REPORT ON KAS SCHOLARS POLICY & ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME NEPAL 2025

30th March To 4thApril, 2025

Presented to

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung-KAS, Political Dialogue Asia

Presented by

National College KAS Scholars

Organized by







ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We express our sincere gratitude to the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, (KAS) & Consortium of South Asian Think Tanks (COSATT), for the opportunity to participate in these impactful events. We also thank our fellow scholars for sharing their diverse insights and perspectives. Coming together as passionate, likeminded individuals allowed us to explore key issues of climate change, economic resilience, and sustainable development in the South Asian context.

We look forward to presenting our collaborative findings and policy suggestions in the upcoming final report, which will reflect the collective wisdom and dedication of all participants.

Once again, we extend our heartfelt appreciation to everyone involved.

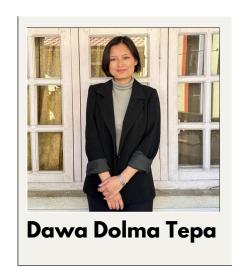


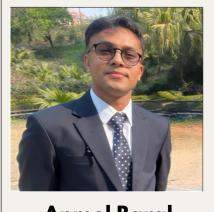
KAS Scholars from South Asia, along with national and international delegates

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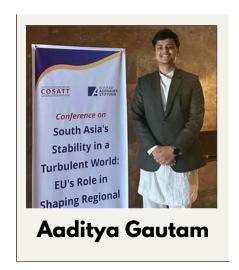


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INTRODUCTION

As Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) scholars from National College, we had the privilege of actively participating in two major events organized by the Consortium of South Asian Think Tanks (COSATT) in collaboration with KAS. These events served as valuable platforms for in-depth intellectual engagement, high-level policy discussions, and fostering regional collaboration.

The KAS Scholars Policy and Engagement Program Study Tour, held from March 30 to April 4, 2025, took place in Kathmandu and Pokhara, Nepal, and brought together 25 scholars from diverse regions across South Asia. The tour was designed to enhance our understanding of contemporary policy issues, facilitate academic exchange, and expose us to the real-world impacts of climate change on local communities—particularly how they are coping and adapting to environmental challenges. The entire experience was not only educational and eye-opening but also highly engaging and inspiring, offering us the chance to connect theory with practice in meaningful ways.

EVENT 1: GEOPOLITICAL & ECONOMIC DIALOGUE



Panelist of South Asia's Stability in a Turbulent World; EU's Role in Shaping Regional Resilience

The first event focused on international trade, security studies, and geopolitical transitions. The session commenced with an insightful address by Mr. Vidur Ghimire, Coordinator at the International Trade Centre (a joint agency of the WTO and UN). His remarks set the tone for understanding Nepal's evolving trade dynamics in a global context.

The event was further enriched by Professor Dr. Suba Chandran, Dean of the School of Conflict and Security Studies at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), who provided a comprehensive lecture on South Asia's geopolitical landscape and the implications of global transitions. A dynamic comment, question-and-answer, and discussion session followed, allowing us to engage directly with policy experts, 5 scholars, and fellow participants.

"TRUMP PRESIDENCY, THE EUROPEAN UNION, & ITS IMPACT ON SOUTH ASIA"

Key questions were addressed:

- What implications does the Trump presidency have for South Asia's economic and security landscape?
- In the face of shifting U.S. policies, how can the EU and South Asian countries ensure strategic partnerships and regional economic resilience?

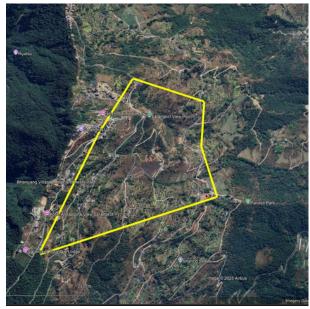
The event fostered valuable networking opportunities and discussions with high-profile diplomats, researchers, policymakers, security stakeholders, academics, and students from across South Asia.



Panelist Mr.Faizan Riaz,Research
Associate,Islamabad Policy
Research Institute (IPRI),
Presentation on Impact Of
Trump Presidency For South
Asia's Economic & Security
Landscape.

EVENT 2: FIELD RESEARCH ON CLIMATE CHANGE





Marked within the yellow parameter are the past (March 2014) and present (April 2025) comparisons of the Sarangkot Hill Top Field Survey Area respectively.

Venue: Sarangkot Municipality, Ward No. 17, Pokhara.

The second event focused on the impact of climate change in the Sarangkot community, a prominent tourist destination in Nepal. Under the guidance of Nepalese climate expert Mr. Ujjwal Upadhyay, we applied a convenience sampling research methodology to verify and expand upon the climate impact study he had conducted in 2022.

The field research provided us with a hands-on learning experience in applying academic theories to real-world environmental challenges. We benefitted immensely from the feedback and evaluation by Mr. Moritz Weiler (intern at KAS PDA, Singapore) and Mr. Mahesh Bhatta (manager, COSATT) during our group presentation of research findings. Their suggestions helped us refine our analytical perspectives and explore holistic approaches to climate resilience.

SUMMARY OF THE CLIMATE CHANGE WORKSHOP

Our participation in the KAS Scholars Policy and Engagement Program was a transformative experience that expanded our academic horizons and deepened our awareness of South Asia's evolving geopolitical, economic, and environmental dynamics. The dual events—in Kathmandu (focused on policy-level discourse) and Pokhara (centered on climate change field research)—offered a holistic platform for both intellectual and practical engagement.

One of the most insightful parts of the program was our field visit to Sarangkot, Pokhara, a popular tourist destination now facing increasing climate stress. Led by climate expert Mr. Ujjwal Upadhyay, we employed convenience sampling methods to assess local perceptions of climate change, verifying and building upon his 2022 baseline study. Through this exercise, we found that over 80% of locals could identify visible climate impacts such as shifts in planting seasons, increased pest infestations, erratic rainfall, and rising temperatures.

We observed that climate-induced challenges to tourism and agriculture—two major livelihood sources in Sarangkot—have created an urgent need for localized adaptation strategies.

REFLECTION

In Kathmandu, we engaged with regional experts, policymakers, and researchers through a high-level dialogue facilitated by COSATT and KAS. According to Dr. Vidur Ghimire, South Asia currently trades internally only \$23 billion worth of goods, despite an billion. This of \$67 estimated potential figure highlights the underutilized intra-regional capacity, largely due to political mistrust and institutional barriers, especially between India and Pakistan. Furthermore, the last SAARC Summit was held in 2014, reflecting a prolonged stagnation in regional cooperation.

Faizan Riaz, from Islamabad Policy Research Mr. Institute (IPRI), reinforced the notion that South Asia's political fragmentation limits our collective ability to address transnational threats such as climate change, terrorism, and pandemics.

In contrast, the European Union (EU) has become a key external partner for South Asia. Mr. Ivano di Carlo, a senior analyst at the European Policy Centre, shared that in 2023, the EU became India's largest trading partner, with trade reaching €124 billion, surpassing the U.S. and China. Moreover, the EU accounted for 12.2% of India's total trade, and was the secondlargest destination for Indian exports. These figures are particularly important given the trade rifts during ⁹ President Trump's tenure, which inadvertently pushed

REFLECTION

South Asian countries are to diversify their alliances—making the EU more attractive as a strategic partner.

We were especially drawn to Mr. Thomas Millar's presentation on the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy (2021), which aligns strongly with South Asia's sustainable development priorities. The EU's investment in climate resilience, economic integration, and multilateral governance stood out as a promising model for future collaboration.

As students from Nepal, we found the data to resonate deeply. Despite contributing only 0.041% to global carbon emissions, Nepal remains highly vulnerable to climate change. For instance, the Hindu Kush Himalayan region, which spans parts of India, Pakistan, Nepal, and beyond, is warming at a rate higher than the global average. Even if global warming is limited to 1.5°C, this region will continue facing extreme weather patterns. The 2022 floods in Pakistan, which affected over 33 million people, and the 2024 flash floods in Nepal, which displaced thousands, serve as tragic reminders of our climate fragility.

While the program was undoubtedly enriching, we recognize a few areas for improvement, mentioned in the recommendation section below.

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REFLECTION

Nonetheless, the experience fostered cross-border dialogue and allowed us to network with scholars from across South Asia, improving our teamwork, public speaking, and socializing skills. Meaningful conversations with organizers, diplomats, and researchers also inspired us to pursue further research through academic papers, articles, and policy briefs, creating opportunities to grow as thought leaders in our respective fields.

In sum, this program reaffirmed our belief in the power of regional collaboration, especially in a rapidly changing geopolitical climate. We left the events more informed, more connected, and more motivated to work towards a resilient, cooperative, and sustainable South Asia.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Understanding climate change and its impact, particularly in the Pokhara region, and understanding it as a global phenomenon.
- Group discussion and informal talks with scholars and speakers underscored the impact of climate change across South Asia. Sharing the lived experiences of our communities was critical to understanding where our common interests and issues intersect and how we as individuals and a region can come together. One KAS scholar from Bangladesh shared how her hometown, which lies in the Hill Tract Area, is facing a scarcity of water as water sources are drying up. Such insights were valuable in understanding the climate vulnerabilities.
- Understanding the emerging role of the EU in the rapidly changing international landscape, including the Trump Administration and aid cutoff, the Graduation of countries like Nepal and Bangladesh from Least Developed Countries (LDCs).
- South Asian's commonalities of geography, culture, religion, and shared historical experiences give the region a better opportunity to collaborate and work on the issues that the region faces, and support each other's sustainable development.
- The importance of regional cooperation in the South Asia Region to secure stability and strengthen institutional capacity.

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REFLECTIONS ON THE THEMES DISCUSSED

- The grassroots people, like farmers, are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Due to changes in rainfall patterns, increased temperature, and the decline of spring sources, new phenomena like increased outward migration to cities and foreign countries, and the excessive use of fertilizers to increase agricultural yield are emerging. Such unsustainable practices highlight the urgent need for strategies and mechanisms that would empower individuals to adapt to climate change with the least disruption to their livelihoods.
- The importance of anticipatory actions in building climate resilience. In countries like Nepal, highly vulnerable to climate change, anticipatory actions can be of great relief to protect their citizens and their livelihood. Such actions highlight the need for good governance, strong political commitment, and international cooperation. However, with the ongoing national political unrest and emerging global trends of wars and radical leaders, the efforts of participatory actions look dim.



Household survey in Sarangkot, Pokhara

ROLE AS YOUNG SCHOLARS IN CONTRIBUTING TO REGIONAL PEACE AND DIALOGUE

The role of emerging scholars in fostering regional peace and dialogue is both significant and indispensable. As future leaders, it is imperative that young scholars develop a clear understanding of global and regional dynamics and redefine and drive change in unique and innovative ways that they, as youths, have to offer.

As KAS scholars at National College, we have come to understand the importance of our role in promoting regional peace and dialogue. This awareness comes not only from our academic background in development and social sciences, but also from the values and responsibility that come with being part of the KAS community.

With this understanding, KAS scholars from National College, together with scholars from the Asian University for Women in Bangladesh, have taken the initiative to form a KAS Interest Group. This group brings together young scholars from across South Asia to discuss and reflect on shared regional concerns, particularly those related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Although still in its embryonic stage, the Interest Group represents a growing effort among youth in South Asia to build cross-border partnerships and work together as a regional community. Collaborations like these are important steps toward strengthening peace, trust, and 14 mutual understanding in the region.

ROLE AS YOUNG SCHOLARS IN CONTRIBUTING TO REGIONAL PEACE AND DIALOGUE

Beyond dialogue, the academic contributions of young scholars also hold great value. Through research, they help generate new knowledge and ideas. Their involvement at both the grassroots and policy levels can lead to practical changes that address the real needs of communities. By staying engaged, curious, and connected, young scholars can play a key role in shaping a more peaceful and cooperative South Asia.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

Several key recommendations are listed and detailed based on the study tour and conference organized under the KAS scholars Policy and Engagement Program and the COSATT-KAS conference.

- 1. Adopting more diverse site visits aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) would enhance scholars' understanding of real-world challenges and grassroots solutions. Confirmed and detailed itineraries in advance would help participants in better preparation and reflection.
- 2.The study tour highlighted the role of women-led organizations like the Women Skills Development Organization in Pokhara. Future programs must showcase and support grassroots changemakers, especially women and marginalized groups, as significant agents of sustainable change.
- 3. The participation of regional policymakers and leaders, such as those from the Pokhara metropolitan office and the Gandaki provincial government, is vital in programs like this. It enables scholars and participants to directly advise policymakers to adopt flexible strategies that integrate local insights with international climate resilience frameworks.
- 4. While the presentations and workshops were highly engaging, time management was a recurring issue. Future programs must support stricter cohesion of time allocations to maintain audience engagement and for better Q&A sessions.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

5. We highly value the mentorship and exposure provided by KAS and COSATT and recommend the development of a structured alumni network and KAS Interest Groups to sustain engagement beyond the program. This network can include mentorship opportunities, access to fellowships, collaborative projects, and ongoing training.

Introducing KAS scholars at the conference in Kathmandu.





Presenting a token of love - the national musical instrument of Nepal, the Sarangi - to Mrs. Megha Sarmah, Programme Manager, Regional Programme Political Dialogue Asia, KAS Singapore on behalf of the KAS Interest Group



Presenting a token of love- the national musical instrument of Nepal, the Sarangi - to Mr. Andreas Klein, Director, Programme Political Dialogue Asia, KAS Singapore on behalf of the KAS Interest Group

Visit to the Women's Skill Development Organization, Pokhara





KAS scholars in Sarangkot before the survey with Dr. Ujjwal Upadhyay



After the survey with the respondent



Andreas Klein, Director of KAS PDA presenting a token of appreciation to Mr. Thomas Millar, Charge d' affaires, a.i., Delegation of the EU in Nepal.

thank you

WE ARE IMMENSELY GRATEFUL FOR THE EXPOSURE, LEARNINGS, AND NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES AS MEMBERS OF THE KAS FAMILY.