

Voices of Afghanistan: an Evaluation Study

by Seema Patel



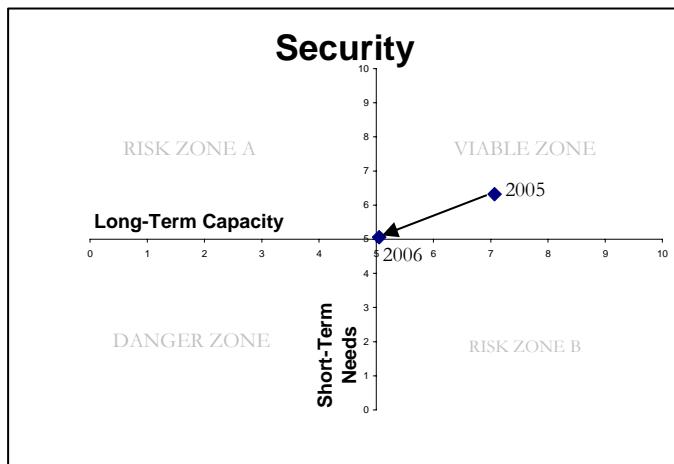
Afghans are less hopeful today than they [were a year ago](#). The state-building mission has lost ground, and is slipping further into the “danger zone”. These are the initial findings and first impressions of Measures of Progress 2006, a study being conducted by the PCR Project, to evaluate the impact that reconstruction efforts have had on the average Afghan.

To this end, six Afghan interviewers (three men and three women), trained in social science research, conducted 1,000 qualitative interviews over a six-week period covering the five pillars of reconstruction: security, governance, justice, economic opportunity, and social well-being. The interviewers covered thirteen provinces—encompassing all five regions of Afghanistan—and captured a balanced sampling of ethnic groups.

The research and analysis focused on the tension between meeting the immediate needs and interests of Afghans, and building a foundation for the establishment of long-term capacity within the Afghan state and society. Delivering on both can help Afghanistan reach the “viable zone” at which point progress is likely to continue with only minimal external aid. Reaching the “viable zone,” however, is no guarantee of success—experience in numerous post-conflict states demonstrate that unless international efforts are continuously making headway in both meeting short-term

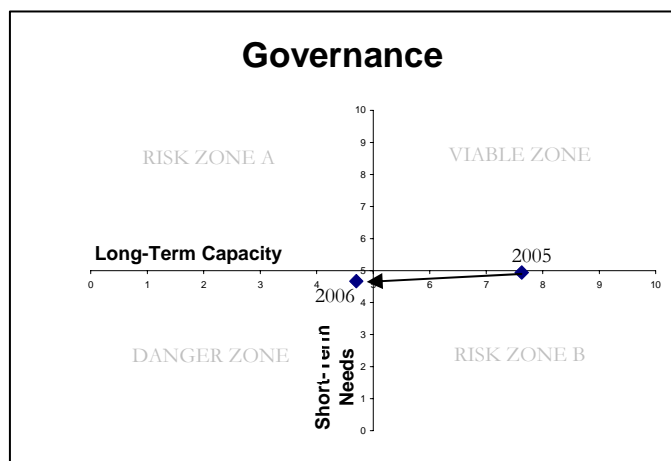
needs and building long-term capacity, successes may quickly turn into failures.

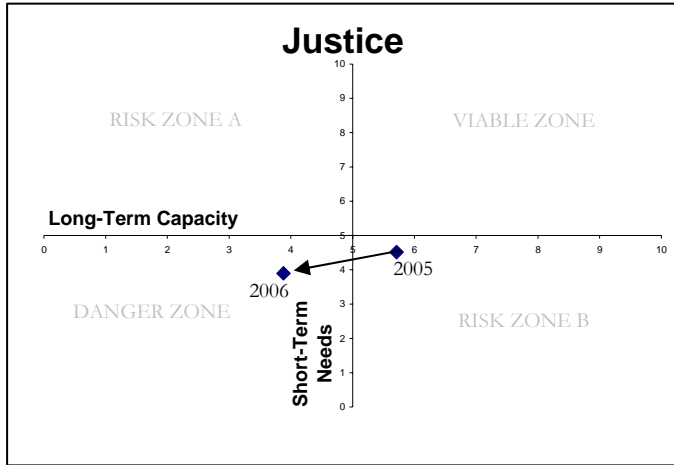
What changes have the Afghans experienced in each of the five pillars since the last Measure of Progress study in 2005?



Security – The security sector shows the most dramatic decline. Capacity is being built in the Afghan National Army and people continue to have confidence that “in the future, with an increase in the national army there will be 100% security in our country” (Balkh). Last year, efforts to stabilize and secure the country were seen as a success. Today, however, Afghans feel less safe than they did a year ago. “Where is security? Everywhere there are explosions that kill poor and helpless people” (Kandahar).

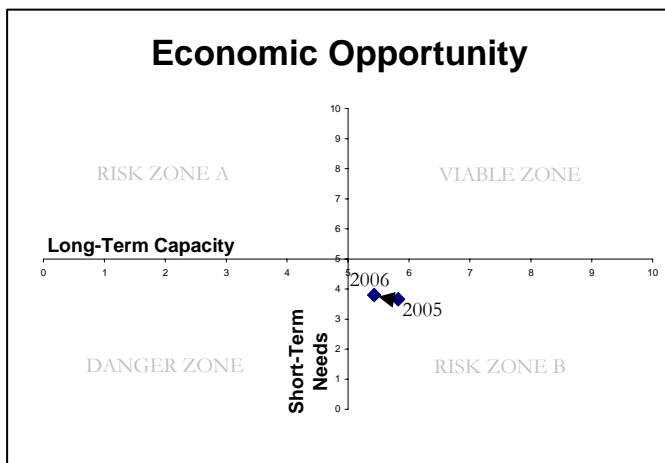
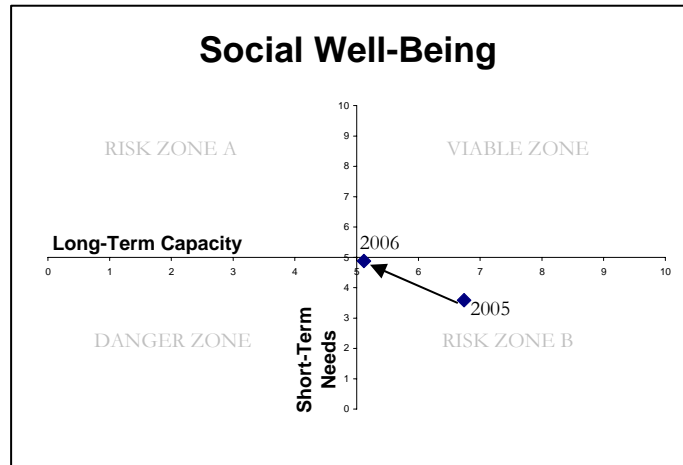
Governance – Governance has fallen into the danger zone this year, mostly because Afghans perceive the government to be losing credibility and capacity. Access continues to be a problem – “Nobody hears our concerns and we cannot tell anyone either” (Balkh). Afghans “trust the law but do not trust those who implement the law” (Kabul) often because “decisions are taken by warlords and powerful people; whatever they want, they do” (Nangahar). Afghans see the corruption and nepotism in their government increase, and feel that it has undermined the government’s capacity to meet their needs in the long-term.





Justice – The justice sector, the worst-performing sector last year, has slid even further this year. Afghans are extremely disenchanted with the justice system. Corruption—“no dispute is decided without bribery” (Kabul)—and impunity—“whoever has money or power wins the case without any consideration of justice” (Nangarhar)—are rampant.

Social Well-Being – While long-term capacity building in this sector has slipped, short-term needs are being met more effectively than last year. Many of those in Kabul and provincial centers reported that schools and clinics have been built. However, the sustainability of these services continues to be a problem. “We have clinic but no medicines. We have school but no professional teachers and study materials” (Kandahar). Afghans still yearn for increased investment in infrastructure, particularly in electricity. “The government before anything else should provide people with electricity” (Nangarhar).



Economic Opportunity – Economic Opportunity is the sector with the least change from last year. In the short-term, many Afghans are still having a difficult time making ends meet – “My income is such that it keeps me alive but it is not sufficient for my family’s needs” (Kabul). Afghans continue to require jobs and income-earning opportunities to survive, but without significant investment in infrastructure in power, irrigation and roads, the long-term prospect for economic growth and development remain uncertain.

CSIS Analysis

The legitimacy of the rebuilding mission seems to be waning. From the government to the international donors and NGOs to the military, almost everyone is being criticized for the way business is getting done. The Taliban are gaining power in the South and are competing with the local governments for legitimacy and power. The international community has reduced its development assistance and NGOs are increasingly reluctant to work in the insecure South for fear of being targeted. Afghans are running out of patience at a time when it is most required.

Afghan expectations have not been adequately managed. It is no longer sufficient for lives to be better than they were during the Taliban or the years of civil war, people are looking for a change that matches the level of resources that have come into the country. The sentiment heard most often across the country is: "It has been 5 years since the international community entered Afghanistan and billions of dollars have been spent. Where has this money gone?" Of the total money spent by the international community in the last 5 years, \$82.5 billion was spent on military operations. Of the relatively scant \$7.3 billion spent on reconstruction, the majority went to salaries for the Afghan national forces and counter-narcotics efforts. Only a fraction of the total is going to projects that directly benefit ordinary Afghans. This is compounded by the inability of the government to spend even 50% of its development budget on projects for Afghans.

Afghans should be able to see the benefits that come with cooperation with the government. All communities have different priorities, different levels of support for the government, and different experiences with reconstruction. Countrywide strategies that are not tailored to match the diversity of needs and priorities Afghans have in different localities are at best wasteful and at worst counter-productive. It is critical that programming is provincially balanced, focusing not only on the places with the greatest problems, but also on provinces that are less accessible, but still stable, and the places where support for the government and its initiatives is high.

Gains have been made in education, communication, government processes, institutional capacity, roads, and the private sector. Yet, the big issues from the beginning of the intervention remain: how to manage warlords and continued impunity, how to decrease poppy and drug trafficking, how to stop support for the Taliban, how to deliver electricity and revitalize the judiciary, and how to provide economic development in areas with limited access and infrastructure and serious security constraints.

The goodwill of the Afghan people towards the international community and their struggling government has not yet been squandered. However, expectations need to be realigned to the realities and complexity of the reconstruction mission. The international community should realize that Afghanistan is at a tipping point. If assistance is not targeted to help the government meet the needs of ordinary Afghans, the mission will fail.

For more information about our initial findings, listen to the event held at CSIS on September 26, 2006, [Impressions of Afghanistan](#).

For more information on the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project's work on Afghanistan or receive updates, visit us on the web at: <http://pcrproject.com/projects/afghanistan/>