



Measuring the Development Impact of Provincial Reconstruction Teams

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Comprehensive Information on Complex Crises

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*This report examines the extent to which and how PRTs in Afghanistan measure the impact of their work on local development. Additional information on this topic is available at www.cimicweb.org. **Hyperlinks to source material are highlighted in blue and underlined in the text.***

This report was initially intended to comprise a [meta-evaluation](#) of the economic impact of NATO Provincial Reconstruction Teams ([PRTs](#)) operating under the International Security Assistance Force ([ISAF](#)) in Afghanistan. PRTs are [civil-military organisations](#), commonly under military lead with civilian advisers, which are responsible for a range of tasks which commonly include protecting the population and undertaking reconstruction and development initiatives of varying types and scales.¹ By consolidating the data and findings of several rigorous evaluations, the report would have provided an evidence-based portrait concerning how PRTs have impacted the economic conditions of local populations in their areas of responsibility. Yet an intensive search for publicly-available PRT evaluations or impact assessments did not yield evidence-based reports.² Next, the search criteria was expanded to include research studies (rather than strictly evaluations) concerning PRT impact. However, no empirical, evidence-based study could be located. Rather assessments and studies, such as one by Michael J. McNerney in the journal *Parameters*, tended to [evaluate the concept of PRTs](#) and civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) rather than their impact upon either development or stability. In those instances in which reports attempted to gauge impact, “evidence is anecdotal and not based on a comprehensive-outcomes or cost-benefit analysis”, to quote [a 2008 study](#) undertaken by a team from [Princeton University](#).

To The Reader: *This report addresses how PRTs measure the success of their reconstruction and development assistance in Afghanistan. The following pages attempt to capture general trends based on the open source materials available to the CFC but likely lack recent and un-reported efforts being taken by individual PRTs and others. It is the author's hope that this report will spur PRTs and others to provide further information and share good practices concerning impact measurement which the CFC may consolidate and share with civil and military stakeholders in Afghanistan and elsewhere.*

Accordingly, this report was re-focused to examine how PRTs measure their impact and what room may exist for improving their metrics and methods. As with all publications from the Civil-Military Fusion Centre ([CFC](#)), this report is based upon public, open-source documents and does not preclude the possibility that PRTs, embassies, foreign ministries or others may produce evidence-based, rigorous monitoring or evaluation reports which are not releasable to the public. For instance, in 2009 the US Army War College's [Strategic Studies Institute](#) published

¹ Any singular definition of a PRT is difficult given the wide degree of heterogeneity among the various PRTs currently in Afghanistan and formerly in Iraq. In addition, the conceptualisation and operationalisation of PRTs has evolved across time.

² This review included standard web-based searches as well as specific searches of websites and databases maintained by the US government's Congressional Research Service ([CRS](#)) and Government Accountability Office ([GAO](#)), the US military's Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction ([SIGAR](#)), the [NATO e-library](#), the website of the International Security Assistance Force ([ISAF](#)), [ReliefWeb](#), various research centres and think tanks and other sources.



a report entitled “[Provincial Reconstruction Teams: How Do We Know They Work?](#)” This report indicates that its findings are based upon carefully collected data but that findings may only be provided in a rather general narrative format given that the underlying data, particularly related to PRTs’ impact on security, is classified.

Measuring Impact: Key Terms & Concepts

A range of terms is commonly used when discussing the measurement of impact. In the case of PRTs, actors are often impelled to resolve differing definitions. For the purpose of this paper, the following definitions are utilised:

Verification: Checking the provision of assistance to ensure that what was supposed to have been provided was provided. Verification is focused upon inputs and may comprise one aspect of an audit.

Monitoring: Measures progress towards a goal or objective. Unlike verification, monitoring is not concerned with counting or checking what was done (e.g., how many classrooms were built and to what level of quality). Rather, it is focused upon measuring what has been achieved (e.g., how has school enrolment changed as a result of a newly built school).

Evaluation: Measuring how a situation has changed in intended, unintended, positive and negative ways as a result of assistance. Evaluations are based upon counterfactuals (e.g., baselines or control groups) which allow for the measurement of change between the pre-intervention and post-intervention situation/context. To continue the school-building example from above, an evaluation might build upon data concerning school enrolment or attendance and also seek information about the underlying of longer-term impacts. These may include changes in learning outcomes (i.e., are students’ measures of performance better as a result of the school) and in community members’ attitudes towards insurgents and/or the government (i.e., whether they are more or less favourable).

Source: *Adapted from a range of sources, including UNDP, [Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results](#) (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2009) and NATO, [Operations Assessment Handbook, Interim Version 1.0](#) (Brussels: NATO Supreme Allied Command Europe, 2011).*

The State of PRT Monitoring & Evaluation

Among the documents reviewed in preparing this report, one commonality was found – a tendency to note and critique the limited attention which PRTs had paid to the results of their interventions. As stated early on in [a 2004 report](#) by [Save the Children](#), an international non-governmental organisation (NGO), “[t]here does not appear to have been any attempt by US/Coalition forces” to establish metrics of success “across the main areas of activity of the PRT”. As Save the Children noted, this lack of attention to understanding the impact and effectiveness of programmes contradicts the US Army’s Field Manual on “Operations” ([FM 3-0](#)), which instructs commanders to develop and implement “measures of effectiveness and measures of performance”.³ Similar comments were also found in a 2008 “[note from the field](#)” from the United States Agency for International Development ([USAID](#)) that stated “[t]he Afghanistan PRTs continue to operate [without a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system]”. Furthermore, a December [2009 paper](#) published in a US National Defense University ([NDU](#)) journal noted that “PRTs often struggle to establish metrics for progress”. No single evaluation or study of PRTs located by the author provided quantitative or structured qualitative evidence on how PRTs had improved access to education or medical care, impacted household incomes, reduced child mortality, improved security or had any other direct impact.⁴ Where impact is described, it is unclear to what extent the findings are supported by evidence.

³ The Save the Children report pertained to the June 2011 edition of FM 3-0, which was replaced in June 2008 by an updated edition. The complete text of the 2001 edition no longer appears to be public available.

⁴ It should be noted, however, that two separate studies of the PRT in Mazar-e Sharif did provide markedly greater depth of analysis than other reviews of PRT progress. These include the following: (i) Jonathan Goodhand with Paul Bergne, “[Evaluation of the Conflict Prevention Pools: Afghanistan](#)” (London: Department for International Development, 2004) and, in particular, (ii) David Harriman and Helené Lackenbauer, “[Assessment of progress](#) in multifunctional and multinational operations: Swedish experiences from the operational and tactical level in Afghanistan” (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2010).



Reports suggest that improving the measurement of PRTs' effectiveness and impact has remained a priority. The US military's Special Inspector General For Iraq Reconstruction ([SIGIR](#)) noted in 2009 that Iraqi PRTs had begun to [more effectively measure](#) progress in their areas of responsibility. However, the SIGIR report notes that assessments are primarily applied to Iraqi government institutions – as measures of their capability – rather than to the contributions of the PRTs. Furthermore, it outlines a “Maturity Model” of impact measurement in which PRT personnel themselves characterise the performance of Iraqi government institutions as one of the following: beginning, developing, sustaining, performing or self-reliant. Such an approach proved useful, according to SIGIR, but did not necessarily involve specific or independent assessments of the work and assistance provided by the PRTs.

Obstacles to PRT Monitoring & Evaluation in Afghanistan

Available research does not state that the lack of monitoring and evaluation within PRTs is a matter of will or that PRTs have consciously chosen to pay little heed to their impact. Rather, a range of factors inhibit more effective monitoring and evaluation within PRTs according to a number of research studies discussed below.

First, a recent publication of the US Air Command and Staff College ([ACSC](#)), entitled “Gauging Provincial Reconstruction Team Effectiveness” noted, the [evolving scope and nature of the PRTs](#) has provided an obstacle to measuring the effectiveness of their projects more fully. Initially intended as vehicles for short-term, quick-impact projects ([QIPs](#)), PRTs gradually came to encompass larger-scale, higher-value and longer-term reconstruction and development functions pertaining not only to infrastructure rehabilitation but also to governance and public administration. Given their narrow and short-term initial scope, tools for measuring the mid-to-long-term impacts of PRT's effectiveness were not developed at that time. As their scope grew, corrective measures, such as developing new monitoring and evaluation frameworks and tools were not taken, according to the ACSC report.

Second, while militaries and civilian agencies commonly have internal monitoring and evaluation systems and toolkits, often elaborate ones according to a brief USAID report on “[Civil-Military Cooperation in Micro-Enterprise Development](#)”, it is not clear how they would or should be combined in the case of PRTs with their dual civilian and military contingents. As the report notes, should PRTs utilise one of the following: more “strategic” or security-minded metrics common within the military; the developmental metrics common within civilian agencies; a combination of both systems; or establish a new approach? In addition, it remains unclear “who” has the responsibility for answering such a question – NATO, ISAF, PRT host nation governments, national aid agencies (e.g., USAID), multilateral institutions or others?

Third, high turnover rates for civilian and military personnel in conflict have posed a challenge, according to a 2007 report, “[Side by Side or Together? Working for Security, Development and Peace in Afghanistan and Liberia](#)”. When personnel change frequently, those who designed, managed or implemented a PRT project may no longer be available to ensure that its impact is carefully measured. The high level of turnover and its adverse implications for PRTs is a well-documented research subject. For instance, [a 2009 study](#) by the Bonn International Centre for Conversion ([BICC](#)), entitled “The Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: Role model for civil-military relations?”, noted that members of German PRTs were, at the time, commonly in theatre for between three and six months before rotating to a different position. Similarly, a 2011 [US Army "PRT Handbook"](#) notes that American personnel commonly rotate through PRTs every nine to 12 months. Such timelines do not correspond to the emergence of development impacts upon student learning, health conditions or crop yields, which may take more than a year to become apparent.⁵

⁵ For instance, it may take a year or longer to understand if a newly built school results in sustained increases in student attendance and female school enrolment and several years and major assessments to determine whether the new school leads to improved student performance. Agricultural projects may require one or, more likely, several years to have a visible impact. Likewise, health records for several years before and after the intervention may be needed to compare local conditions before and after a medical clinic or potable water source was built.



Fourth, insecurity has been cited by reports as a factor that may prevent or limit the potential for PRTs to conduct regular, in-person monitoring and evaluation visits to project locations and surrounding communities. As an article from the United States Institute of Peace ([USIP](#)) noted in March of this year, [insecurity in places such as Afghanistan](#) prevents personnel, particularly foreign military and civilian personnel, from engaging in data collection. Partner organisations, including [private companies](#), are increasingly being employed to conduct monitoring and evaluation activities, and [mobile phone-based monitoring systems](#) are regularly being developed and proposed. A number of programmes have sought to increase means through which development projects can be monitored and evaluated despite the limitations posed by conflict contexts. (See Annex A for a list of reports which touch upon this topic.)

Fifth, the extent of strategic and policy guidance on the monitoring and evaluation of PRT activities has, at times, been sparse. The fourth edition of the [ISAF PRT Handbook](#), published in 2009, dedicates approximately one out of the 317 pages to monitoring and evaluation of PRT activities. The *Handbook* stresses the importance of identifying indicators to measure outputs and impacts but suggests that “information collection can quickly overwhelm PRT teams and should not keep the teams from performing their primary functions”. PRTs are advised to build upon provincial-level data collected by embassies, NGOs, international organisations, Afghan government agencies and others when attempting to gauge their impacts. The document does not recognise the inability of national or provincial data to reflect the effectiveness or impact of individual, local PRT projects.⁶ Such issues are increasingly being addressed in the [NATO Operations Assessment Handbook](#), which continues to be revised and developed within NATO. However, this document does not specifically refer to the unique situation of PRT development projects and includes a primary focus on high-level strategic assessments (alongside a description of generic data collection and analysis methods). Toolkits, manuals or other implementation-ready materials for monitoring and evaluating PRT assistance projects in Afghanistan do not appear to have been developed at this point in time, more than eight years after PRTs were first introduced in Afghanistan.

Why Monitoring & Evaluation Matters to PRTs

Despite the aforementioned impediments to monitoring and evaluation within PRTs, measuring impact remains a critical task for humanitarian, reconstruction, stabilisation and development actors. The UK [Stabilisation Unit’s](#) “lessons learnt” publication provides a [concise description](#) of how monitoring and evaluation relates to the sorts of civil-military stabilisation activities being undertaken by PRTs. The Stabilisation Unit document specifically notes that:

- Monitoring and evaluation allow stabilisation actors to determine if their activities are effectively and efficiently achieving both the tactical/programmatic and strategic objectives of the intervention. In other words, are the interventions achieving what they are expected to achieve (e.g., improving living conditions and legitimising state institutions)?
- Monitoring and evaluation help to identify gaps and flaws in the overall stabilisation strategy/plan, an outcome which is particularly important given that stabilisation environments are highly dynamic. Monitoring local-level stabilisation activities may provide valuable insights into the overall relevance and effectiveness of the strategy.
- Monitoring and evaluation allow stabilisation actors to learn from their past experience in order to improve their future interventions in that same context or elsewhere.

⁶ For instance, as one can see in the Afghanistan Provincial Indicators ([API](#)) resource, several measures of development progress are gathered only one time every three years or even less frequently by international organizations or Afghan government agencies.



In addition, monitoring and evaluation helps to provide accountability to donor governments. For instance, the United States had distributed [USD 2.64 billion](#) as of 30 September 2010 through its Commander's Emergency Response Programme (CERP), which commonly finances PRT activities, according to [SIGAR](#). Evaluations may demonstrate what effect this funding has had upon local populations' living conditions and can help policymakers to make better-informed decisions about how to finance future reconstruction in Afghanistan.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, monitoring and evaluation serve as a crucial form of [communication with local communities](#), according to a volume, *Knowledge Shared*, edited by Edward T. Jackson and Yusuf Kassam. While such communication is considered important in all developing country contexts, it is fundamental to the success of stabilisation missions and the specific activities undertaken by PRTs. The study goes on to note that, conducting an objective and in-depth evaluation of a particular project indicates that a PRT is concerned with the effect that its assistance has upon the local population. In doing so, it also demonstrates the PRTs are "[learning organisations](#)" which are striving to improve the quality of assistance they provide. Evaluations provide a unique opportunity for PRTs to deepen or establish trust with local communities and to signal a break with any past projects, personnel or practices which may have been locally unpopular.

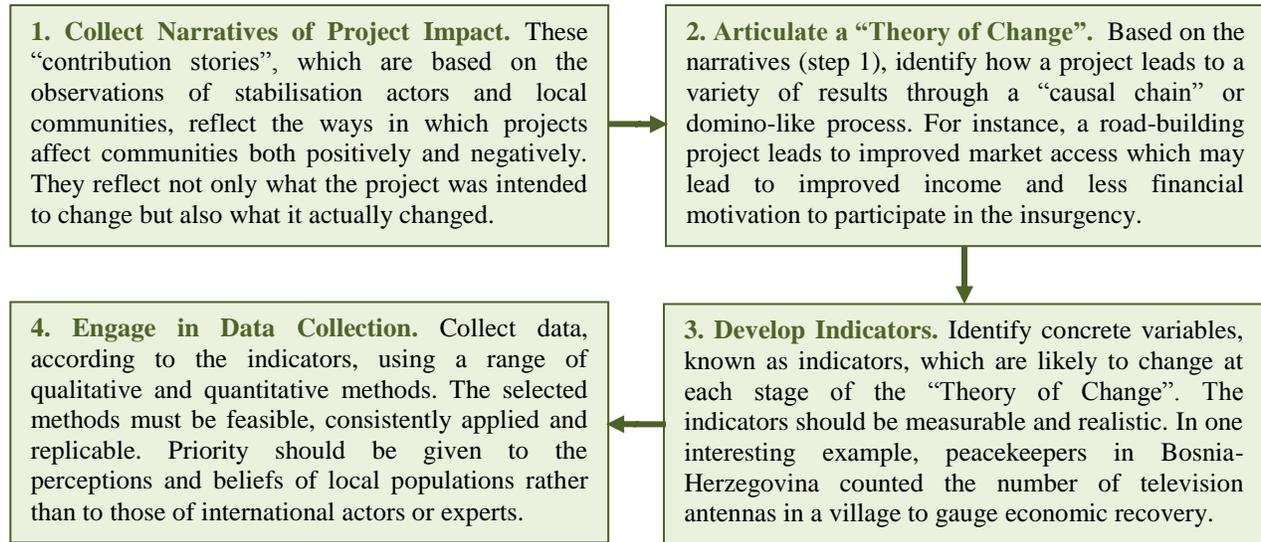
Options for Improving monitoring and evaluation within PRTs

This report highlights the importance of developing a more systematic and mandatory means of measuring the impact of PRTs' work; a great deal of work is being done to strengthen metrics – particularly those related to security, stability and other COIN objectives – for civil-military and stability operations. While many such efforts are not publicly available, one of the most recent has been produced by the [RAND Corporation](#) on behalf of UK Stabilisation Unit.⁷ The [RAND publication](#) differs from the traditional metrics of the development community, which focus upon improvements in well-being, and those of the COIN actors and security services, which concentrate on reducing insurgent attacks. Rather, RAND adopts a focus on "beliefs and behaviour" which involves monitoring not only the technical outcomes of a project but also how the project affected those attitudes among local communities which may be viewed as particularly relevant to stability objectives.

For instance, when monitoring and evaluating the impact of a school-building project, RAND indicates that the following should likely be considered: "whether they produce measurable and sustained changes in beliefs and perceptions such as reduction in perceptions of corruption, exclusion or impunity, especially on the part of politically relevant individuals and groups". Here the issue is not simply whether local populations are more supportive of the government as a result of the project, but rather how the project has affected their broader perceptions regarding key elements of governance such as corruption, inclusion and equity. While the RAND document is not a manual or handbook, it does suggest a series of steps which stabilisation actors such as PRTs, may take in designing and deploying a monitoring and evaluation system. A simplified portrait of the planning process recommended by RAND is presented below (Figure 1).

⁷ See Christian van Stolk, Tom Ling, Anaïs Reding and Matt Bassford, [Monitoring and evaluation in stabilisation interventions: Reviewing the state of the art and suggesting ways forward](#), *Technical Report* (Cambridge and London: RAND Europe and the Stabilisation Unit, 2011).

Figure I. Planning Evaluations & Collecting Data in Stabilisation Contexts



Source: Developed by the author based on Christian van Stolk, Tom Ling, Anaïs Reding and Matt Bassford, [Monitoring and evaluation in stabilisation interventions](#); Reviewing the state of the art and suggesting ways forward, Technical Report (Cambridge and London: RAND Europe and the Stabilisation Unit, 2011).

Steps, such as those noted above, can provide a useful means of measuring the impact of PRT activities upon social and economic conditions as well as upon local populations’ attitudes towards the Afghan government and international actors. However, as stated at the outset of this report, innovative means of measuring and analysing impacts have likely been developed by PRTs yet not publicly shared. The CFC looks forward to receiving information on such efforts so that it can be shared with civilian and military stakeholders in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

The Civil Military Fusion Centre (CFC) is an Information and Knowledge Management organisation focused on improving civil-military interaction, facilitating information sharing and enhancing situational awareness through the web portal, [CimicWeb](#). CFC products are developed with open-source information from governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations, international organisations, academic institutions, media sources and military organisations. By design, CFC products or links to open sourced and independently produced articles do not necessarily represent the opinions, views or official positions of any other organisation.



Annex A. Additional Resources

The documents below include assessments regarding the state of impact measurement within PRTs. Readers may access these documents, some of which are large PDF files, by clicking on the hyperlinked names of the publications' authors.

- [Eronen, Oskari](#). 2008. *PRT Models in Afghanistan: Approaches to Civil-Military Integration*. Cuopio: Crisis Management Centre (CMC) Finland.
- [Harriman, David and Helené Lackenbauer](#). 2010. *Assessment of progress in multifunctional and multinational operations: Swedish experiences from the operational and tactical level in Afghanistan*. Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency.
- [Malkasian, Carter and Gerald Meyerle](#). 2009. *Provincial Reconstruction Teams: How Do We Know They Work*. Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute.
- [Save the Children](#). 2004. *Provincial Reconstruction Teams and Humanitarian–Military Relations in Afghanistan*. London: Save the Children.
- [Stabilisation Unit](#). 2010. *Responding to Stabilisation Challenges in Hostile and Insecure Environments: Lessons Identified by the UK's Stabilisation Unit*. London: Stabilisation Unit, November.

The materials listed below provide guidance on monitoring and evaluation for development and governance interventions in complex and insecure environments such as Afghanistan.

- [Cohen, Craig](#). 2006. *Measuring Progress in Stabilisation and Reconstruction*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.
- [De Coning, C. and P. Romita](#). 2009. *Monitoring and Evaluation of Peace Operations*. New York: International Peace Institute.
- [van Stolk, Christian, Tom Ling, Anaïs Reding and Matt Bassford](#). 2011. *Monitoring and evaluation in stabilisation interventions: Reviewing the state of the art and suggesting ways forward*. Cambridge: RAND Europe for the UK Stabilisation Unit.
- [USAID](#). 2006. *Monitoring and Evaluation in Post-Conflict Settings*. Washington, DC: United States Agency for International Development.

Annex B. Locations of PRTs in Afghanistan

The ISAF “placemat” below, which is current as of 16 May 2011, identifies the locations of and lead nations for each of the PRTs in Afghanistan. The flags on the map signify the lead nation(s) for the PRT in each province.

