Study for NATO ACT Innovation Hub
Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India
March, 2017

Focus Group Study

Two focus group interviews were conducted at the Karyavattom campus of the University of Kerala, India.
The first was with students who were doing a Masters in Technology and the second with faculty of the Department of Future Studies at the same University.

The objectives of the focus groups were as follows
     1) To understand perceptions of NATO.
     2) To understand the implications of the word stability
     3) To learn about determinants of stability and instability.
     4) To explore the cultural dimensions of stability.

Methodology

The objectives and questions were suggested by the Innovation Hub team but were then modified to be adapted to India. Subjects were recruited through a contact at the University of Kerala, Mr. Sanal Kumar, who recruited the participants.

Focus Groups

There were 8 subjects for the first focus group. These were students who were studying for Masters in Technology at University of Kerala at Karyavattom Campus. The ages of the students ranged from 23-27 with 5 females and 3 males in the sample.

The second focus group included Faculty Staff members from the Department of Future Studies at University of Kerala. The ages of this group ranged from 29 to 58. The respondents were one female and four males. The discussion for the faculty group was predominantly in English (more than 95%). The student discussions were somewhat equally split between English and Malayalam. All participants and moderator were bilingual.

Background

Karyavattom is in Thuruvananthapuram District. Thiruvananthapuram is the capital and largest city in the state of Kerala. Kerala is a coastal state in South India. Kerala is the thirteenth-largest state in India by population. Kerala is divided into 14 districts. Malayalam is the most widely spoken language and is also the official language of the state. Kerala is the state with the highest literacy and Human Development Index (a composite statistic of life expectancy,

education, and per capita income indicators) rates in India. The state has the highest media exposure in India with newspapers publishing in nine languages, mainly English and Malayalam. Kerala is one of the prominent tourist destinations of India, with backwaters, beaches, Ayurvedic tourism and tropical greenery as its major attractions.

Source: http://www.mapsofindia.com/kerala/

Focus Group Discussion Summary

There were a lot of similarities in the information from both the groups about stability and its implications. **Stability was discussed as related to political process and elections by both the groups.** Differences were observed about stability for Kerala as opposed to rest of India.

There were differences in their awareness and understanding of NATO. The Staff Faculty Group was well aware of NATO while the Student Group did not know much about it.

	Student Group	Faculty Group
Questions related to NATO	This group was not well aware of NATO. No one could recollect what NATO was on free recall. One recalled NATO as an organization related to Nature protection or preservation of Environment. There was one mention of NATO as a trade organization. NATO is not seen as involved in Asia and its core task are not known, some suggested NATO should do more for the refugee problems in the world. Two people discussed that NATO should involve itself in green energy and environmentally friendly initiatives.	This group was very knowledgeable about NATO, presenting it as a collective defense and cooperative security organization, involved in 'policing' of many places in the world. The relevance of NATO after the Cold War was significantly discussed. Questions were raised about "stability of NATO" and reason for "existence of NATO". There were mentions of recent discussion in the media about "NATO being a burden to USA". There was mention of NATO being more often in the news in India more than 20 years ago. The group eventually felt NATO should involve itself more for peace and stability all over the world.
What does stability mean to you?	This group discussed several issues that affected stability. • Social concerns Concern for safety of women and reports of rapes in India were a concern raised by a few. The increasing suicide rate is seen as well as a potential sign of instability. • Economic The income disparity was also mentioned as another reason for lack of stability. Development was pointed out as characteristic of stability. Stability was also mentioned from the perspective of NRI (Non Resident Indian), especially in the Middle East.	This group discussed stability from different perspectives. One by one different subjects contributed to what is meant by stability. They stated that stability could be related to: • Military interventions, • Economy, • Security (terrorism), • Health, • Education, • Income disparities. The political instability was significantly discussed. The constant political alternation since 1982 was discussed as to whether it should be considered as a source of stability or not. They concluded that the democratic process is a real factor of stability, despite rampant corruption. They also discussed the process of decentralization as contribution to stability, even this process has not been fully implemented.
What is undermining stability in India?	• Social: The increase in "self-oriented functioning of the society" was mentioned as a reason for concern about the well-being and stable functioning of the society as a whole. • Environment Weather related disasters were also mentioned as another cause for instability. • Political Corruption is another important cause of instability.	**Delayed justice** was mentioned and discussed as destabilizing force in the Indian society. **Lack of transparency** in governance and administration was also mentioned as a factor of instability. **Lack of integrity** of politicians was also pointed out as another factor that undermines stability. Bringing in more of e-governance was suggested as a way to deal with lack of integrity and to bring in more transparency.

Moderator observations	There were similarities and differences between the two groups. The faculty group was very well-informed about NATO and had a lot to say about NATO. They were very confident in their opinions and suggestions. The discussions proceeded very well and the group really warmed up to the idea of focus group discussion. They seemed to really enjoy the process and would have continued longer if possible. Not everyone in the student group get fully involved in the discussions, though. Some participants did not appear very confident in their opinions probably due to their age and their background (technology students) India has been a relatively stable country from a military perspective. The last major war was 46 years ago (1971-Pakistan). Hence, none in the Student group has ever lived in a country at war. Even those who knew the 1971 war may be affected minimally during some of the skirmishes with Pakistan because the state of Kerala is one of the farthest states from the Pakistan-India border. The age of the Students and the Faculty Staff members along with the stability of India (no war since 1951, rapid growth over the past 50 years) and the wealth of the area of Kerala explain why those two groups agreed on stating that India is very little subject to instability.

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