
SEA

SOUTH
OSSETIA

Tskhinval/i

GEORGIA

TURKEY

ARMENIA

AZERBAIJAN

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

The 2008 war over South Ossetia was the dramatic culmination of years of conflict. Although the situation has stabilised since the 2008 ceasefire, on-going violence during the previous nineteen years has left lasting infrastructural, economic, and psychological damage. Today local residents face a range of daily challenges, from reduced opportunities to earn a living to concerns around unexploded ordnance, which undermine both perceptions of security and peaceful development of communities. In response, Saferworld and the Association of South Ossetian Women for Democracy and Human Rights have been working with conflict-affected communities in Dzhava and Znaur/i districts since November 2011 and in Tskhinval/i district since April 2012, supporting communities to work with local security actors to improve security at the local level. This publication outlines the partners' approach during this initial phase of work.

Cover photo: Girls preparing for the opening ceremony of a mill renovated by the community, Znaur/i district, August 2012. © THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH OSSETIAN WOMEN

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