

A woman with a red tilak on her forehead is holding a young child. She is wearing a green and yellow patterned top and colorful floral pants. The child is wearing a blue patterned jacket. They are standing in front of a thatched hut. A white goat is visible to the left. The scene is set in a rural, natural environment with trees and a clear sky.

# Behind Apeiron's Theory of Change

**A narrative about  
barriers to equality  
and our approach to  
overcoming them**



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## OUR BACKGROUND

Apeiron was founded in 1996 in Florence, Italy, by a group of friends who dreamed of an equal world: a place where women and men could enjoy the same opportunities, utilize the same rights, and live a life free of violence. These friends wished to make a difference, one life at a time, to infinity. They founded an organization and named it Apeiron, a Greek word meaning “unlimited,” “boundless,” or “infinite”.

After running empowerment projects in various countries that helped participants remove boundaries from their lives, Apeiron’s team settled in Nepal, where violence against women and girls (VAWG) remained a major barrier to the development of individual women and girls, their communities, and

Nepali society as a whole.

In 2004, the team formally established Apeiron as an international NGO with a country office in Kathmandu. Since then, Apeiron has been dedicated to needs-based projects across Nepal that empower women and reduce gender-based violence (GBV), understanding that this approach results in long-term impacts such as increased self-awareness, vocational skills, and equality in households.

In 2007, we founded CASA Nepal, a safe house in Kathmandu for women and their children escaping GBV. Women began arriving from far-flung districts of Nepal to receive personalized psychosocial support, empowerment,



and skills trainings in a residential group setting. Apeiron has run CASANepal since then, expanding our support to up to 60 women and children per year. Building on the skills trainings we initially developed for women in CASANepal, Apeiron staff introduced income-generating activities (IGA) into field-based projects in 2009. We piloted a micro-enterprise program in Syangjya district (western Nepal), in which small business development paired with collective empowerment trainings improved the lives—and livelihoods—of participants.

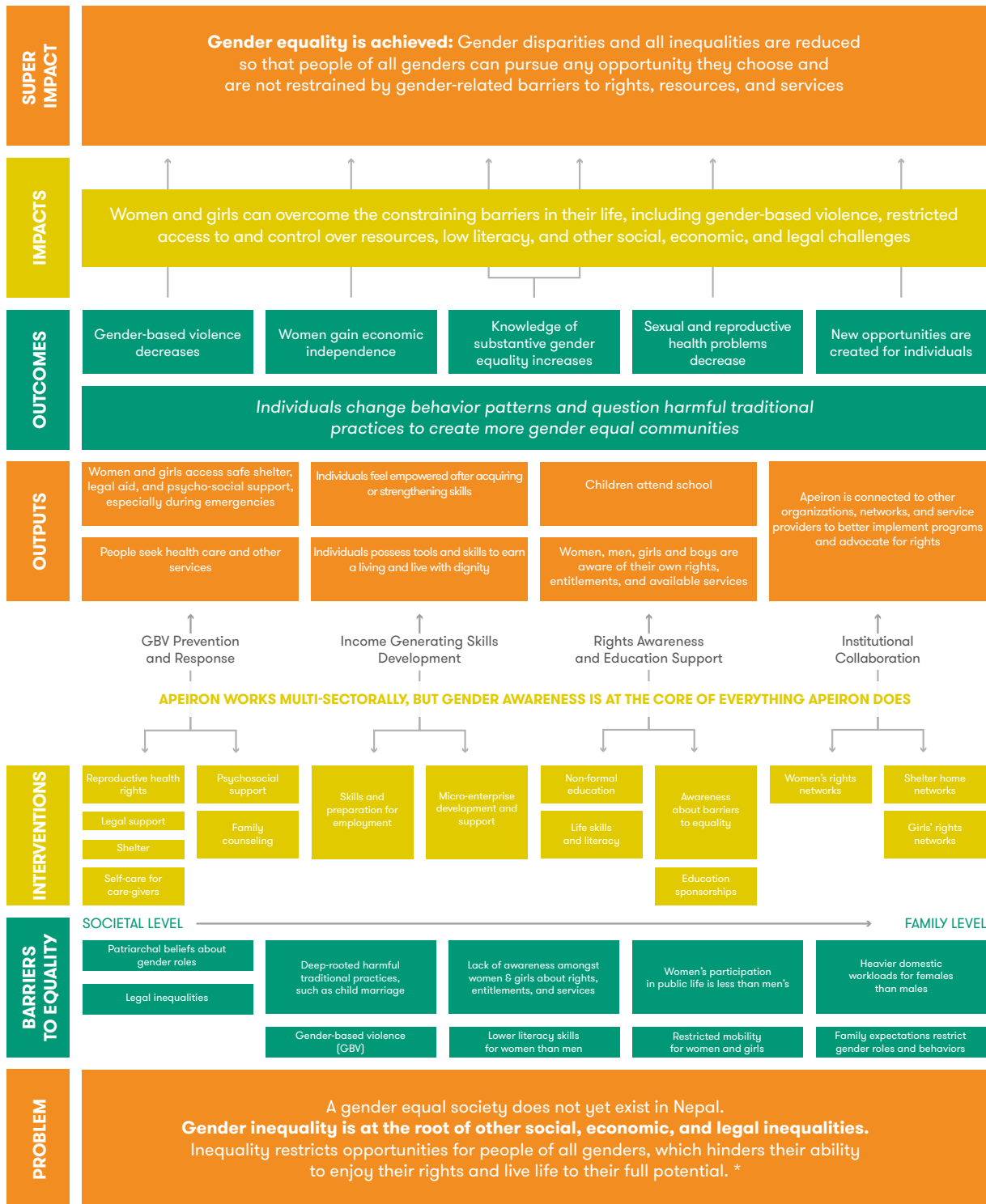
Apeiron's programs gradually expanded to Dhading and Jumla, two under-developed rural districts in central and western Nepal. By early 2013, we had legally changed from an Italian INGO with seven staff and board members to a Nepali NGO. By 2017, we have grown to be a Kathmandu-based, women-led Nepali NGO (DAO reg. no. 223, SWC: 38100) with nearly 30 staff members

and additional employees in the district project sites.

In April 2015, a devastating 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck Nepal. Apeiron responded immediately by establishing female friendly spaces (FFSs) in displacement camps and distributing health kits to women. Through our mobile FFS that rotated among camps, we responded to displaced women's and girls' needs such as psycho-social counseling, transportation to a family planning clinic, and activities specifically for adolescent girls, who had been overlooked in the earthquake response.

Years after establishing our office in Nepal, we continue to build on our experience—learning from both successes and failures—to develop participatory programs that will empower Nepali women and their communities. Our Theory of Change.

## THEORY OF CHANGE



## THE PROBLEM WE'RE TRYING TO SOLVE

A gender equal society does not yet exist in Nepal. Gender inequality is at the root of other social, economic, and legal inequalities. Inequality restricts

opportunities for people of all genders, which hinders their ability to enjoy their rights and live life to their full potential.



# BARRIERS TO EQUALITY

During participatory planning sessions in 2016-17, Apeiron staff identified and debated the biggest barriers to equality for women in Nepal. With the ultimate objective of gender equality – equal opportunities, rights, resources and services for people, regardless of their gender – Apeiron acknowledged ten major barriers to equality as being the biggest hindrances<sup>1</sup>. An explanation of these barriers follows.

## FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD LEVELS

### Heavier domestic workloads for females than males

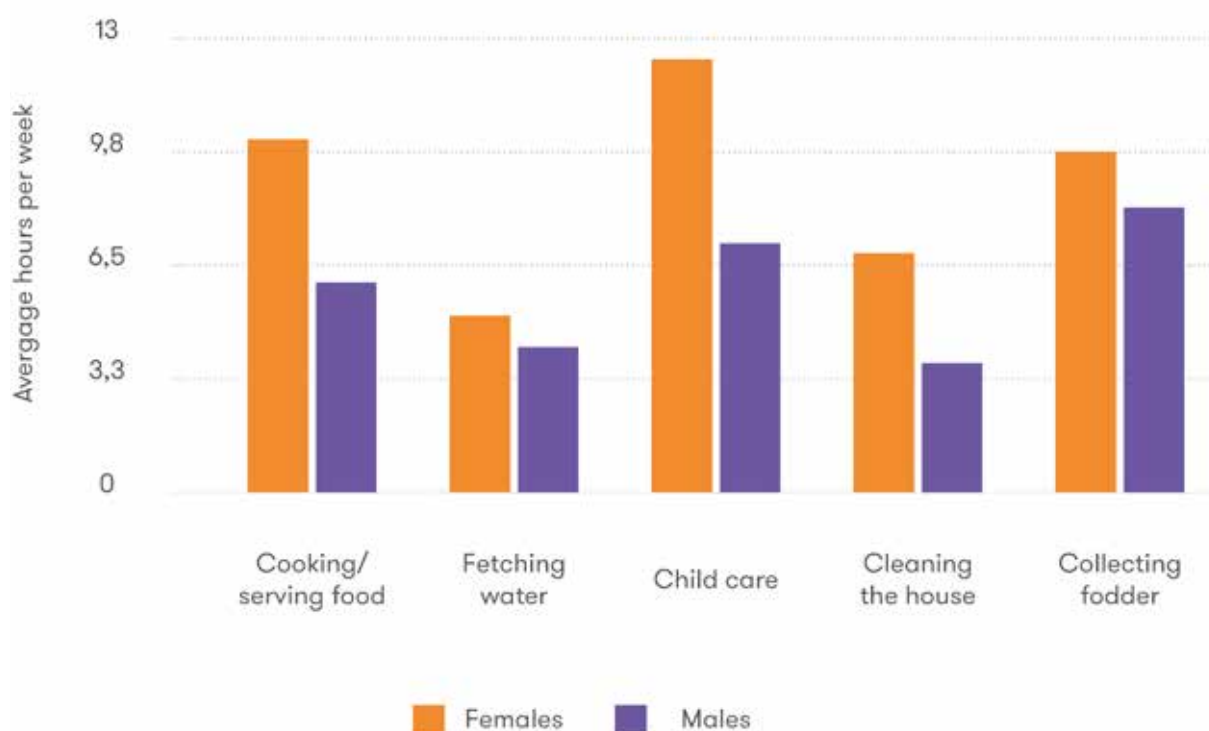
According to the Nepal Living Standards Survey 2011, females in a household spend noticeably more time doing domestic, usually unpaid, chores than male members of a household. For example:<sup>2</sup>

Household chore	Hours spent by females per week	Hours spent by males per week
Cooking/serving food	10.5 hours	5.7 hours
Fetching water	4.8 hours	3.8 hours
Child care	12.4 hours	7.5 hours
Cleaning the house	7.2 hours	3.5 hours
Collecting fodder	9.7 hours	8.4 hours

<sup>1</sup> According to the Feminist Movement Builders Dictionary, “Gender equality does not imply that women and men are the same, but that they have equal value in society and should be afforded rights and treatment as equals.” Further, “equality obligates states [governments] to eliminate all forms of discrimination, as any form of discrimination would result in some individuals being denied equal enjoyment of their rights.”

<sup>2</sup> Data is from the Nepal Living Standards Survey 2011 (NLSS), calculated in R-Studio using the original NLSS dataset. Hours are the average for females and males over age 5 who spent more than zero hours on any given chore. Respondents answered the question, “How many hours has [household member] spent doing the following activities during the past 7 days?”

## Weekly hours spent on domestic tasks in Nepali households



In alignment with traditional gender roles, **women and girls are still shouldering a heavier domestic burden than men and boys in most Nepali households.** This hinders their mobility, pursuit of educational or occupational opportunities, and economic advancement. A heavier domestic burden for females is a major barrier to equality at the most localized level – within the household.

### Family expectations restrict gender roles and behaviors

Nepali women and men are encumbered with a great deal of expectations, many of which begin at home. Females of all ages within households are expected to uphold *ijaat*, or a family's honor, while men are expected to inherit and control property and financially support parents, wives, and children.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers (OPMCM, 2012), *A study on gender-based violence conducted in selected rural districts of Nepal*, 4

**Infographic source:** Nepal Living Standards Survey 2010/2011; N= different number of respondents per domestic task, but the minimum number of respondents for any given task was 1,512 and the maximum was 9,177. Despite similarly large numbers of women (15,333) and men (13,337) being asked the question about whether or not they spend time on these tasks, far more women than men responded that they had performed these tasks. For example, for cooking/serving food, 9,177 females, or 60% of the total females surveyed, responded that they spend more than zero hours on that task, while only 1,926 males, or 14% of the males surveyed, responded that they spent more than zero hours cooking/serving food.



Traditionally patrilineal and patrilocal kinship systems put some pressure on Nepali families to produce at least one son, although men have also expressed the importance of having a daughter. However, the value ascribed to daughters and sons differs. Half of 1,000 Nepali men interviewed in three districts about the importance of having a daughter cited girls' roles in rituals such as *raksha bandan* and *bhai tika* – rituals that endorse the long life and good health of girls' brothers.<sup>4</sup> Other reasons that men hoped to have daughters was “for emotional support” (37% of male respondents) and “sharing the workload” (49%).<sup>5</sup> When men talk about having at least one son, however, they noted lineage, old age support, and funeral rites as the top three reasons that sons are important. In short, “Men’s views about the importance of sons and daughters are highly influenced by **traditional customs and gender roles that dictate only boys can carry on their father’s name and continue the family lineage while girls provide emotional support and are expected to be dutiful and hardworking.**”<sup>6</sup> These embedded beliefs put pressure on girls and boys to fulfill certain duties and roles beginning at a young age and lasting throughout their lives.

Nepali women almost always move into the households of their husbands and become a low-ranking member of the joint household. Subsequently, young women’s subservient roles become embedded due to pressure from older

women in a household, such as mothers-in-law pressuring their daughters-in-law, often to the point of violence, to behave a certain way. For example, of 288 cases of violence registered at the Women and Children Service Center in Kathmandu in just one month of 2016, 62 cases – or 21% – were reported as “abuse by mother-in-law.”<sup>7</sup> ODI reports that young men assume that their wife’s main duty is to serve the husbands’ parents, and young women surveyed about violence in their household reported being scolded, taunted, or abused by their mothers-in-law.<sup>8</sup>

Both natal and marital households contain strictly prescribed roles for women and men enforced by other household members – roles that hinder gender equality. Gender equality will not be truly achieved at the community and societal levels until families ease these restrictive roles that impede individuals’ choices based on their gender.

## COMMUNITY LEVEL

### Women’s participation in public life is less than men’s participation

Nepal has recently made great strides in increasing the representation of women in local government bodies. The new Constitution of 2015 requires that two of the five elected representatives for local ward councils are women, including one Dalit woman. Further, the constitution mandates that a woman must fill the

<sup>4</sup> Nanda et al (2012), “Study on Gender, Masculinity and Son Preference in Nepal and Vietnam,” 52

<sup>5</sup> Nanda et al., 52

<sup>6</sup> Nanda et al., 53

<sup>7</sup> Ghimire and Samuels (2017), “Understanding intimate partner violence in Nepal: Prevalence, drivers, and challenges,” 30

<sup>8</sup> Ghimire and Samuels, 48

position of either mayor or vice-mayor.<sup>9</sup> These mandates will result in thousands of women – 6,680 Dalit women alone – serving on decision-making bodies in large numbers for the first time in Nepal’s history.<sup>10</sup> In the first two rounds of local level elections, even traditionally conservative towns elected women to serve as mayors and vice-mayors, a truly historic leap.<sup>11</sup> Further, the President and Speaker of Parliament are both women as of 2017.

Other entities remain lopsided between male and female representatives. For example, **a prime minister of Nepal has never formed a cabinet of which more than 15% of members were women** (and a Nepali prime minister has never been female).<sup>12</sup> The Nepal Police ranks include 4,123 women, or 5.6% of the police force.<sup>13</sup> The Nepal Army employs nearly 4,000 women, or about 5% of total officers.<sup>14</sup> As of 2016, Nepal’s civil service was 17% female; while female applicants now outnumber male applicants, 62% of successful candidates for civil service positions in 2016 were men.<sup>15</sup> Female parliamentarians are 29% of the Legislature-Parliament, despite women making up more than half of Nepal’s population.

Considering the historical under-representation of women in Nepali

decision-making bodies and positions of authority, we are cautiously optimistic that women’s participation in public life will increase due to current elections. However, the influence that women will yield in these new positions is yet to be seen.

### Restricted mobility for women and girls

Women and men live in different spheres in Nepal. Women are typically relegated to the domestic sphere (see “Heavier Domestic Workloads,” above), while men enjoy more freedom of movement outside of the home. Women’s and girls’ restricted mobility hinders them from fully enjoying their rights, accessing services, and pursuing opportunities.

An ODI report on intimate partner violence found that adolescent girls in two Terai districts are restricted from leaving their house without the permission of parents or male siblings, who decide where these young women go, how long they study, and when and whom they marry. In these districts, girls stop attending school after getting married and having a child, and are expected to shoulder the vast burden of domestic work. Once married, young women are restricted from moving around in their communities, even to

<sup>9</sup> Kunda Dixit, “Federal feminine republic of Nepal,” *Nepali Times*, May 29, 2017

<sup>10</sup> Kunda Dixit, “Nepal harnesses politics of inclusion,” *Nikkei Asian Review*, June 27, 2017

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Ashok Dahal, “Women’s representation in cabinet declining,” *Republica*, August 26, 2016

<sup>13</sup> Nepal Police, Women & Children Service Directorate: <https://cid.nepalpolice.gov.np/index.php/cid-wings/women-children-service-directorate> and <https://nepalpolice.gov.np/index.php/about-us/organization-structure>

<sup>14</sup> Nepal Army, “Women in the Army,” [www.nepalarmy.mil.np/wia.php](http://www.nepalarmy.mil.np/wia.php); “Women in Nepal Army: Challenges and opportunities,” *Republica*, March 29, 2017

<sup>15</sup> Rastriya Samachar Samiti, “More women apply for PSC exam,” *The Himalayan Times*, December 7, 2016

attend training programs or socialize with neighbors.<sup>16</sup> The study found that high-caste hill groups and ethnic groups in the plains adhere strictly to mobility norms.<sup>17</sup>

While the severity of mobility restrictions may vary across regions and ethnicities of Nepal, they are almost always present. A Nepali government study of 900 women in six districts in the Terai, hills, and mountains found that **71% of women needed permission from their husbands or in-laws to visit friends or relatives; 51% for going to a health post or hospital; and 63% to attend a community meeting.** Overall, 45% of women surveyed had low freedom

of movement, 33% had moderate freedom, and 23% had high freedom of movement.<sup>18</sup> Women face these restrictions in all ecological strata of the country, a direct affront to the universal human right of freedom of movement and residence within the borders of their state.<sup>19</sup>

### **Lack of awareness amongst women and girls about rights, entitlements, and services**

Women tend to lack knowledge about key facts that could positively impact their lives. When it comes to knowledge about Nepal's GBV laws and bills, **87%**

<sup>16</sup> Ghimire and Samuels, 49

<sup>17</sup> Ghimire and Samuels, 58-60

<sup>18</sup> OPMCM, 28-30

<sup>19</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 13.



**of women surveyed in 2012 did not know about the Domestic Violence Crime & Punishment Act, a key law that was promulgated in 2009; 95% did not know about the bill against sexual harassment in the workplace; and 91% did not know about the law against marital rape.**<sup>20</sup> Seventy percent, however, did know that the law had been changed to guarantee property rights to daughters as well as sons. Knowledge of these key laws that affect women's lives is uneven at best, which negatively impacts their likelihood of accessing justice for crimes and discrimination against them.

Women also struggle with knowledge and access to essential services. Of women who experienced violence, 16% of 900 women surveyed said that they did not seek care due to distance, and some identified "not knowing where to seek help" as a barrier to justice along with "fear of societal and family retribution" and "lack of support from authorities."<sup>21</sup> Only 25% of women surveyed believed that services were available in their districts to survivors of GBV, despite Women & Children Service Centers (by Nepal Police) and Women & Children Offices (by the Department of Women & Children) existing in every district, as well as 17 Safe Houses run by women's cooperatives. About the safe houses specifically, only 6% of women knew that these crucial centers of support existed at the district level. A dismal 0.7% knew that health services were available to survivors of GBV.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> OPMCM, 34

<sup>21</sup> OPMCM, xiv, 36

<sup>22</sup> OPMCM, 43

<sup>23</sup> NLSS (2011) Statistical Report Volume 1, 120

<sup>24</sup> UNESCO (2012), "Adult and Youth Literacy, 1990 – 2015: Analysis of data for 41 selected countries," Montreal: UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

Another measure of access to services is pre- and postnatal care for pregnant women. While about 78% of pregnant women receive prenatal care, only 19% receive post-natal care.<sup>23</sup> The reasons behind this gap need to be explored, but women have reported not going for pre- and post-natal check-ups due to the distance of health facilities from their homes and the difficulty of traveling by foot or on unpaved roads.

Gaps in knowledge and access prevent women from overcoming obstacles and exercising their rights to health, education, and justice.

### **Lower literacy skills for women than men**

While Nepal's literacy rate has skyrocketed over the past decades of development, adult women have been left behind. Nepal's overall adult literacy rate (15 years and older) in 2015 was 66%, with an uneven division between women and men: 56% of women and 77% of men were literate, a gender parity measure of 0.72 (where 1 is exactly equal).<sup>24</sup> Nepal's youth are in better standing: 88% of youth ages 15-24 were literate as of 2015, including 91% of young men and 86% of young women. While the trend is promising for young people – the gender parity measure is 0.94 – a gender gap in literacy persists.

The measure looks starker when you consider that **67% of illiterate adults and 60% of illiterate young people in**

**Nepal are female** – 4.9 million women, including 487,000 young women. Kunda Dixit notes that, “Superimposing district-wise data for female literacy over the figures for extreme poverty, malnutrition, child marriage, maternal and infant mortality gives us an almost perfect match.”<sup>25</sup> With literacy underpinning so many skills and opportunities, Nepal’s women will continue to struggle until full parity in literacy is achieved.

## SOCIETAL LEVEL

### Deep-rooted harmful traditional practices, such as child marriage

Nepal is often described as a traditional society, a statement that holds both positive and negative connotations. On the positive side are family and communal rites dating back generations that form personal and sociocultural bonds. On the negative side are traditional practices that restrict people’s human rights and prevent them from exercising their own agency. Three of these practices with roots in gender inequality are **child marriage, polygamy, and chhaupadi**.

**Child marriage** is the marriage of any person while still in childhood – under 18 years old. **In Nepal, a shocking 37% of girls marry before age 18, and 10% are married before age 15.**<sup>26</sup> These marriages are often arranged by parents or other family members, and are based on social and economic

pressures. This practice is particularly harmful to girls because married girls often drop out of school and have babies early, before they are physically and emotionally ready to become mothers. Further, girls who marry as children are more likely to experience domestic violence than women who marry later.<sup>27</sup> Although the government of Nepal has formulated a National Strategy to End Child Marriage (2014), this trend does not seem to be lessening, putting millions of girls and women at risk of violence, health problems, and losing their access to education. The National Strategy’s theory of change notes that “Patriarchy, lack of knowledge of legislation for the legal age of marriage, the low value accorded to the girl child, poverty, the dowry system, and other religious and social norms perpetuate child marriage, which denies girls their rights, choice, and participation, and undermines progress toward an equal and prosperous Nepal.”<sup>28</sup> Child marriage also negatively affect boys, who are pressured to begin supporting their wife and family from a young age – a possible “push factor” in young men’s migration for labor. The burgeoning trend of teenage elopement is also considered child marriage, even though these young people are marrying by choice.

**Polygamy**, despite being illegal, is a form of GBV often accepted as normal by both men and women. However, polygamous practices by men can trigger violence against women. Young

<sup>25</sup> Dixit, “Not just...”

<sup>26</sup> Human Rights Watch (2016), “Our time to sing and play: Child marriage in Nepal,” 3. Although the Government of Nepal has changed the legal age of marriage to 20 years, under the Convention on the Rights of the Child “child marriage” is still considered to be the marriage of those under age 18.

<sup>27</sup> Human Rights Watch, 3-4

<sup>28</sup> Government of Nepal (2014), Theory of Change for Ending Child Marriage in Nepal

women interviewed in 2017 attributed some domestic violence to arguments between spouses regarding a man's relationship with a second wife or girlfriend; polygamy is also a cause of economic disputes in families when men spend their money on women outside of the household.<sup>29</sup> It may also be connected to son preference, another harmful traditional belief. In a survey on GBV by the Nepal Police, communities in two districts explained that polygamy occurs if a man's wife gives birth to a daughter as their first child.<sup>30</sup>

**Chhaupadi** is a social tradition rooted in western Nepal in which women and girls are restricted from normal family

activities – including sleeping in their own house – during menstruation, due to strong beliefs surrounding impurity.<sup>31</sup> This practice has been legally prohibited since a 2005 ruling by Nepal's Supreme Court, but enforcement is nearly non-existent. Humiliatingly, menstruating women and girls are forced to sleep in animal sheds for the duration of their periods; these sheds can be up to a mile away from their homes.<sup>32</sup> Women have been raped while sleeping in these sheds, and have experienced snake bites, malnutrition, flu, and smoke inhalation from trying to stay warm by a fire. In western districts, these practices are widely known; it is not a secret within communities that women

<sup>29</sup> Ghimire and Samuels, 42

<sup>30</sup> BPRC (2011), "Baseline survey on violence against women and children of five project districts," Kathmandu: Nepal Police Directorate of Women and Children Services

<sup>31</sup> OPMCM

<sup>32</sup> BPRC, 28



are menstruating and considered “impure.”<sup>33</sup> While this practice may be less severe in other regions, families will often restrict a menstruating woman from entering the household’s *puja* room, kitchen, or her bedroom, and she may be prohibited from eating certain foods and cooking. Women who refuse to practice *chhaupadi* are blamed by their communities for crop failure, illnesses, and the death of livestock.<sup>34</sup> *Chhaupadi* is a tradition rooted in exclusion that degrades the health and dignity of women.

Other traditional harmful practices that are prevalent in Nepal are *dowry* (the expectation that a bride gives exorbitant

gifts to her husband and his family); *jari* (the practice of marrying someone else’s wife by paying money to the original husband); *deuki* (“donating” a young girl to a temple, where she must then live away from her family); *boksa/boksi*, or witchcraft allegations (against both women and men); and other practices rooted in inequality, discrimination, and a suppression of rights. A number of these practices have been identified in Nepal’s 14<sup>th</sup> Periodic Plan as challenges to gender equality and women’s empowerment.<sup>35</sup>

These and other practices are rooted in exclusion and discrimination, and must be eliminated for gender equality to truly exist.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Al Jazeera, “Nepali teen dies from snake bite in ‘menstruation hut,’” July 9, 2017; [www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/nepali-teen-dies-snake-bite-menstruation-hut-170708084307951.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/nepali-teen-dies-snake-bite-menstruation-hut-170708084307951.html)

<sup>35</sup> Nepal’s 14<sup>th</sup> Periodic Plan (2073/74 – 2075/26), section 6.1.1.2, “Gender Equality and Women Empowerment: Challenges.”



## Gender-based violence

Despite political commitments and a progressive legal and policy framework, GBV has long been a challenge in Nepal.<sup>36</sup> In 2010, a mapping of GBV revealed that women of all ages are subjected to various forms of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. The 2011 Nepal Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) revealed that one in five women of reproductive age (15 – 49) reported a lifetime experience of physical violence and more than one in ten experience sexual violence. A study by the Office of the Prime Minister found an even higher rate: **48% of women surveyed had experienced violence at some point in their lives.**<sup>37</sup> The lifetime experience of physical violence, as well as experience of physical or sexual spousal violence, was greater for older women than younger women: 35% of women aged 45-49 had experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, compared with 21% of women aged 15-19.<sup>38</sup> Disturbingly, GBV is a major reason that suicide is the leading cause of death among Nepali women of reproductive age.<sup>39</sup>

However, a majority (75%) of women who experience GBV do not seek

any help and only 7% of women who experience sexual violence report the assault. Reports of recent violence are associated with older women (above 35 years), women with lower levels of social networking (see “Restricted Mobility,” above), and women living in the hill districts. In contrast, empowerment and the absence of spousal violence is strongly associated with positive health outcomes.<sup>40</sup>

According to a 2014 study, almost one in two adolescents believed that women should tolerate violence so as to keep harmony in the family; one in six married girls had experienced physical violence, and one in three reported being forced to have sex by their husbands.<sup>41</sup> The level of disempowerment of women in Nepalese society, their economic dependency on men, traditional power structures, the lack of familial and legal support, and their subordinate social position are all factors making them particularly vulnerable to GBV.<sup>42</sup>

A study on local security and justice perceptions in selected districts in Nepal in 2013 revealed that women’s sense of security has been declining.<sup>43</sup> This trend has emerged as a result of

<sup>36</sup> Gender based violence (GBV) is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetuated against a person’s will and that is based on socially prescribed gender differences between males and females. While men and boys can be victims of GBV (particularly sexual violence), GBV has a greater impact on women and girls.

<sup>37</sup> OPMCM, page ix; 900 women were surveyed in this study

<sup>38</sup> Nepal Demographic Health Survey, 2011

<sup>39</sup> Pradhan et al (2011). Review of the evidence: Suicide among women in Nepal.

<sup>40</sup> Tuladhar et al (2013). “Women’s Empowerment and Spousal Violence in Relation to Health Outcomes in Nepal: Further analysis of the 2011 Nepal Demographic and Health Survey.”

<sup>41</sup> Amin et al (2014), “Highlights from the UNICEF Adolescent Development and Participation Baseline Study.”

<sup>42</sup> OPMCM

<sup>43</sup> FWLD, INSEC, Institute of Human Rights Communication Nepal, International Alert, National Business Initiative, and Saferworld (2013), “Snapshot of local security and justice perceptions in selected districts of Nepal: District Assessment Findings”



insecurities due to intra-familial and domestic violence perpetrated by husbands, in-laws, and extended family members. The study further states that violence against women is entrenched in the broader community as a result of patriarchy, underpinning the continued use of exploitative traditional and social practices such as chhaupadi, polygamy, child marriage, dowry-related traditions, allegations of witchcraft, and limited access to property and citizenship rights. Further, the study observed that growth in seasonal male migration is amplifying incidences of polygamy and other forms of violence.

Both men and women in the 2013 UNFPA Nepal Perception Survey reported that physical abuse of women, rape, girl trafficking, polygamy, discrimination between sons and daughters, and child marriage are common forms of GBV in Nepal.<sup>44</sup> One-fifth of the respondents reported that they have seen or heard of incidents of rape and attempted rape in their community. Only one in ten interviewed women knew that they should seek health care services following sexual violence, but a majority of women expressed that women do not visit health facilities for fear of stigma and loss of honor for the woman's family.

All this evidence helps us understand the scope and nature of the pervasive, persistent problem of GBV in Nepal, but does not present us with easy solutions.

## Legal inequalities

The government of Nepal has attempted to reduce violence against women via laws such as the *Domestic Violence Crime and Punishment Act (2067)* and the *Sexual Harassment Prevention Act (2071)*, but legal inequalities exist between Nepali women and men based on gender. While Nepal's new constitution (2072) proclaims a right to equality for all citizens, **Nepali citizenship has proven difficult to acquire for Nepali women and their children.** The Constitution establishes clear paths to citizenship for children of Nepali men, but Nepali women must prove that their children's father is Nepali for the children to receive citizenship by descent.<sup>45</sup> As the Forum for Women, Law and Development notes, "Without citizenship certificates, individuals cannot register on the voters' list, register marriages or births, buy or sell land, appear in professional exams, open bank accounts or have access to credit."<sup>46</sup> In reality, women have struggled to obtain their own citizenship documents, often having to provide proof to local officials based on their husbands' or fathers' Nepali citizenship.

Further, the Forum for Women, Law and Development estimated that as of 2009, Nepal still has 96 provisions and 92 schedules of various acts that would need to be revised for truly substantive equality between women and men,

<sup>44</sup> UNFPA Nepal Perception Survey (2013)

<sup>45</sup> Constitution of Nepal 2015, English translation by Nepal Law Society, UNDP and IDEA, part 2, "Citizenship"

<sup>46</sup> FWLD, "Citizenship Right in Nepal," accessed from <http://fwld.org/core-areas/legal-identity-and-citizenship/>

especially in areas such as nationality, marriage, and family relations.<sup>47</sup> Lastly, a majority of Nepalese do not know about existing laws that do attempt to make progress toward equality and reduce discrimination. In a 2012 survey, 61% of 900 women interviewed did not know that any GBV laws existed in Nepal (see “Lack of Awareness,” above).<sup>48</sup> In the words of one woman who participated in an Apeiron focus group discussion, “I’ve heard of women’s rights – but I don’t know where to get them.” Women will continue to struggle in many aspects of their lives without truly substantive legal equality that is actively upheld and enforced by duty bearers.

### **Patriarchal beliefs about gender roles**

There is no secret that patriarchal beliefs about gender affect behavior, roles, opportunities, and lived experiences. In a study conducted by the Office of the Prime Minister in 2012, **Nepali women and men identified patriarchal norms as an underlying cause of violence against women.**<sup>49</sup> One man explained that “even if women are more educated than men, [men] are considered superior and their opinions are always supported, but women are always considered backward and less knowledgeable.”<sup>50</sup> However, these patriarchal beliefs also negatively affect men. In a study of men in eastern Nepal, young men

revealed frustration at their inability to find suitable employment – a key responsibility ascribed to Nepali men. They also fear being ridiculed and losing social status if they are perceived to give too much autonomy to their wives, girlfriends, and sisters, even if the men themselves believe in gender equality. This study by Saferworld notes that, “There is a lack of modern-day role models – both male and female – in the communities, from which young men and boys can learn what equitable and non-violent gender relations can look like.”<sup>51</sup>

A different study on masculinities among Nepalese men in relation to son-preference showed that a majority displayed high masculinity norms and high acceptance of violence against women.<sup>52</sup> Nearly 55% of men in Nepal had witnessed gender discrimination and violence within the home while they were growing up, with the most common form being restrictions imposed on their female sibling. This study also found that nearly half of men surveyed in a 2012 study believed that “a woman’s most important role is to take care of her home and cook for her family,” and 70% agreed that “to be a man, you have to be tough.”<sup>53</sup>

A study by ODI also examined social norms of masculinity and femininity in Nepal. Norms associated with masculinity are a deep need for respect, the control over a wife by her husband, and the “guardianship” of

<sup>47</sup> Nanda et al, 8

<sup>48</sup> OPMCM, 34

<sup>49</sup> OPMCM, page x

<sup>50</sup> OPMCM, 76

<sup>51</sup> Maycock et al (2014), “How can you be a marda if you beat your wife?": Notions of masculinities and violence in Eastern Nepal, 8

<sup>52</sup> Nanda et al.

<sup>53</sup> Nanda et al., 27



females by males; these norms are used as justification of violence against women by men, especially if wives do not obey husbands. Norms associated with femininity are various forms of submissiveness, including ceding control

to one's husband or male relatives.<sup>54</sup> Such norms vary in degree by region of Nepal, community and family, but their prevalence is widespread and restricts the choices of both women and men.

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<sup>54</sup> Ghimire and Samuels, 45-49

## OUR INTERVENTIONS

Apeiron's intervention areas and project activities are designed to counter these barriers to equality. Throughout all of our projects in four intervention areas, we help individuals and communities overcome the constraining barriers in their life.

### INTERVENTION AREA 1: GBV PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

As noted above, almost half of Nepali women experience violence during their life. Due to this violence, GBV survivors – mainly women – cannot fulfill their potential and exercise their rights. To help women and men overcome the barriers created by all types of GBV, Apeiron designs and runs GBV Prevention and Response activities based on individuals' and communities' needs.

GBV Response means providing a wide range of services, such as legal, medical, psychosocial, and economic support, to meet the needs of survivors of gender-based violence. Apeiron has focused on GBV response since its establishment and over the years we have acquired additional competencies, sensitivities, and knowledge to better serve survivors. Although we have been serving female GBV survivors thus far, we do not exclude the possibility of working with male GBV survivors. Our beneficiaries and partners tell us that we are unique in our holistic approach to helping survivors get their life back on track and prepare for a stable, successful future.

Our GBV Prevention activities encompass outreach and awareness to

help communities become aware of anti-GBV laws in Nepal, as well as broader rights awareness for individuals. Income-generating skills for women are also a method of preventing GBV by building women's economic independence and decreasing their financial reliance on male family members, which lessens their vulnerability to abuse. Engaging men and boys on awareness activities is another prong of our GBV prevention approach. Lastly, our work to bring awareness and prevent child marriage also prevents GBV, since child marriage puts women and girls at particular risk of sexual, physical and psychological violence throughout their lives.

Under this intervention area, we undertake multi-sectoral and holistic project activities in Kathmandu, Dhading, Syangjya, Bhaktapur, Udayapur, Sindhuli, Jumla and Okhaldhunga districts, including:

- Legal counselling
- Psycho-social counselling
- Life skills training and literacy classes
- Safe shelter
- Medical services
- Vocational and income-generating skills training
- Awareness classes and education
- Reintegration or resettlement, based on survivors' desire
- Referrals to mental health institutions and other necessary services
- Outreach and awareness sessions about recognizing and preventing GBV (overlapping with the Rights Awareness and Education Support intervention area)

Amongst other types of impact, the women we serve through GBV Response

enhance their resilience, develop income-generating skills to strengthen their economic status, form social bonds with other beneficiaries, increase their confidence, and gain knowledge of their rights – perhaps for the first time. When possible, we work with the women’s families to address harmful behaviors and prevent violence from recurring. Ultimately, GBV survivors will be able to overcome the trauma of their experiences, reintegrate into their households and communities, and prepare for a stable, successful future. Our GBV Prevention activity participants

(male and female) are more aware of GBV laws and services in Nepal, and pledge to watch for warning signs of GBV in their communities, including child marriage. Prevention activities are also incorporated into Response, resulting in cross-cutting impact; we find that women who stay at CASA Nepal and receive holistic services and training are less likely to experience GBV again after returning to their communities. Barriers to equality that are addressed in this intervention area:



## Case Study: Suntali

**Suntali's case:** Though Suntali's maternal family lived in a rural area, she began working as a housemaid in urban Kathmandu at a young age. The family she worked for treated her like another daughter, and she stayed a long time. She met her husband, Rajesh, while working there, and after one month they ran away together to his home in Okhaldhunga district. His family treated her with respect because she had NRs. 150,000 in savings from her work as a housemaid. During the first few months together, Rajesh treated Suntali well, but then their marriage turned sour. Her husband stopped talking to her. Suntali wanted to plan for the future since Rajesh had no work, but he refused to make plans. He would spend the day gambling and wouldn't give Suntali money for basic necessities – denial of resources, which is a type of gender-based violence (GBV).

Rajesh would often leave Okhaldhunga and go to Kathmandu without telling her. One day when he disappeared, Suntali called relatives and learned that he had gone to Kathmandu, so she took a bus to go find him. After locating him, he convinced her to open a small hotel with him in Kathmandu. She invested all of her savings in opening the hotel, but once the hotel was opened her husband demanded more money and left Suntali to run the hotel by herself. By this time Suntali was pregnant and unable to keep up with the demands of running a hotel without support. After six months of business, Suntali had to sell the hotel, receiving only 60,000 of the 150,000 she had invested. She and Rajesh returned to their district, but after returning home, he ran off again. Having had enough, Suntali came to CASA Nepal for skills

development training on the advice of her brother-in-law.

**Problem:** There is a lack of awareness of the consequences of early marriage, which often results in tense relationships between spouses who do not know each other well nor have financial plans for the future.

**Solutions:** Apeiron provided Suntali shelter, life skill trainings, and awareness lessons on health, GBV, literacy, human rights, and other subjects. Apeiron supported Suntali in seeking and receiving legal services after she learned from relatives that Rajesh married another woman and planned to move abroad.

**Significant Change:** With the help of CASA Nepal, Suntali's self-esteem and confidence level increased. For the first time in her life, she got the opportunity to learn a new skill – stitching – and seek stable employment to support herself independently. She is now working in a factory where she earns NRs. 10,000 per month. CASA Nepal also provided sponsorship support for her daughter's education.

Apeiron has seen personal and economic improvements in the short time that GBV survivors stay in CASA Nepal. They learn income generating skills, which strengthen a woman's economic status and allow her to establish more independence. Survivors who take life skill and awareness trainings together form social bonds and feel personally empowered after learning about their own rights, availability of services, and access to justice.

## **INTERVENTION AREA 2: INCOME GENERATING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

Apeiron has been running a wide variety of income-generating activity (IGA) skills trainings since 2004. These trainings complement our other intervention areas of GBV Prevention & Response and Rights Awareness & Education Support. Data suggest that women's participation in the public and private sphere is constrained by their lack of formal employment and livelihood opportunities, and is compounded by their limited access to economic resources such as start-up capital or loans. A lack of income-generating or livelihoods skills makes women financially dependent on their husbands, which also makes them vulnerable to abuse or coercion. Our internal research shows that women feel "voiceless" when they do not earn their own income, and this prevents them from standing up to abusive husbands or other family members.

Since many of our beneficiaries are illiterate or semi-literate, they lack the academic credentials for formal workplaces. With custom-made skills training, they gain immediate knowledge and access to the labor market and can start earning their own income, often for the first time. One of our first projects, Shakti Ghar, taught skills in housekeeping, English, and cooking to women and girls. We have progressed in the types of skills we now teach, but we are still using this type of intervention

because of strong evidence that IGA skills reduce inequalities between women and men and help GBV survivors increase their confidence and feel empowered.

We have implemented the following income-generating skills trainings in Kathmandu District, Syangja and Dhading districts:

- Making and selling bamboo stools and woven baskets
- Knitting and tailoring
- Housekeeping
- Making and selling candles and incense
- Security guard training
- Beautician training
- Cooking and food-related skills
- Business literacy
- Seed capital for micro-enterprise development
- Linkages with markets and value-chain actors (micro-enterprise support)

Program participants have reported three main benefits from our trainings:

- Women gain skills and competencies that allow them to enter the workforce and demand fair market wages
- They gain agency, confidence, and decision-making power in their households
- They earn money by finding a job or starting their own business with their new skills. For women, earning their own income is a fundamental component of their overall personal empowerment.

Barriers to equality that are addressed in this intervention area:

**Patriarchal beliefs about gender roles**

**Women's participation in public life**

**Gender-based violence**

**Lack of awareness about rights, services**

**Restricted mobility**

**Low literacy skills**

**Family expectations**

### **Case Study: Sabita**

Sabita's case: Sabita (name changed), a young married woman from Jhapa, had two daughters. Her husband and in-laws were not very happy about the fact that she gave birth to two daughters and no sons. Her younger daughter developed heart problems at age nine and needed very costly surgery. Sabita's husband didn't want to pay for the surgery, which created conflict between Sabita and her husband. They eventually got divorced.

**Problem:** Post-divorce life is difficult for Nepali women, especially finances. After the divorce, Sabita struggled with daily living expenses and her daughter's medical bills were ever increasing. She decided that foreign employment was the solution to her financial problems, so she approached Casa Nepal to learn skills that would help her get a job in a Gulf country, where many Nepali women work as domestic helpers.

**Solutions:** She started learning tailoring in CASA Nepal. As part of CASA's series of awareness sessions along with income-generating skills, Sabita started analyzing her decision to go abroad. A session on Safe Migration finally changed her mind. With the help of individual counseling, Sabita realized that she could earn enough money in Nepal and also be with her children. She also convinced other three friends (who had similar thoughts about foreign employment) to open a shop together. CASA's business planning session helped Sabita understand the operational needs of running her own enterprise.

**Significant Change:** CASA Nepal provided Sabita with a cost-subsidized sewing machine. She went back to Jhapa, her home district, and opened a tailoring shop along with three other GBV survivors. They are all doing well and plan to scale up their enterprise.



### INTERVENTION AREA 3: RIGHTS AWARENESS AND EDUCATION SUPPORT

Apeiron has been working in Rights Awareness and Education Support since 2006, starting with the sponsorship of 12 underprivileged children. While meeting the children and getting to know more about them and their families, Apeiron realized that Education Support was needed far beyond these 12 children. We also learned from a micro-enterprise project in Syangja that gender friendly curriculum was needed to encourage thoughtful discussion about gender roles in all aspects of public and private life.

Women and vulnerable children (such as orphans or those from female-headed households, single-parent households, or poor families) are the program participants in our Rights Awareness and Education Support intervention area. Men and boys will also participate in future projects.

Components of Rights Awareness and Education Support have been incorporated into projects in Kathmandu, Bajura, Bardiya, Kalikot, Rasuwa, Jhapa, Sindhupalchok, Sindhuli, and other districts. The specific activities are:

- Children and their families are

financially and logistically supported to go to school

- Awareness sessions about human rights and women’s rights, gender based violence, entitlements and services are conducted in communities
- A gender-sensitive non-formal education (NFE) curriculum about rights, literacy, and life skills specially developed for semi-literate and illiterate adult women

Participants have reported the following impact:

- Children at-risk of dropping out regularly attend formal schooling
- Parents show increased motivation to send children to school
- Women gain literacy skills
- Women become aware of their rights for the first time
- Women, girls, men and boys become aware of the illegality of harmful practices as well as the legal age of marriage in Nepal, and realize that they do not need to continue harmful practices in the name of “tradition”
- Women become aware of services and entitlements available to them

Barriers to equality that are addressed in this intervention area:



## Case Study: Sweta

**Sweta's case:** Sweta (named changed), a 35-year old women currently living in Dhading, is one of the success stories of Apeiron's Rights Awareness intervention. Sweta was an uneducated young woman from Kathmandu who met and fell in love with her husband Ram, a garment factory worker, at age 20. She moved into Ram's home with him and his mother, and soon gave birth to one son and one daughter.

Early in their marriage, Sweta and Ram were content, but after one year, Ram began drinking regularly and hitting Sweta. Their land was not sufficient for their daily survival, so Ram went to India to seek employment. During his stay in India, he sent no money and called home only to speak to his own mother, who gossiped negatively about Sweta. When Ram came home infrequently, he would shout at Sweta and advise her to marry someone else. Sweta felt tense around her mother-in-law and lost her appetite and ability to sleep.

**Problem:** Women in Nepal are expected to live with their husband's family, even if he leaves the home to migrate. If uneducated, they are economically and socially dependent on their husband and in-laws.

**Solutions:** When Apeiron's Outreach, Knowledge and Change was launched in Dhading, our social mobilizer met Sweta and learned that she was suffering from psychological abuse. Sweta and her mother-in-law were invited to attend an awareness program for six months. At first, Sweta's mother-in-law did not allow her to attend the sessions, but after additional outreach from Apeiron, both women attended together. In the program, the women learned about human rights, reproductive health, gender based violence, domestic violence, and other topics. Further, Apeiron's psychosocial counsellor provided eight counselling sessions to Sweta's family as well as individual counselling for her.

**Significant change:** After the counselling and awareness sessions, Sweta's mother-in-law treated Sweta with more respect, and even advised Ram to change his behavior by calling more frequently and communicating with Sweta. Sweta reports improved relationships, better communication, and less tension in her household due to the psychosocial counselling and awareness sessions.

#### **INTERVENTION AREA 4: INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION**

Lastly, Apeiron is always seeking to strengthen our internal operations and external connections. We stay connected to local, national, regional, and global conversations on gender equality through our local partners, regional networks, and expanding number of institutional partnerships. Nationally, we are members of Nepal's GBV Information Management System with the Nepali government, UNFPA, and nine other Nepali NGOs; the Women's Security

Pressure Group; and other coalitions working to reduce GBV and increase women's empowerment in Nepal. Regionally, we are a member of the Asian Network of Women's Shelters, in which we contribute our knowledge and expertise about running safe houses for survivors of GBV. And globally, we are a partner organization of Girls Not Brides, a worldwide coalition to reduce child marriage. We value learning from other experts and sharing our own experiences with like-minded allies to advance the pace of women's empowerment and the achievement of gender equality.

## TARGET BENEFICIARIES

Women and girls are at the center of Apeiron's work. While we seek to empower entire communities and create a more gender equal world, we have identified women and girls as our target beneficiaries. Since Apeiron's establishment, we have seen the positive

effect that women's empowerment makes on their families and communities. We will continue to focus on women and girls and engage men and boys, while measuring impact at the individual, household, and community level.



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## ABOUT US

Apeiron is a non profit organisation working for a gender equal society in Nepal since 1997.

Through 4 main areas of interventions; Gender Based Violence Prevention and Response, Awareness and Education, Income Generation and Institutional Collaboration, Apeiron fights against prejudice, violence, and inequalities so that women develop the skills necessary to support themselves and their families.

By helping women confront uphill battles, we enable them to overcome the constraining barriers in their life and realize their potential.

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