



'The Power(lessness) of Evaluation: The Case of Afghanistan'

A Review

Alina Rocha Menocal

September 2021

Ofir, Z. (2021). [The Power\(lessness\) of Evaluation: The case of Afghanistan](#), Blog in *The Big Picture*

A Review by Alina Rocha Menocal, Director of the Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice

What has happened in Afghanistan is likely to be a critical juncture for international development well beyond Afghanistan itself. There are searching questions about the importance, value and relevance of international efforts to promote state-building, peace-building and development and governance more broadly that the situation in Afghanistan has thrown into high relief. There is a simple narrative emerging around 20 years of intervention, trillions of dollars, and very little to show for it, but the reality is that things are much more complex.

This blog by Zenda Ofir on "[The Power\(lessness\) of Evaluation: The case of Afghanistan](#)" is essential reading. It highlights lessons from Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction from their August 2020 Report that highlight why "thinking & working politically" principles are so fundamental to development.

Among the Report's key messages:

- It is essential to understand context (!) and start from there, and not impose agendas and narratives from the outside
- Being strategic requires flexibility & adaptability
- Institutions are fundamental to development (again ... !)
- People with needed resources – namely in terms of skills, networks, local knowledge, and time – are indispensable
- Long term engagement over 20 years is not the same as engagement on short-term projects (1-3 years) over 20 years
- The fixation with quick and tangible results "to show that things are being done" can lead to perverse incentives to spend and bean count rather than focus on substantive and sustainable change.

These are all lessons that we know well, but as we also know, they have proven extraordinarily hard to get traction on the ground. In the case of Afghanistan, as the author of the blog argues, this has been to devastating effect.

About the Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice

The Thinking and working Politically Community of Practice (TWP CoP) is a global network of practitioners, researchers and policymakers in development and global affairs committed to promoting more effective policy and practice. The TWP CoP works to foster more politically aware approaches to understand how change happens and why, translate findings and implications emerging from political economy analysis into operationally relevant guidance, encourage more flexible and adaptable ways of working, and provide evidence-based insights that can stimulate innovation, sharing and learning in international development and global affairs.

The TWP CoP is funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and hosted by the International Development Department at University of Birmingham.

Visit our website:

<https://twpcommunity.org/>

Subscribe to our Newsletter:

<https://twpcop.substack.com/>

Get in touch:

Email: info@twpcommunity.org

Bluesky: [@twpcommunity.org](https://bsky.app/profile/@twpcommunity.org)

LinkedIn: [Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice](https://www.linkedin.com/company/thinking-and-working-politically-community-of-practice)

