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SURVEY OF THE ATTITUDES OF THE RESIDENTS OF LIBERATED AND FRONTLINE COMMUNITIES IN UKRAINE: *CHORNOBAIVSKA COMMUNITY IN THE KHERSON OBLAST*

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Kiev International Institute of Sociology

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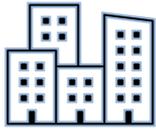
INFORMATION ABOUT THE SURVEY

Target audience	Adult residents (18+) of the Chornobaivska community (Kherson district in the Kherson oblast).
Method	Online focus group discussions with local habitats (8 in total).
Field stage	19 December 2023 – 17 January 2024
Distribution criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4 FGDs with local population aged 18+• 1 FGD with youth aged 18-29• 1 FGD with working population aged 30-59• 1 FGD with active population (volunteers, business, activists)• 1 FGD with internally displaced persons living in the community



SATISFACTION WITH LIFE IN THE COMMUNITY

DESCRIPTION AND ATTITUDE OF COMMUNITY AND ITS RESIDENTS



Residents of the Chornobaivka UTC demonstrate a high level of loyalty and attachment to their region of residence, community, and villages in particular. The region is famous for its natural advantages and agricultural activity, which is the basis of the community's profile. In addition, the survey respondents still perceive the region as promising, despite destruction and other negative consequences of the war.

💡 *"Famous Chornobaivka, a place where the enemy was being constantly damaged" (male, general population).*



The local population is notable for hard work, resilience, and generosity. The impact of the full-scale war on the population of the community was both negative (changes in the mental state, partial marginalization of the population) and positive (increased cohesion of residents, active assistance to each other, joint participation in socially beneficial activities).

💡 *"Both endurance and morality. They did not lose heart. This is a great willpower that regenerates despite the fact that currently there is no work or financial support" (female, general population).*



The main residents of the community today are people of retirement age and mothers with children. **The main reasons for staying in the community** can be considered the attachment of residents to their own home and relatives and the availability of work/support for survival. Respondents also mentioned the presence of IDPs, military personnel, and people with disabilities in the community..



The estimated number of IDPs in the community is 5-20% of the existing population. The following reasons can be considered when choosing this community for IDP temporary residence: relative safety in the region, proximity to the native home (sometimes work at the place of previous residence), presence of acquaintances or relatives. **According to respondents, the absolute majority of IDPs plan to return to their previous place of residence after the end of the war.**



Respondents mentioned that approximately 50-60% of those who left the community, came back. These are the main motives for return: presence of relatives in the community, safety and financial issues as well as desire to participate in development of the native community. Respondents who temporarily left their native community similarly expressed a desire to return to the Chornobaivka community after the end of the war, or possibly even earlier.



The main conflicting issues in the community are just distribution of humanitarian aid and aid for reconstruction, presence of unpunished collaborators. Other causes for tension were mentioned in smaller quantity.

💡 *“People were very, let's say, spoiled by humanitarian aid. No matter how much you get, it's always not enough. As practice shows, neighbors are ready to rip each other's throat out. For example, one guy had only half of his house destroyed, while the other – completely destroyed housing. However, both of them get equal aid” (male, general population).*



Currently there's a **significant quantity of collaborators** and population loyal to Russia.

💡 *“You don't know who is a traitor and who is not in the village. There were many traitors who gave out Ukrainian positions. And now they change their ground and help the Armed Forces” (male, active population).*

💡 *“My mom personally suffered from fellow villagers who... I was in the military at that time and my mother was simply handed over to the Russians. They visited her and tortured. In the end, my mother is not able to walk to this day. These same fellow villagers live in the same area today, they just walk around and brazenly smile. Conflicts arise due to such situations” (female, general population).*

LOCAL NEWS SOURCES

Viber groups at the village level (usually moderated by village council employees) are **the main online sources of information** about local news for community residents. Community residents less than often named messengers and Facebook pages of the Chornobaivka community council. Oftentimes, the news from community-level sources is duplicated to village groups.



The Facebook page of the Kherson Regional State Administration, Viber and Facebook pages of rural educational and cultural institutions, Facebook pages of Chornobaivka UTC council departments, and web-based media are indicated much less often.

Popular offline sources of information are: “word of mouth”, printed announcements in crowded places, and headman’s office. A fewer respondents mentioned calls from their headman, meetings with village authorities, and the “Prydniprovska zirka” (Transdnieper star) district newspaper.



All respondents who temporarily left the community are interested in learning news and important information about the life of the Chornobaivka UTC. Most often, the sources of information for them are acquaintances and relatives.

INTERACTION BETWEEN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE COMMUNITY

TRUST TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND DYNAMIC CHANGE OF TRUST



After the occupation of the community's settlements, the population's attitude towards the local government has changed in some places. About half of the respondents spoke about unchanged mixed feelings towards local authorities, while others pointed to a decrease in trust. The reasons for the latter were: local authorities decreased their care for population during the occupation, suspicions of collaboration, suspicions and facts of authority abuse when it comes to distribution of humanitarian aid and reconstruction budgets.

“The attitude towards local authorities worsened due to actions that they took during the occupation or because they simply did nothing” (male, youth).



It was noted that trust in the authorities is growing in direct proportion to the implementation of reconstruction projects and existing response of the authorities to the current problems of the population, and active cooperation of the authorities with donors.

“When some organizations arrived after de-occupation, our authorities represented our village with dignity, they talked about needs and everything was done to ensure that people received some kind of humanitarian aid as soon as possible. Moreover, some funds were paid by international organizations and all that, but I didn't notice any drastic changes. Plus, the attitude remained the same” (male, general population).

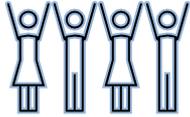


The main and almost the only topic of public meetings is housing reconstruction programs from various donors. The community's youth are the least aware of holding public meetings, not all informants have experience of participating in such meetings (the highest rate among community activists).

💡 *“For example, when destruction took place in the village and people did not know which program to use – “Plich o plich” (Side by side), “E-vidnovlennia” (E-recovery) – what documents to apply. The headman’s office held a meeting and they explained everything to the community. And then, representatives of “Plich o plich” (Side by side) and “E-vidnovlennia” (E-recovery) would come to answer any specific questions the population might have. Then we had a message on Viber that we gonna meet “Norwegian Refugee Council” or “the Red Cross”. So, we go attend such meetings and have talks with these organizations. They explain us how and what should we do to get help” (female, active population).*



The common opinion of the respondents is that **it is dangerous to hold public meetings at the moment.**



Respondents gave several examples of cases when the population of the community managed to influence the authority decisions or convey their opinion to the authorities. The majority of respondents are convinced that the local authorities don't listen to the requests and suggestions of the community population.

- Case 1. Parents wrote a letter to the head of Chornobaivka UTC with signatures and a demand to change the principal of the school in the village of Kyselivka. The principal was fired..
- Case 2. The appeal of an activist from the village of Kyselivka to the village headman regarding optimization of the queue for cash assistance.

 *"I personally appealed on behalf of these people who were standing there in a queue to the head of the village council, to the headman of our village. The community supported the initiative, authorities listened to us and everyone was grateful" (female, active population).*



The information provided by the local authorities is quite insignificant to the majority of respondents, others would like to have more information as to the following topics: plans for the reconstruction of villages and individual institutions, distribution of reconstruction budgets, information on how to register to assistance programs for population, changes in legislation.

“Know more about spending of funds that were allocated for our community. Having survived during occupation, it seems to me that people will no longer be silent and will ask questions. They want to know the details. We should know what, where, and how budget funds are spent. This is my personal opinion” (female, general population).



The main obstacles currently complicating communication between the local government and the population of the community are: time issue among population, issues of physical security during public meetings, population’s indifference, authorities having no desire to engage population in processes. Some young people indicated the inappropriate level of moderation of public meetings, and hence the low level of effectiveness of such meetings.

“Our village is 90% destroyed and the government only makes promises, spins the yarns. I’m in a constant argument with them. They keep on telling me to leave the office but why should I? I mean I have my opinion on all this stuff. I live here and fought for our country. But they still don't want to do a thing” (male, general population).

“Well, it's just a mess, a lot of people and everyone’s talking. No organization in terms of rational communication. People can't always come to an agreement with each other, so such meetings are not always effective” (male, youth).

EVALUATING SERVICES PROVISION IN THE COMMUNITY



After de-occupation of the village, communities returned to a more stable life, and in certain areas respondents saw development: opening shops/cafes, repairing institutions and damaged housing stock, return of residents who left the community, including children.

At the same time, respondents mentioned **downsides and problems in various spheres of daily life** of the community: problems with utility systems, heating, destruction of critical infrastructure and housing stock of the community, marginalization of population.

Respondents pointed out **some minor problems** in the: field of educational services, access to administrative services, cleanliness of public places, accessibility of cultural centers/parks, social care, access to psychological services.

Instead, **significant gaps are seen** in the: field of security, health care and access to medicines, opportunities for learning and recreation for children offline, opportunities for self-realization for adults.

Business and the labor market, as well as transport connections (transport routes, state of highways). The latter directly affects access to various services, which are currently characterized by low level of provision in the community.

PUBLIC ACTIVITY



Residents of the community settlements actively support the improvement of the villages – they are engaged in volunteer clean-up and housing repair.



Respondents are interested in participating in socially useful events – important for the community – and are ready to be active (the most popular):

- Volunteer or donate money/clothes/other items to good deeds.
- Attend meetings organized by local authorities, including online.
- Participate in events organized by civic organizations.
- Join activities of public and volunteer organizations (as a participant).

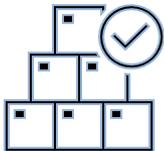


Respondents are not aware of civil society organizations that are permanently active on the territory of the community, including business communities. Activists mentioned that they want to register to the “Zhinky hromady” (Community women) CSO project.



Holding cultural events is untimely in the community – for ethical reasons, as well as security reasons. But all respondents stated the relevance of such events for different segments of the population: one may optionally consider some online events. Priority will be given to psychological trainings and relaxation classes on psychological topics for children and adults.

PARTICIPATING IN ACTIVITIES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE VICTORY OF UKRAINE



Community population (mostly women) actively participates in **various activities that contribute to the victory of Ukraine in the war**: fundraising upon requests of the Armed Forces, making clothes/bedding for the Armed Forces, weaving camouflage nets, cooking food for the Armed Forces, producing trench candles.

💡 *“People baked ducks. Others cooked gingerbread. Somebody brought good whatever they could find at home. Others brought vegetables. Overall, we managed to gather food and load the cargo vehicle with 5 tons of food. All this happened within 3-4 days. We’re not even counting how much food we’ve sent within the past year” (female, active population).*

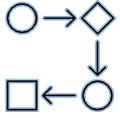
💡 *“Chornobaivka allocated 6 million in 2022 or 2023. And recently, 3 million has been allocated by the Chornobaivka community. I remember that we collected funds to...to purchase quadcopters” (male, general population).*



At the same time, survey respondents believe that **it is possible to increase the efforts of the community in order to speed up the victory of Ukraine in the war**. New activities are seen as: assembling and repair drones at home, population education (first medical aid using modern methods, military training, weapons ownership), car repair, assistance to families of military personnel.

💡 *“I would assemble drones. A lot of people keep saying that the process to assemble drones is now well-organized. I would do that for free if I could, if teach me how to do it. Maybe at home, or somewhere else, a room would be just enough. Yes, I would definitely assemble drones” (female, general population).*

PROSPECTS FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



When discussing potential **strategies for reconstruction and restoration of the community**, the majority highlighted several main directions:

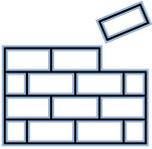
- Reconstruction of infrastructure (educational and medical institutions, administrative buildings, transport connections).
- Restoration of the economy (development of backbone enterprises, emphasis on the development of agribusiness, development of new production areas, development of small and medium-sized businesses, restoration of the airfield and military unit in Chornobaivka, development of the technology industry).
- Utility solutions (restoration of the affected housing stock (priority), restoration of utility systems in villages, optimization of landfills in villages, filling ponds with water, minimization of environmental disaster consequences caused by the explosion of the Kakhovska HPP).
- Development of culture/leisure and social direction (reconstruction of culture and leisure centers for children and adults in villages, development of sports facilities, playgrounds, park areas, conducting educational courses for the population, preservation of historical monuments, development of the social sphere).
- Security solutions (construction of shelters, demining of territories, road safety in villages with highways).



When discussing the two options for reconstruction – rapid reconstruction and gradual development, respondents mostly drifted toward the second one – improvement in various areas indicated above.

RECOVERY

NOTIONS AND PRIORITIES OF THE COMMUNITY RESTORATION



Currently, the absolute majority of survey respondents have, at best, a **relative notion of reconstruction plans** or current reconstructions being implemented in the community. Some of the respondents can name individual objects being restored and less often donors.



Reconstruction is possible only with the funds/investments of international donors and when security conditions are stable.

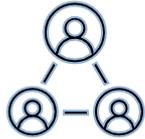


The absolute majority of respondents named schools as **the most important objects in the community that need to be restored after the end of the war**. Alternative opinions are the restoration of the economic sphere (providing jobs in the community) and the repair of the housing sector.

💡 "Educational institutions need to operate. Let's say, a person from the working population needs to go to work and they need their children to study somewhere, right? They want their kids to be in a safe place so that they may not worry and make a living" (male, general population).

💡 "Enterprises provide jobs so that people work and pay taxes, which then go to the city council. They can also try to help repair machinery for the farmers here. Repaired machinery leads to planted fields" (female, general population).

ENGAGING COMMUNITY POPULATION IN RECONSTRUCTION PROCESSES



Most respondents believe that population can be involved in reconstruction processes in various ways. The most popular are the following: execution of construction works, submission of proposals, monitoring/control of the reconstruction budget. These are the moderately popular ways of involvement: monitoring the course of reconstruction work, participation in discussions about restoration, coordination and fundraising. The desire of the respondents to participate in the specified processes is often equivalent to the popularity of the given activity.

💡 *“100%, I support and the taxpayer must check how the government spends every single penny” (female, general population).*

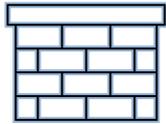


Respondents mentioned that **it is more reasonable to organize the population’s participation with the help of some advisory body** or residents' union that has necessary professional knowledge, or even create a local CSO that will perform anti-corruption or supervisory functions in the processes of community restoration.

💡 *“We can create an organization, a public controller, and engage employees who understand finances and can oversee the process on behalf of the community. I would simply like a report, for example, of how budget funds of the village council or Chornobaivka community are spent. We’re part of the community. Do we have any rights here? How much money is currently coming to our community? How much money our community spends? We know that many organizations are coming to our community – both Norwegians and some other – and it’s crucial to be aware of their budget funds. I would definitely like to know all this information. We definitely need to put some efforts and establish a control organization or group of people with required experience” (female, active population).*

OBSTACLES TO RESTORATION

Apart from the lack of professional knowledge, respondents reviewed other **obstacles** that prevent the population from engagement in restoration processes:



- lack of free time
- passivity of authorities and population
- no organizers
- lack of trust in effectiveness of dialog and so on

💡 *"We simply don't have enough time. Everyone needs to do some work, think so. When you have a family, then you've got even less free time. That's from the woman's point of view" (female, general population).*

💡 *"The main part of the population is pensioners. It is sometimes difficult to establish smooth communication with them, or you have to explain everything for too long and you still can't explain anything, and then you may hear some complaints. There is no guarantee of any favorable relationship" (male, youth).*

💡 *"I believe things are gonna be better for us here in the village compared to the past. We're still alive and hope for good things ahead. We'll get some nice pond, wonderful entertainment center, and bomb shelters. We have strong hopes and believe that our village will do good" (female, general population).*