

# NEPAL TRUST AUSTRIA

MAHILA AVAZ  WOMEN'S VOICE



## Project

The project Mahila Avaz - Women's Voice aims at holistically empowering women and girls in the rural northwest of Nepal to end gender based violence and overcome poverty.

A 2015 participatory study conducted by Nepal Trust Austria in the remote Himalayan region identified poverty and Chhaupadi as the main issues of women in the region. Chhaupadi is a legally banned yet practice rooted in the belief of “impurity” of women during their Menstruation and after childbirth. Women are thus banned from their communities for seven days per month as well as for the first 30 days after childbirth. They instead have to spend the nights in the woods, caves, huts or stables, where they are subjected to sexual assault, dangerous wildlife, abductions with the goal of forced marriage and freezing temperatures down to minus 20 degrees Celsius – with their newborns. In an area where 56% of population live below the poverty line, winters are harsh and land is scarce, women are also the most affected group of malnourishment

## Strategy and Programs

Mahila Avaz provides shelter for women and their children during Chhaupadi as well as for victims of domestic violence, which is widespread in Simikot. In early 2018, we opened the first women’s shelter in the Humla district (50,000 inhabitants) to offer accommodation and a wide range of activities to fight poverty, malnourishment and gender based violence. In addition to women's and men's groups, agriculture training on communal land, chicken breeding and beekeeping, we run programs, including a radio program, to raise awareness of the mentioned issues and consequences. By now, 600 women are participating and acquiring knowledge and education in the areas of small businesses, social issues, legal rights, ecology and health while involving the entire local community in the process of change. The activities additionally enable income generation, empowerment and networking among the female community, and thus overall improve the status of women within their families and society.



To ensure maximum impact and a peaceful transition to gender equality, the women's families and communities have been continuously involved in the entire process, from the 2015 study to project planning to implementation and monitoring.

### Organisational Background

The Austrian civil society association Nepal Trust Austria has been operating in Simikot, Nepal since 2002. Originally aimed at improving the precarious medical care state of the local population, establishing a hospital and providing continuous medical care, the association saw that many health issues resulted from gender discrimination and therefore decided to extend its focus and include social issues in 2015. In order to analyse the specific problems and challenges for the local population, several months of participatory field research were carried out using the methods of PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal). The participants identified poverty, gender-based violence and the socio-economic disadvantage of women and girls as the main issues. The jointly developed solutions were the foundations of the project *Mahila Avaz* (Nepali for *Women's Voice*). Just like the past and ongoing projects in the health sector, *Mahila Avaz* will be implemented by the local partner organization NAPO - Nepal Austria Partnership Organization, with 90% of the team being female.

### Duration and Costs

The phased implementation was started in January 2018. The projects initial duration is two and a half years. At the end of this period, an external evaluation will be conducted and, if deemed appropriate, an extension of another two and a half years is intended. The budget for the first period amounts to GBP 120.000; costs of the first year amounted to GBP 49.000 and were covered by equity capital, private donations, proceeds from exhibitions as well as large individual donations. The costs for the next year of the project amount to GBP 71.000; of this amount, GBP 52.000 are already covered by private donations, a grant from NOAN and donations from STRABAG. The yet uncovered costs amount to GBP 19.000.

[www.womens-voice.at](http://www.womens-voice.at)

[www.nepaltrust.at](http://www.nepaltrust.at)

[gruber@womens-voice.at](mailto:gruber@womens-voice.at)

+43 699 191 33 110