

AUW - KAS Scholars' Reflection Report

COSATT Conference 2025

South Asia's Stability in a Turbulent World: The European Union's Role in Shaping Regional Resilience

March 30 – April 1, 2025 | Kathmandu, Nepal

&

KAS Scholars Policy Engagement Program 2025

Impact of Climate Change on the Lives of Local Communities in Nepal

April 2 – April 4, 2025 | Pokhara, Nepal



AUW - KAS SCHOLARS REPORT WRITING TEAM



Kasturi Mijar



Zainab Musavi



Meneno Terhüja



Kubra Khaliqi



Sabina Yeasmin



Umme Sadia Katha



Ornika Jaman Akhai



Jannatul Fardush



Tonima Kairi



Jannatul Mawa Nowshin

Acknowledgement

We, the AUW - KAS Scholars, express our deepest gratitude to the **Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS)** for organizing and supporting our participation in the KAS Scholars Policy Engagement Program 2025 in Pokhara, Nepal. We are grateful to the **Centre for South Asian Studies (CSAS)** for supporting our engagement in the COSATT Conference: 'South Asia's Stability in a Turbulent World: The European Union's Role in Shaping Regional Resilience' in Kathmandu, Nepal. We are thankful to both KAS and CSAS for providing us with the opportunity of exploring the pressing local, regional and global issues centering the European Union's role in South Asia's regional resilience and the urgent challenges posed by climate change to local communities. We also extend special appreciation to the **Women's Skills Development Organization (WSDO)** for warmly welcoming us and sharing their stories of resilience and empowerment.

We are grateful to our mentors and facilitators from KAS, CSAS, and the EU delegation for their guidance, insights, and encouragement that motivate us as future leaders committed to sustainable development, regional cooperation, and policy innovation. We also extend our heartfelt thanks to the **Asian University for Women (AUW)** for its unwavering support in fostering academic excellence and global engagement. This experience would not have been possible without AUW's belief in our potential to serve as thoughtful, compassionate agents of change. Lastly, we are appreciative of our fellow scholars from across South Asia, whose diverse perspectives and collaboration made this journey even more impactful..

AUW - KAS Scholars

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Purpose of Participation	1
Expected Outcomes.....	2
Objectives	2
Event Overview	2
Reflections & Learnings	3-5
- Reflections & Learnings from Conference	
- Reflections and learnings from the KAS Scholar Policy Engagement Program	
Professional and Academic Impact	6
Application of Knowledge	6
Recommendations	6
Conclusions	6
Appendix	7

Introduction

The COSATT Conference and KAS Scholars Policy Engagement Program 2025 convened scholars, diplomats, and policy experts in Kathmandu and Pokhara, Nepal. From March 30 to April 4, 2025, a delegation of KAS Scholars from the Asian University for Women (AUW) had the invaluable opportunity to attend the COSATT Conference in Kathmandu and participate in the KAS Study Tour in Pokhara. The conference focused on the European Union's role in enhancing South Asia's regional resilience amidst global geopolitical uncertainty. The KAS Scholars Policy Engagement Program in Pokhara followed the conference and provided scholars with a firsthand view of the impact of climate change on local livelihoods, particularly in semi-urban areas. This multi-part engagement provided scholars with a profound learning experience that bridged academic theory and real-world policy practice.



Purpose of Participation



As KAS Scholars from the Asian University for Women, the primary aim of our participation was to explore how global crises and shifting international dynamics affect South Asia and how the region, in collaboration with actors like the European Union, can foster greater resilience. We also aimed to network with leading scholars, policymakers, and professionals working in areas related to diplomacy, development, and regional cooperation. As scholars with a background in Public Health, Economics, Politics, Philosophy & Economics (PPE), Environmental Studies and

Development Studies, we were particularly interested in examining how these dynamics influence vulnerable populations and sustainable development initiatives.

Expected Outcomes

We hoped to gain insights into policy responses to regional crises, foster connections with professionals in international relations and public policy, and explore the implications of climate change on vulnerable populations.

Objectives

The key objectives of our participation in the conference and the policy engagement program were:

- To explore the EU's evolving role in South Asia's strategic and economic landscape.
- To develop an academic and practical understanding of climate change's social impact.
- To expand professional networks and explore future opportunities for collaboration.

These objectives closely align with our academic interests in public health, economics, politics, philosophy, policy, and sustainable development.

Event Overview

The COSATT Conference, from March 30 to April 1, 2025, was an intensive academic and diplomatic event featuring prominent experts and policymakers. The sessions focused on diverse topics, including the impact of global crises on South Asia, the role of the EU in regional development, and the potential of EU-South Asia strategic partnerships. Key speakers included Mr. Hernaikh Singh, the deputy director at Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), Singapore, Mr. Ivano di Carlo, the senior policy analyst at European Policy Centre, Brussels, Mr. Rishan De Silva, Geopolitical Cartographer, Colombo etc. Panels also featured voices from India, Bangladesh, and other South Asian nations, providing a multifaceted view of regional affairs.



Following the conference, the KAS Scholars Policy Engagement Program commenced in Pokhara, beginning with an orientation on April 2 and concluding on April 4. The tour focused on the impact of climate change on local livelihoods, showcasing both the vulnerabilities and resilience strategies employed by local communities in Sarangkot. We participated in field visits, interactive group discussions, and cultural events that enriched their understanding of grassroots challenges and adaptation mechanisms.

Reflections & Learnings

The *COSATT Conference* and the *KAS Political Dialogue Asia (PDA) Programme*, along with the KAS Scholar Policy Engagement Program in Pokhara, provided valuable opportunities to engage with experts and directly interact with communities. The programs focused on key regional issues such as South Asia's stability, EU-South Asia cooperation, and the impacts of climate change.

Reflections and learnings from the conference

The **COSATT and KAS Political Dialogue Asia conference**, "*South Asia in a Turbulent World: The EU's Role in Shaping Regional Resilience*," brought together diverse voices from across South Asia to reflect on the region's pressing political, economic, and diplomatic challenges. A recurring and urgent theme voiced by many participants was the **instability and fragmentation** of South Asia due to persistent regional disputes, particularly between India and Pakistan, and increasing tensions between India and Bangladesh. These divisions, compounded by internal challenges within individual countries, have rendered South Asia one of the least integrated regions in the world.

Participants emphasized the **need for stronger regional cooperation and leadership** to overcome these barriers and to transform shared challenges into collective opportunities. The European Union emerged as a critical ally in this context, offering support through trade relations, diplomatic engagement, and a commitment to human rights and climate action. Several attendees reflected on the **destabilizing impact of shifting U.S. foreign policy**, especially under the Trump administration. Protectionist policies, trade tariffs, and global uncertainty were seen as major factors influencing regional dynamics and economic partnerships. In contrast, the EU's approach, grounded in diplomacy, cooperation, and inclusive development, was praised as a stabilizing force for the region.

One point that stood out during the conference discussions was the reference to U.S. President Donald Trump's **withdrawal from international agreements** such as the Paris Climate Accord and the cancellation of several environmental protection funds and foreign aid programs. These actions weakened global momentum in addressing climate change and created uncertainty for vulnerable regions like South Asia. It also highlighted how the



policies of a single powerful country can undermine years of multilateral progress, leaving less-resourced nations to face disproportionate consequences. This reinforced our belief that regional cooperation and resilience are crucial, especially when global support becomes unreliable. The conference also fostered **deep dialogue between scholars, policymakers, and young leaders**, encouraging mutual learning and the exchange of regional perspectives. There was consensus that inclusive partnerships, educational access, and cross-border collaboration are vital to ensure sustainable progress in South Asia.

In conclusion, the experience was profoundly transformative, reaffirming the belief that **resilience, unity, and international cooperation**, particularly with partners like the EU, are essential for shaping a more stable and prosperous future for the region.

Reflections and learnings from the KAS Scholar Policy Engagement Program

The **KAS Scholar Policy Engagement Program in Pokhara**, centered around **climate change**, offered scholars a deeply immersive experience into one of the most pressing global issues of our time. Through fieldwork, discussions, and peer engagement, the program allowed us to reflect critically on both the environmental and human dimensions of climate change, especially as they relate to South Asia.

A key learning outcome was the opportunity to observe firsthand the effects of climate change on the daily lives of people in Sarangkot, a village in Pokhara. Interacting directly with local communities helped scholars understand how erratic weather patterns, water scarcity, and shifts in agricultural productivity are threatening livelihoods. These encounters grounded theoretical knowledge in lived experience and underscored the urgency of sustainable adaptation strategies, especially for vulnerable mountain communities. For many participants, the situation in Nepal drew stark parallels to similar challenges faced in climate-vulnerable regions like Satkhira and Khulna in Bangladesh, reinforcing the shared nature of these issues across borders.



One powerful realization among scholars was the importance of promoting **ecotourism** as a sustainable solution in tourist-heavy areas like Pokhara. The need to balance economic development with environmental preservation was made clear, encouraging future leaders to think about long-term, nature-respecting tourism models that support both the local economy and ecological resilience.

The visit to the **Women's Skills Development Organization (WSDO)** added another layer of



insight, highlighting the disproportionate impact of climate change on women. Despite managing household responsibilities, many women have taken on the additional role of economic contributors through sustainable handicraft production. Their resilience and creativity were both inspiring and instructive, emphasizing the need for gender-inclusive climate strategies. We were deeply inspired by their mission to empower underprivileged women, including widowed, disabled, divorced, and abused individuals, by offering free training and employment opportunities. They

produce beautiful handmade items like bags, footwear, toys, and kitchen goods using traditional skills such as sewing, weaving, dyeing, and cutting.

It was eye-opening to see how the production and administrative processes worked in harmony. The production team handles everything from raw material processing to design and quality control, while the administration manages marketing, finance, export, and storage. We also learned that WSDO provides scholarships for employees' children, as well as healthcare, childcare, and awareness programs.

Another central outcome was the opportunity to engage with fellow KAS scholars from across South Asia. These interactions provided a platform for mutual learning, fostering a strong sense of regional solidarity and shared responsibility. Through rich dialogue and exchange of perspectives, scholars were able to identify the importance of collaboration in addressing collective regional challenges. The program also contributed significantly to scholars' personal and professional growth. It strengthened skills in communication, data collection, and policy thinking, while reinforcing the belief that young people can and must play an active role in shaping climate policy and promoting regional cooperation. The formation of initiatives like the **KAS Interest Group** showed the potential for such gatherings to plant the seeds for long-term impact, unity, and innovation across the region.



Professional and Academic Impact

This experience was deeply aligned with the academic interests of the scholars in public health, policy, and community resilience. The insights gained will significantly inform future research and practical engagement in areas such as climate change adaptation, public health policy, and sustainable development. Meeting with professionals from KAS, CSAS, and EU delegations clarified potential career pathways in international development and diplomacy. The event facilitated peer learning and cross-cultural exchange, strengthening communication skills and boosting confidence in engaging with complex geopolitical narratives.

Application of Knowledge

We plan to integrate the conference insights into our research on regional health systems and policy resilience. Additionally, the climate fieldwork findings in Pokhara will inform ongoing studies on the intersection of environmental stressors and community well-being.

Recommendations

While the overall organization of the events was commendable, several scholars noted that the conference's tight schedule limited opportunities for informal engagement and deeper conversation with speakers. It was recommended to include more interactive components during panel sessions to enhance scholar participation and engagement.

Conclusion

The COSATT Conference and KAS Scholar Policy Engagement Program in Pokhara 2025 offered a rich blend of academic dialogue, field experience, and cultural immersion. It exceeded our expectations by combining theoretical exploration with practical insights, all while fostering professional connections across borders. As AUW - KAS Scholars, we are grateful for this opportunity and remain inspired to further contribute to South Asia's development through our studies and future careers.

Appendix

