
REVISED Assessment Report “Buffer zone” (Georgia)



September 2008, Destroyed school of the village of Kvemo Nikozi

Period of the assessment: from the 15th to the 30th of September 2008

La Garenne-Colombes / Tbilissi, the 11th of October 2008

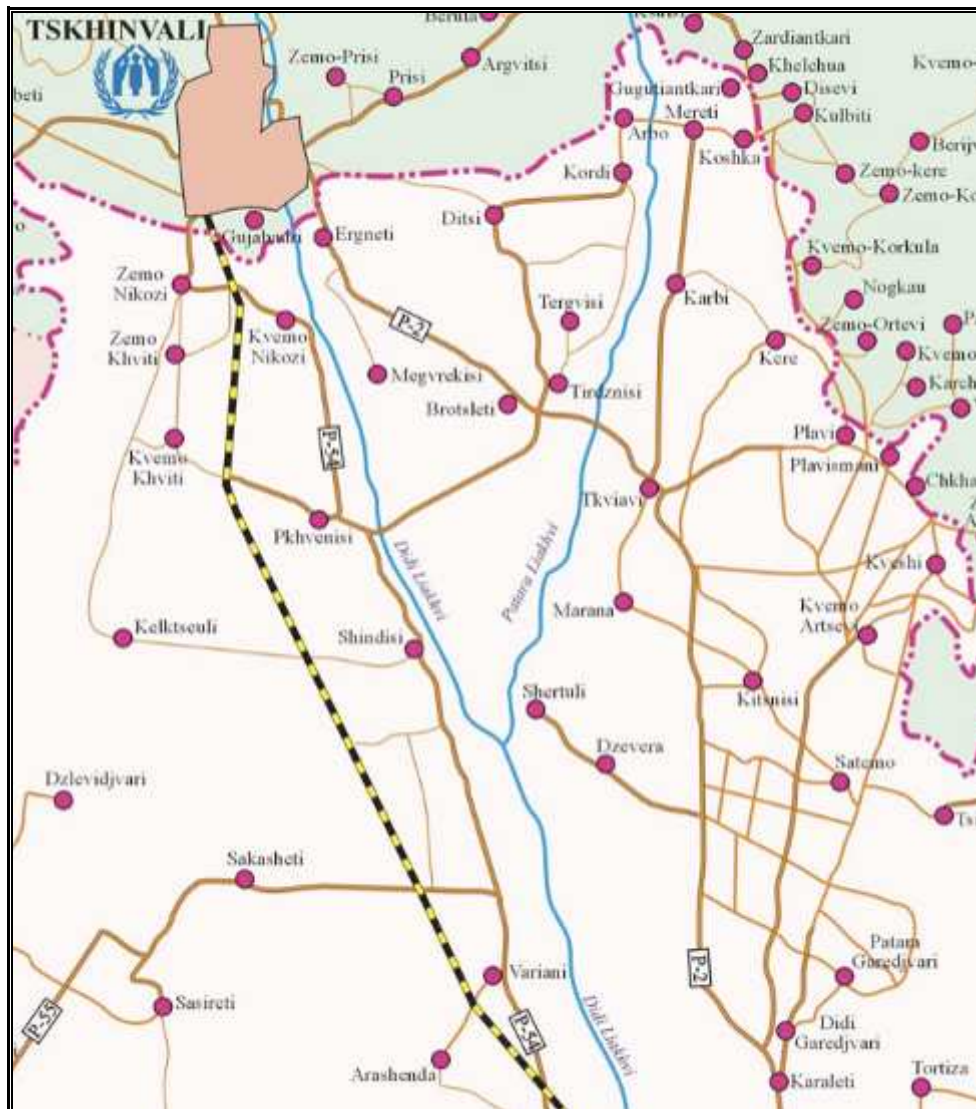
I. Methodology

A. Assessment site selection:

1. Buffer zone, definition

Among most actors in the field, there is no common definition on what is currently called *the buffer zone*. Yet the US Department of Defense defines a 'buffer zone' as follows. "A defined area controlled by a peace operations force from which disputing or belligerent forces have been excluded. A buffer zone is formed to create an area of separation between disputing or belligerent forces and reduce the risk of renewed conflict." (DOD 2005) Under the current circumstances in post-war Georgia, the so-called buffer zone can be defined as follows:

- A war-affected Georgian territory north of Gori and South of Tskhinvali (corresponding to 36 villages) with restricted access that is occupied by Russian and Ossetian armed forces from which a significant part of the population was forced to move.



Map 1: PU area of assessment: the co-called *buffer zone*

2. Assessment localities

The PU assessment mission in Georgia started to collect information at the beginning of the crisis. PU participated in the different cluster meetings lead by UN agencies in Tbilisi and Gori.

For this assessment, PU decided to focus on the most war-affected areas of the co-called buffer zone, starting from the boarder of South Ossetia and going south. A total of 8 municipalities have been assessed corresponding to 29 villages (see section **II. Population**, page 4, for more detailed data).

B. Sources of Information

1. Secondary Level:

A review was done of the assessment reports gathered by the coordination systems:

- Attendance of different Clusters in Tbilisi and Gori
- Attendance to coordination meeting held by UNHCR

2. Primary Level:

- *Local authorities:*
 - Meeting with the heads of municipality of the so-called buffer zone
 - Meeting with, Kakha Toliashvili, Chief of apparatus of Gori municipality board
- *IDPs*

In the IDP camp of Gori a significant part of the crisis-affected IDPs were interviewed, in order to get an overview of the situation.

- *Inhabitants of the assessed villages*

In the different villages, interviews were conducted with different villagers. Specific interviews were conducted with local focal points (nurses, teachers and shop owners) on the subjects of health, education and the impact of the conflict on the local economy.

C. Methodology

- Questionnaire:

For the first ten villages the WFP Initial Rapid Assessment (IRA) form was used. This form was later on adapted to focus more on qualitative data.

- Focus group:

Focus-group discussions held within the Gori IDPs camp.

Focus-group in the different villages with representative of the population

- Interviews:

Interviews were conducted in order to cross-check the gathered information.

Interviews were also conducted in order to cross check information gathered from official authorities.

II. Population

A. Data of the assessed villages (see municipalities contact list annex 1)

	Municipal Office Title	Governor Name, Surname	Before war census			Current population	Dead	Destroyed houses	Burnt houses
			Population Quantity	Family Quantity (governor datas)	Family Quantity according to 3,5 pers/fam (PU data)				
1	Shindisi	Ivane Gabroshvili	6500	2739	1857	4600	6	3	0
	Shindisi		3500	1402	1000	2500	4	2	0
	Pkhvenisi		1500	550	429	700	2	1	0
	Kelktseuli		700	360	200	700	0	0	0
	Kvemo Khviti		800	427	229	700	0	0	0
2	Dzevera	Avtandil Jolbordi	3935	1492	1124	2700	1	8	11
	Dzevera		1240	513	354	1000	1	1	3
	Kitsnisi		1800	617	514	1500	0	6	3
	Satemo		615	224	176	NS	NS	NS	NS
	Shertuli		280	138	80	200	0	1	5
3	Tkviavi	Omar Khabazishvili	5400	2528	1543	3000	8	3	36
	Tkviavi		2500	944	714	1500	8	3	36
	Plavi		1200	425	343	600	0	0	0
	Plavismani		1000	546	286	700	0	0	0
	Marana		700	233	200	200	0	0	0
4	Akhalubani	Guja Rcheulishvili	4335	1819	1239	5043	0	0	0
	Akhalubani		624	229	178	592	0	0	0
	Kveshi		150	454	43	1378	0	0	0
	Akhisi		600	359	171	835	0	0	0
	Adzvi		570	203	163	534	0	0	0
	Mumlaant Kari		210	74	60	198	0	0	0
	Jariasheni		300	119	86	320	0	0	0
	Tsitsaqiant Kari		300	131	86	428	0	0	0
	Kvemo Artsevi		680	244	194	758	0	0	0
5	Ditsi	Zurab Bolashvili	3028	1127	865	1480	0	25	5
	Ditsi		2006	572	573	750	0	25	5
	Kordi		772	377	221	500	0	0	0
	Arbo		250	178	71	230	0	0	0
6	Tirdznisi	Temur Tetunashvili	4630	1355	1323	1751	12	79	125
	Tirdznisi		2200	610	629	1000	3	0	18
	Meghvrekisi		870	247	249	250	3	9	1
	Ergneti		560	177	160	1	5	60	100
	Tergvisi		200	73	57	150	0	0	0
	Brtsleti		800	248	229	350	1	10	6
7	Mereti	Vasil Tevdorashvili	3050	1455	871	2300	12	24	0
	Mereti		1254	502	358	900	2	1	0
	Karbi		780	348	223	500	8	23	0
	Kere		1000	318	286	750	2	0	0
	Koshka		235	128	67	150	0	0	0
	Gugutiant Kari		NS	88		NS	NS	NS	NS
	Zardiant Kari		NS	71		NS	NS	NS	NS
8	Nikozi	Giorgi Devidze	1900	800	543	360	10	29	10
	Kvemo Nikozi		500	251	143	130	1	9	0
	Zemo Nikozi		900	296	257	100	1	5	6
	Zemo Khviti		500	253	143	130	8	15	4
	TOTAL		43578	13315	9365	21234	49	171	187

ns: non specified

na: non applicable

Natality rate: 1,5 children per woman

: non visited villages

1. Number of people before the war

The pre-war demographic data was given to us by the Gori governor's office. PU observed significant differences with the data provided by the governors of the different visited municipalities. Concerning the demographic data, a margin of a 10% quantitative variation has to be taken into consideration. The PU assessment chose to keep one sole source of information (i.e. the Gori governor's office) with respect to the pre-war demographic data.

2. Number of families before the war (current population)

However, it seems as if the Gori governor's data about the number of families shows an fallacious number of people per family (average of 2,05 people per family) and high differences from one village to another. Hence, the PU assessment team decided to calculate the number of families by using the nativity rate of 1,5 children per family.

3. Warning concerning the current demographic data in the so-called buffer zone

The current population is difficult to quantify. Due to the fact that the crisis-affected are constantly moving it is very challenging to quantify how many people are permanently based in the villages. A significant amount of the crisis-affected does stay in their houses during the daytime and flock back to Gori or Tbilisi at night-time.

However, generally it can be stated that:

- the elderly stay in the villages
- the majority of the resident is composed of men who keep their houses and try to harvest the remaining agricultural production
- women are looking out for their children in order for them to go to school in Gori and Tbilisi while all the schools of the buffer zone are closed (and in some cases, destroyed).

Problem statement 1:

There is a noteworthy difficulty to have access to reliable demographic data in the villages. The absence of permanently based aid workers in the zone hinders the production of more precise data.

B. Security, protection and status

1. Protection and status

A significant number of interviewed people could be characterized as being highly traumatized. It has been reported to the PU assessment mission that on a daily basis, Ossetian militiamen threaten the population in some villages. There are widespread oral accounts of murder, looting as well as people being beaten to death. It has been reported that the Russian troops try to stop these types of atrocities but militiamen often succeed avoiding Russian patrols.



Figure 1 : September 2008, People living with traumatic experiences

Problem statement 2:

The absence of adequate civil population protection (i.e. efficient police force and the involvement of the international community) creates unviable living conditions for civilians in the so-called buffer zone. The lack of a permanent humanitarian presence can be linked to the insignificant level of protection for civilians.

2. Security

The major routes of Ossetian militias are crossing Kordi, Tirdznisi, and Zemo Nikosi municipalities.

Note: Security incident during the PU assessment mission

Two vehicles of Ossetian militiamen passed through the village of Tirdznisi while PU was in the process of assessing the local situation. The militiamen improvised a check point on the road to Megvreskisi (between 500 m to 1km from our position). The militiamen stopped and stole 2 vehicles taking the drivers with them. They also stole two buses. It was reported to the assessment team that one bus was recovered by Russian soldiers later that same day.

Even if militiamen are committing crimes and violence in the zone, it is possible to say that the security situation allows the intervention of humanitarian aid workers. However, operations in this types of zones presuppose strict security planing.

3. Mines, UXOs (see Halo trust mapping annex 2)



Photos 1, 2 and 3 - September 2008- : There is a significant presence, potentially in all areas, of UXO's and anti-tank mines in fields and gardens. Anti-tank mines have been deposited close to former Russian camps and are hidden in agricultural fields.

Problem statement 3:

Demining is a priority today. It has to be done quickly before the upcoming winter season (with potential snowfall). It is also a priority to allow the start of agriculture activities next year.

C. Damages and household economy

1. Housing

Lots of houses have been totally destroyed because of the war (171 in the visited villages). However, the majority were burned by Ossetian militiamen (187).

For the most part, people whose houses were destroyed lost everything they owned. In villages where bombing occurred an important part of the houses were damaged especially windows because of the blasts (roofs and walls were also significantly damaged). The PU assessment team was not in a position to produce a precise census of the houses which need to be repaired but its possible to say that at least half of the houses in the bombed villages need significant the windows repair works to be carried out (or temporary fixing via plastic sheeting).



Figure 2 Houses bombed and burned

2. Public buildings

- The administrative office of the secondary school of Tirdznisi was burned. People managed to extinguish the fire.
- The secondary school of Kvemo Nikozi was totally destroyed ; others were damaged (see below)
- Clinics damaged (see below)
- All shops have been looted and sometimes destroyed except for the stores in the village of Plavi. It is also the only shop still open the PU-Assessment team could see in all the entire buffer zone.



Figure 3 Destroyed school in the village of Kvemo Nikozi



Figure 4 Burned kitchen

3. Goods

People whose houses were destroyed lost everything. In the villages where some houses were burned, heavy looting occurred in lots of houses. Ossetian militiamen stole everything from money and jewelry to TV-sets, computers, clothing and even furniture and dishes. It is very difficult to have a precise estimation of all the stolen goods of the people but the PU-assessment team can state that massive looting took place in the buffer zone. A lot of interviewees stated that cars, trucks, tractors, busses and harvest machinery were also been stolen.

4. Household economy

- For most people in the buffer zone, losing an important part of the agricultural production entails the loss of the annual income
- Increase of economic pressure due to the credit for agriculture which cannot be repaid
- Loss of goods for the people whose houses were destroyed by the war and in the villages of heavy Ossetian looting.

5. Winterization

- Context:

Winter is particularly cold in the assessed area (i.e. continental climate and proximity of the Caucasus mountain chain). Last year's winter was particularly cold with temperature reaching sometimes minus 20°C. It is a time where most of the agricultural activities are stopped. Farmers are waiting for the spring season to start the field works.

- Shelter

People whose houses were destroyed, - and who remain in the village -, are living in very challenging conditions. An important part of houses was damaged, especially in heavily bombed areas. Windows were broken because of the blast.

- Heating

The main heating system used during the winter season is wood-powered stoves (which are used to warm the house but also for cooking purposes).

In the north of Gori, people used to go to the Forest of South Ossetia in order to cut and collect wood.

The Forest Ministry of South Ossetia used to sell vouchers to people in order to control access, cutting and collection activities in its jurisdiction. Transportation of wood was organized by the villagers themselves.

The main forest of production was:

- North of the *Patara Liakhvi* river from the villages of Koshuri to Atrisskhevi
- Forest around Ortevi

Currently, the situation prevents villagers to access wood in these areas.

Problem statement 4:

The abovementioned situation requires the support of the crisis-affected with essential food and hygiene products. The upcoming harsh winter season imposes *winterization* works (via the supply of adequate building material) but also large scale distribution efforts to satisfy the needs in terms of winter clothes, blankets and wood-powered stoves. Furthermore, without heating support, people will cut the fruit trees as a coping mechanism in order to survive the upcoming winter season. Consequences on next year's agricultural production would be dramatic.

III. Food Security

A. Agriculture

1. Cultures

People are mainly farmers in the area even if a significant number of the interviewed people are also involved in other income generating activities (shop keeper, administrative positions, nurse....)

The main cash crops in the region are:

- Fruit (mainly apples, peaches, plumbs and pears but also hazel nuts, walnuts)
- Corn (mainly for households)
- Wheat
- Beans
- Tomatoes
- Potatoes
- Cucumbers
- Onions
- Cabbage

People have also their own kitchen garden (grapes mainly for wine and a wide variety of vegetables).

On the west side of the Liakhvi river, people mainly cultivate wheat because efficient irrigation systems are lacking. On the East side of the river, the fruit culture is more important. The harvest season ranges from July to October (with the most labor intensive time being in August). August is a very important month for irrigation for most of the cultures, especially for fruit, tomatoes and corns. (e.g. Apple trees are irrigated around 20 times during the year and 4 times in August when the fruit grows and starts to ripe.)



Figure 5 Tomatoes could not reach maturation

Regularly, farmers are taking out loans every year in order to pay the crops, engines etc... They reimburse the loan once the harvest season is over.

Problem statement 5:

60 to 90 % of this years harvest is lost for different reasons: Irrigation was difficult before the war (the local authorities of Tskhinvali often stopped the irrigation of agricultural surfaces). Lots of cultures are damaged (especially apples). Irrigation was partially cut since the war and water is now frequently unavailable.

Furthermore, there are lots of UXOs and mines in the fields. People are afraid to go back to work in the fields.

Today, a significant number of harvest machinery and engines were stolen. Subsequently, lots of farmers do not have access to the necessary farming machinery.

People released animals to avoid them to be killed or stolen. Consequently, lots of cows ate parts of the harvest.

Almost all interviewees underpinned their incapacity to reimburse the credit and even more stated to be obliged to contract additional credits for next year.

Main detrimental impacts are:

Loss of production (ex: sometimes

100% of peach production is lost)

Loss of productivity (ex: corn is very small, plants did not grow normally)

Loss of quality and impossibility to sell the remaining production (ex: apples are very small, problem of taste, lots of worms. It cannot be sold for human consumption)



Figure 6 Anti-tank mines in a corn field



Figure 6 Burnt potatoes stock

2. Irrigation (see irrigation mapping, annex 3)

Irrigation is a huge problem in the area. Indeed, all the irrigation water is coming from Tshkinvali. More precisely, two main irrigation channels come from the Didi Liakhvi River in Tshkinvali where it can be regulated and/or cut off. These channels give water to 50 to 60 villages, on 61 000 ha. About 120 000 people depend on this water not only for agricultural purposes.

- The first channel leads west, with an average flow rate of 4 to 5 m³ /s and covers 45 000 ha.
- The second channel heads East, with an approximate flow rate of 10 12 m³/s and covers 12 000 ha.

Problem statement 6:

All interviewed farmers who depend on Ossetian water supply raise concerns about the irrigation water.

B. Food stock and consumption

A major part of the local food stock was lost, stolen and/or destroyed. The people are mainly eating the remaining food stock and/or the production they can collect. Humanitarian aids as well as food supplies from Gori have become increasingly important for the crisis-affected. However, the crisis-affected are faced with the bitter fact that they do not have sufficient resources to access these types of goods.

An important part, if not all, of the stores were looted and sometimes destroyed or burned. Almost all local stores are closed and food items are not available within walking distance for most conflict-affected. Formerly, people used to bake their own bread but the lack of flour hinders them to do so under the current circumstances.

Problem statement 7:

Insufficient financial resources to buy basic food items

Significant loss of harvest production

Massive loss of food stocks

Difficulty to access markets

There is a important need of humanitarian food assistance in all assessed villages, especially for flour (as people are used to bake their own bread).

C. Livestock

In every village, animals were killed, stolen and/or lost. Yet the situation is different from one village to another. In lots of villages, animals were stolen by Ossetian militiamen. When people fled, a part of them released their animals hoping to find them after the war. An important part, of course, simply disappeared.

As a coping mechanism lots of villagers are selling their remaining animals to get cash and try to cover basic needs. There are reports of Azerbaijani villagers entering the buffer zone in order to buy off the cows. The sales price for an animals dropped 3 to 4 times (i.e. a dairy cow sold 1 000 laris in July 2008 is now sold 200 to 300 laris).

IV. Drinkable water

1. The Vaneti water system

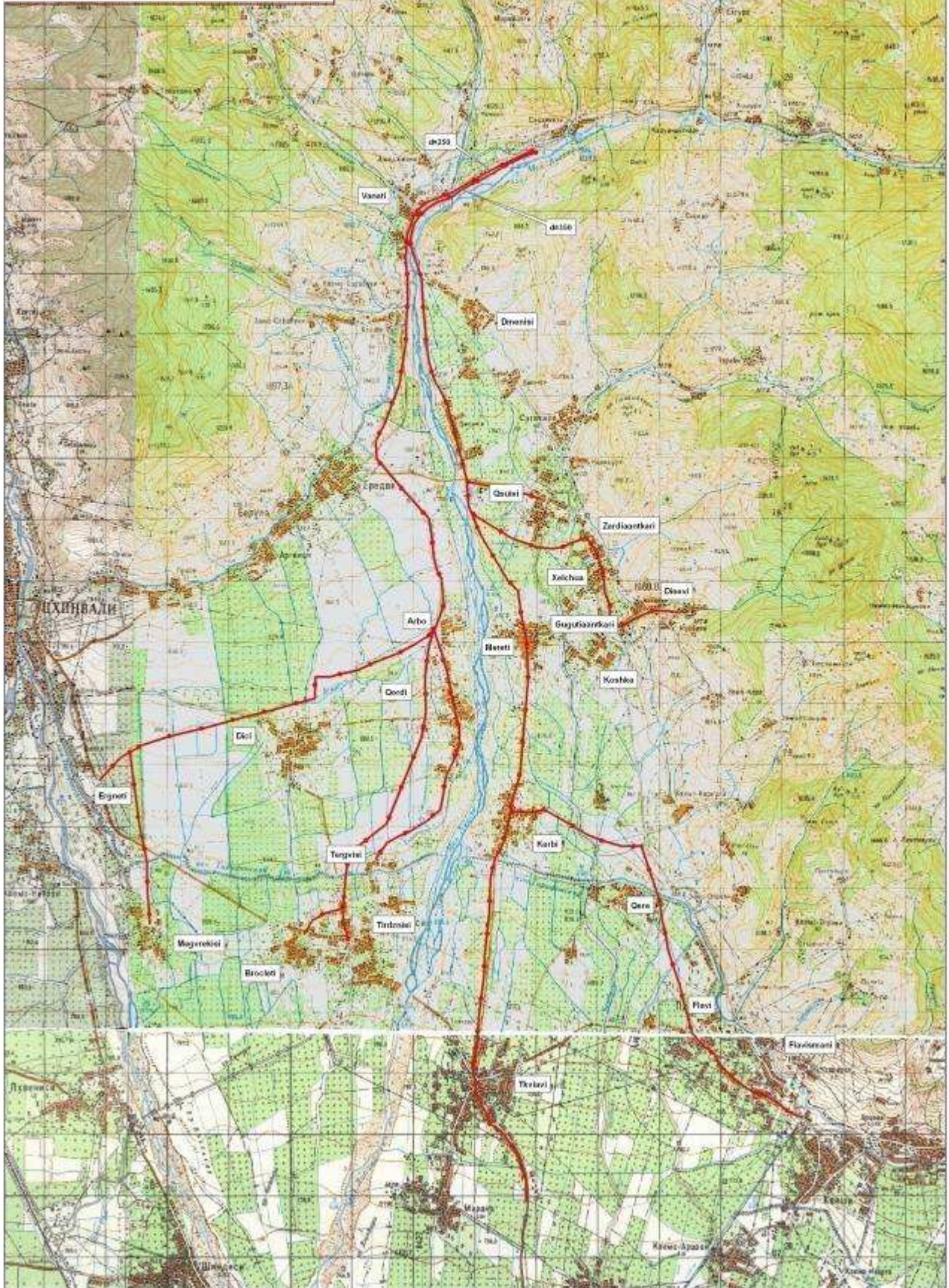
Vaneti is a village mainly populated by so-called ethnic Georgians. From 1958 a drinking water network in Vaneti, South Ossetia, provided drinkable water to 42 villages in the region. Today the ramshackle water supply network obliges an important number of villages to dig boreholes and install electric water pumps in order to access a sufficient amount of drinking water. At the moment, the drinking water is supplied via a gravity system but regular check-ups of the network have to be carried out in order to avoid a collapse of the system during the upcoming winter season. At the moment, some villagers (see table below) have no more water. They are obliged to take water from rivers, traditional open wells or have to travel to villages equipped with water pump.

Note: When checking the villages of Ditsi, Kordi and Arbo, the PU-assessment team observed that there was no drinking water available. With the help of Russian soldiers, villagers could connect electricity to a functional borehole equipped with a water pump. They are now using it to feed drinking water into three districts. Each family is supposed to receive 500l for three day (about 47 l person/day now; 37 l/person/day with the full population)

The network is made of two pipes with different connections (see map). One is going to Ergneti (250mm), the other to Tkviavi (300mm). Due to the constant lack of sufficient power supply, lots of families and villages are also equipped with open traditional wells.

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1:35 000

Vaneti Drinking water network



Drinking water facilities						
Municipal Office Title	Before war			After war		
	Number	Facility	status (working Y/N)	Number	Facility	status
1 Shindisi						
Shindisi	5	drilling	Y	na		
	3	well	Y	na		
Pkhvenisi	4	drilling	Y	na		
Kelktseuli	2	drilling	Y	na		
	3	well	Y	na		
Kvemo Khviti	2	drilling	Y	na		
	2	well	Y	na		
2 Dzevera						
Dzevera	2	drilling	Y	na		
	ns	well	Y	na		
Kitsnisi	1	drilling	Y	na		
	ns	well	Y	na		
Satemo	ns					
Shertuli	1	drilling	Y	na		
	ns	well	Y	na		
3 Tkviavi						
Tkviavi	ns					
Plavi	1	Vaneti water	N	ns	wells	
Plavismani		Vaneti water	N	ns	wells	
Marana	1	drilling	Y	na		
4 Akhalubani						
Akhalubani	1	drilling	Y	na		
Kveshi	10	well	Y	na		
Akhrisi	1	drilling	Y	na		
Adzvi	ns					
Mumlaant Kari	1	drilling	Y	na		
Jariasheni	1	spring	Y	na		
Tsitsagiant Kari	1	drilling	N	4	well	Y
Kvemo Artsevi	1	drilling	N	4	well	
5 Ditsi						
Ditsi	1	drilling	Y	na		
Kordi		depends on Ditsi	Y	na		
Arbo		depends on Ditsi	Y	na		
6 Tirdznisi						
Tirdznisi	5	drilling	Y	na		
	8	well	Y	na		
Meghvrekisi	3	drilling	Y	na		
	1	well	Y	na		
Ergneti	1	drilling	N	1	well	Y
Tergvisi	1	drilling	N	0		
Brotsleti	3	drilling	Y	na		
	2	well	Y	na		
7 Mereti						
Mereti	1	Vaneti water	N	10	well	Y
Karbi	1	Vaneti water		15	well	Y
Kere	1	Vaneti water		15	well	Y
Koshka	1	drilling	N	5	well	Y
Gugutiant Kari	1	drilling	N	0		
Zardiant Kari	1	Vaneti water	N	0		
8 Nikozi						
Kvemo Nikozi	2	drilling	Y	na		
	1	well	Y	na		
Zemo Nikozi	2	drilling	Partially	1	well	Y
Zemo Khviti	3	drilling	Y	na		

Problem statement 8:

A humanitarian drinking water intervention is needed in the villages that depend on the Vaneti water supply system (as the system is entirely controlled by Ossetian authorities).
A massive humanitarian intervention is needed in Zemo Nikozi as electricity is cut for a part of the city which subsequently hampers adequate water supply.
Chemical and bacteriological tests have to be done.



Figure 7 Traditional open well

V. Health

Available health facilities				
Before war				
Municipal Office Title	Number	Facility	status (functioning Y/N)	
1	Shindisi			
	Shindisi	1	clinic	Y
2	Dzevera			
	Dzevera	1	clinic	Y
3	Tkviavi			
	Tkviavi	1	clinic	N
	Plavi	1	clinic	N
4	Akhalubani			
	Kveshi	1	clinic	Y
	Akhrisi	1	clinic	Y
5	Ditsi			
	Ditsi	1	clinic	N/damaged
6	Tirdznisi			
	Tirdznisi	1	clinic	N
7	Mereti			
	Mereti	1	clinic	N
8	Nikozi			
	Zemo Nikozi	1	clinic	N/damaged

6 out of the 10 health facilities in the visited areas are not functioning. Some of the clinics were looted and some were damaged because of aerial bombings. ICRC provided some medical consultancies to the crisis-affected and some medicines in a few number of villages. Otherwise the only way for people to get access to health care is to go to Gori.

Problem statement 9:

The crisis-affected do not have access to an operational health facility in the area.

VI. Education

School facilities				
	Municipal Office Title	Number	Facility	status (Functioning Y/N)
1	Shindisi			
	Shindisi	1	secondary school	N
	Pkhvenisi	1	secondary school	N
	Kelktseuli	1	secondary school	N
	Kvemo Khviti	1	secondary school	N
2	Dzevera			
	Dzevera	1	secondary school	N /damaged
	Kitsnisi	1	secondary school	N /damaged
	Satemo	ns		
3	Tkviavi			
	Tkviavi	1	secondary school	N
	Plavi	1	secondary school	N
4	Akhalubani			
	Akhalubani	1	secondary school	N
	Kveshi	1	secondary school	N
	Akhisi	1	secondary school	N
	Tsitsagiart Kari	1	4 levels school	N
	Kvemo Artsevi	1	4 levels school	N
5	Ditsi			
	Ditsi	1	secondary school	N
	Arbo	1	9 levels school	N
6	Tirdznisi			
	Tirdznisi	1	secondary school	N /partially burnt
	Meghvrekisi	ns		
	Ergneti	1	secondary school	N /damaged
7	Mereti			
	Mereti	1	secondary school	N
	Karbi	1	9 levels school	N
	Kere	1	9 levels school	N /damaged
8	Nikozi			
	Kvemo Nikozi	1	9 levels school	N /destroyed
	Zemo Nikozi	1	secondary school	N
	Zemo Khviti	1	9 levels school	N

No school is functioning in the area. The absence of school facilities is, - according to the interviewees -, a key problem for the IDPs to go back to their places of origine. Displacement is, in lots of places, a direct consequence of the lack of a functioning education. There are lots of unemployed teachers in the villages at the moment.

Problem statement 10:

In the assessment zone there are no working schools. There is an urgent necessity to rehabilitate the damaged schools.

VII. Recommendations

Until now the only humanitarian operators in the area have been ICRC (food and medical cares) and WFP (food distribution through municipalities). There is an urgent need of humanitarian assistance to avoid a worsening of the situation. Assistance will also avoid long term displacement for a part of the population.

Throughout the winter season efficient food security actions as well as winterization works need to be put into place. In parallel, economic recovery and reconstruction efforts should be carefully planned and put into practice as soon as possible.

The lack of income for this year will entail more pressure on the crisis-affected households. A minimum which could be done would be to start distributions of NFI's and the implementation of Cash-for-Work activities in order to alleviate the economic pressure on the conflict-affected and, - at the same time -, generate additional income.

Two urgent actions have to be carried out:

1. Emergency winter preparedness

The assistance must be provided in terms of wood, food, shelter and NFI.

2. Economic recovery and post-winter agriculture preparedness

Cash-for-work during winter should help economic recovery. It has to be specified that winter is a difficult moment for this kind of activities as the snow and the cold hamper reconstruction activities. A good coordination with the municipalities would allow determining the most adequate community works during this part of the year.

The next agricultural year has to be planned early enough for farmers to be on time for the field work in spring 2009. A more detailed food security assessment has to be carried out in order to propose the best activities in terms of agriculture recovery.