

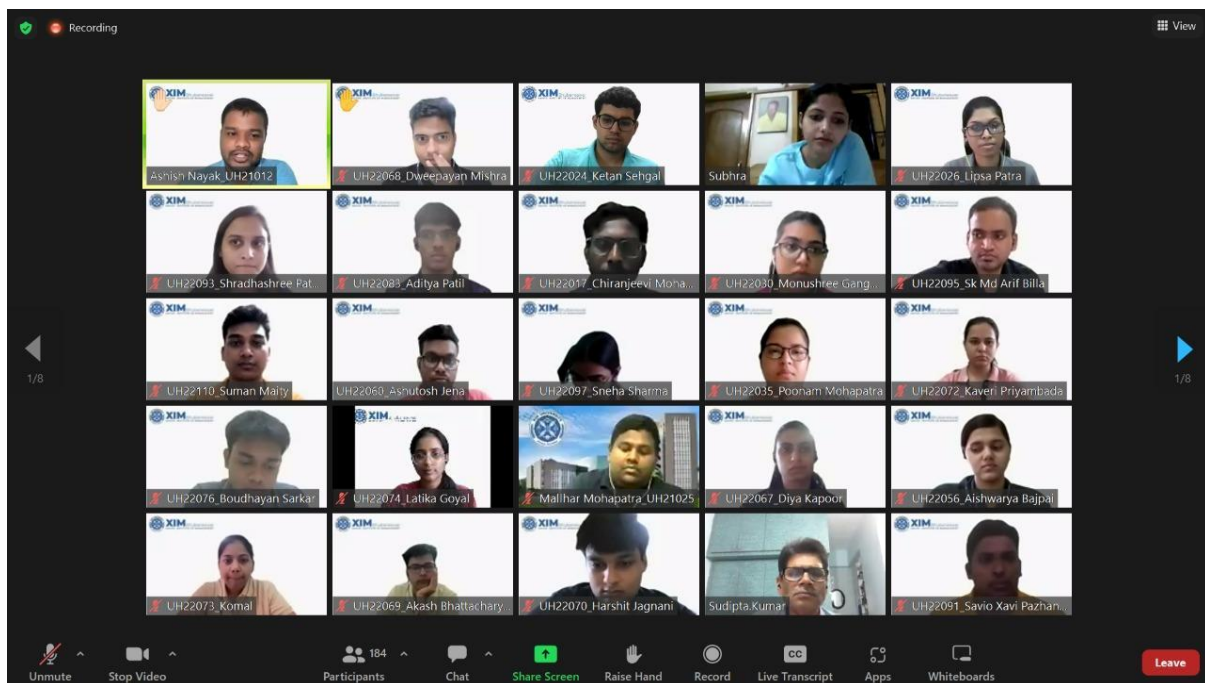
Leadership Talk

Speaker: Dr. Sudipta Kumar, Country Director, ActionAid, Afghanistan

Date: 4th September, 2022

Theme: Expatriate Experiences from HRM perspective

The first-year students of the School of Human Resource Management, XIM University, were fortunate enough to attend a Leadership Talk on the theme – *Expatriate Experiences from HRM perspective* on September 4, 2022, very immaculately delivered by Dr. Sudipta Kumar, Country Director, ActionAid, Afghanistan. While the theme was extremely relevant to the first-year students, the speaker made it a point to deliver his thoughts using real-time examples from his professional experience and personal experience as an expatriate, which made the session even more interesting and valuable.



Talk Summary

The talk focused on the challenges expatriates experience in Afghanistan as well as the various opportunities that the country offers them during their course of work. With factors like nepotism and corruption remaining constant in Afghanistan, finding a job can be a difficult process. Many of the local workers in Afghanistan rely on social connections and who they know rather than experience, talent, or qualifications. Expats will be pleased to know that salaries will provide a good standard of living, as the cost of living in Afghanistan is incredibly low. Expats will need the correct visa and work permit to work in Afghanistan, and they will not be eligible for these documents unless they have already secured work with a local employer.

The slide features a red background. On the left, a circular inset shows two people sitting in a desert-like environment. The main text is white on the red background. A video inset on the right shows a man with glasses speaking. The ActionAid logo is at the bottom center.

Challenges of an expatriate

- You are expected to be wielding a magic wand
- Inspiring a diverse team with varying interests
- HR Constrained Environment
- Caring for yourselves
- Be mindful that you represent your country
- Do not fall into the stereotyped Box

actionaid

Sudipta Kumar

In some ways, Afghani work culture can be quite conservative and formal. Hierarchy is highly valued and one is expected to display respect towards their seniors in the workplace. Contact between the sexes is limited, and most positions of power are still held by men. On the other hand, networking and relationship building are really important in the workplace. Expats should make an effort to engage in small talk and get to know their colleagues on a personal level before getting down to business. Expats who have some proficiency in Pashto and Dari Persian will find it to be an advantage, and even the language of business is Dari and not English.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ You are expected to be wielding a magic wand. Inspire a diverse team with varying interests with your innovative skills.
- ✓ You have to work in an HR-constrained environment.
- ✓ Never overlook caring for yourself.
- ✓ Be mindful that you represent your country.
- ✓ Do not let yourselves fall into the stereotypical box.
- ✓ Using the buzzword "diversity" to inspire expats is evident. Diversity management lowers expatriation expenses and raises the success rates of expatriates.
- ✓ Culturally adept expatriate managers have unique skills in partner selection, communication, relationship building, managing corruption, and overcoming complicated institutional contexts in transitional countries.
- ✓ You reasonably get a good compensation package that covers all allowances, such as housing, education, and home travel, including hardship. Staff welfare also includes pensions, repatriation, training, rest and recuperation.
- ✓ You get to experience good HR practice in most international organizations.

- ✓ You get to inspire people, fulfill the needs of all sections of the population, and even deliver goods and services whenever required.

Q&A session

1. *When repatriates come back to the country, how should HR managers ensure that they are satisfied with the reduced compensation after coming back?*

Two methods are adopted by HR managers to ensure the same. The first one is through the protection of salary through provision of allowances, accommodation, hardship allowance (20%) and per diem, because they leave everything behind, including their own country. Secondly, through the method of settlement, employees interested in working in other countries are exposed to the work in that country and then allowed to make their decisions on whether they want to continue in that country or not, if not, they are allowed to return back to their previous country and if yes, then they are absorbed in the same and governed by the compensation packages of that division of ActionAid. In the case where the employee wants to apply for a new role, He must resign from the post in his home country, come back and that too without any guarantee that he will be accommodated. Other than these things, If an employee is an international staff and is good at what he does, there are little to no chances that they will come back since there is a huge demand for hard working people in this sector, since the nature of the work allows nearly no leaves, no limitation of 8 hours, and a demanding job overall.

2. *While sending any expatriate to another country, how important is the sensitization process?*

The behavior of the expatriate relies highly on the training that they've received or the training that they haven't received. Before the expatriates depart, there is a 3-4 hour briefing and a handbook on what shouldn't be done is provided because expatriates visit culturally sensitive areas where utmost carefulness is demanded.

3. *On an average, how much per diem does an employee get and in which currency?*

The per diems are country specific and take care of the daily food expenses of the expatriates. They are divided into four parts- breakfast, lunch, dinner and incidental allowances. The incidental allowances provided, take care of the miscellaneous expenses. For example, in Afghanistan, the per diem ranges between \$15 to \$25.

4. *How did you, in your experience, manage the cultural differences that you came across? Was there any specific training provided for the same?*

There are strong rules and policies, for example, gender policies, anti-sexual harassment policies, etc. in place that must be followed in the sector. These rules usually align with how a person is in real life. Besides these, a training on participatory practices can train expatriates on how to embrace diversity, how to manage power and with certain growth over the years, the expatriate realizes the importance of being a progressive manager instead of being flamboyant and regressive. Being progressive includes giving space to your team, behaving like a leader, having empathy, identifying the problematic individual and working with him

to resolve the same and understanding that people have different preferences which ultimately leads to more productivity.

5. *Considering the high cost of compensation paid to expatriates due to the difference in pay in their home countries and countries abroad, as an HR manager, how do you justify the expenses that different companies make on these expatriates and what steps must be taken to retain them and keep them happy in the long run?*

The leader i.e. Head of HR and the Country Director are responsible for displaying strong decision-making skills and creating an environment and understanding in the team that justifies why an expatriate is being appointed, which is usually because of the diverse set of skills that they bring to the table, despite the challenges and the difficulties that they face in a foreign country. It is important to gain the respect of the national staff to ensure the well-being of the international staff. Besides this, one important thing to note is to never negotiate with problems causing expatriate staff, so as to create a boundary between the personal and professional relationships.

6. *Since Afghanistan is a country of warlords, there might come a situation where a warlord might pose as a union leader, So how should HR managers handle conflicts that may arise due to differences of opinion?*

Warlords generally approach organizations through their PAs, and ask for different favors which should be dealt with by providing them the right procedure on how to do the same on their own. Strictly abiding by the Humanitarian code of conduct, which has policies on non-interference, secularism etc. directs expatriates to not get influenced by outside pressures and strictly work towards the needs of the masses and humanitarian imperative. Other important things to keep in mind are transparency and acceptance among both the community and the staff.

7. *How do expatriates motivate themselves during challenging situations?*

Remembering the past and taking inspiration from the stories of our ancestors can significantly motivate an individual during challenging situations. Accommodating the thought that being neutral to atrocities and exploitation, isn't really being neutral, it's considered injustice instead and introspecting on the change that you're bringing in people's lives can act as a daily motivator. A huge motivator for your team can be the bonding that you instill through your actions and support.

8. *What kind of training is provided to expatriates to prevent the reverse cultural shock that they might experience on their return back to their home country?*

Learning to be diplomatic in situations that are not acceptable to you and not getting inspired from the same are some skills that you must develop to avoid reverse culture shock. You must be flexible but not to the extent that you corrupt your moral fiber and stop carrying your values.

Mr. Sudipta Kumar is presently working as Country Director for ActionAid in Afghanistan. Sir is a **development** and **humanitarian expert** with extensive experience in leadership positions spanning more than **25 years**. He's an alumnus of School of International Studies,

Jawaharlal Nehru University.

With organizations like **ActionAid, Helpage, ACF, Plan, Save the Children, and VSO**, he has considerable experience working in extremely sensitive, conflict, post-conflict, and dynamic security contexts. His work experience spans over **8 countries in Asia and Africa** in leading and managing people, systems, and institutions. Prior to taking on international duties in Afghanistan, Nepal, South Sudan, and Rwanda, along with regional responsibilities in Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda, he oversaw programs in Kashmir and Jharkhand in India.



He has extensive knowledge of creating and leading large, impactful programs, partnerships with several stakeholders, and teams with a wide range of backgrounds. His expertise in working mostly in post-conflict environments adds another level of complexity to his job in terms of identifying and grooming people and talent.

Compiled by: Ms. Bidisha Satpathy and Ms. Kanak Sawlani

Reviewed by: Prof. Subhra Pattnaik