Summary
This is a project about improving menstrual hygiene among female students and supplying pure drinking water to reduce student absenteeism and improve academic achievement. Four female-friendly washrooms and a water filtration plant were constructed, and handed over to Shree Bal Shiksha Secondary School in Sindhupalchok, in a remote hilly district of Nepal.

Narrative
I always wished to work for water and sanitation (WAS), and the education sector in remote villages in Nepal. Though I am a student majoring in economics, I was concerned about poor menstrual health, and the high rate of absenteeism among teenagers in rural schools and have contemplated whether I could be of some help with this issue. I had witnessed firsthand the devastation in school facilities by the 2015 mega earthquake in my village. Fortunately, my village lies near the capital city and the damaged school received quick support, unfortunately the Shree Bal Shikha school was not as lucky.

Because Sindhupalchowk is one of the remotest hilly districts of Nepal and faced massive damage from the Mega earthquake of 2015, the school fits the requirements as my project site. Even five years after the disaster, drinking water and hygienic washroom facilities were yet not available to the students at this school. Since I started working on that site, the school's teachers, including the principal and vice principal, have contributed their valuable time. They were available for observation, plan implementation, construction materials, finding employees, record keeping, and helped arrange a local homestay for my accommodation. I was blessed to have a school like this, and staff members like them.

My initial plan was to construct female-friendly washrooms and install drinking water stations at Chandrodaya Secondary School in Lamjung Nepal. Lamjung was also one of the most affected areas by the earthquake and has similar conditions to Sindhupalchok. However, the plan did not work out due to several obstacles. When my teacher and I went to visit the school in lamjung, we did not receive support from the school team. The school needed toilets as the existing toilets were ruined. I met the schoolteachers and principal, and they told me that the toilets will need a retention wall but if I do not have enough budget, I can refurbish the existing toilets. After I observed the condition, I showed my entire plan to them. I asked them for further help to manage workers, local estimation costs, and accommodation. After discussing the project with the principal, he had concerns for my financial stability and ability to complete the project on time. I assured him that I will be fully responsible for my project, and I will deliver what I have promised. However, they did not respond to my messages when trying to contact them for 15 days. Without a response from them, I selected a similar school to implement my project at Sindhupalchok.

I had planned to provide stationeries to needy students to support their education as an additional component to the project. I asked for funds through Facebook fundraising and with my teacher’s contribution, some warm-hearted people funded my plan for these students to have bags, pens, pencils, and notebooks. My budget allocation was to build toilets and install water stations, but Shree Bal Shiksha Secondary School also needed a safety tank for the toilets. Therefore, the school also contributed funds that were originally not covered by my budget. There are several opportunities to continue my work on this issue. Four female-friendly toilets are not enough for students. The washrooms will be used equally by male and female students, two for male students and two for female students. Since there are no toilets in a good condition for male students, I could not force the school just to allow them for single gender use. Therefore, if the school could have a few more washrooms, this will help to reduce the current burden of the limited number of washrooms at a school with around 1,000 students.
Reflection

Peace for me includes a stable society where everyone has equal access to the basic needs of life. My project demonstrates the society that I dream of as all the students and teachers have a clean drinking water facility inside their school premises. Health risks from the contaminated water have been reduced, female students have a hygienic washroom, and no students need to miss their classes during their period, and in the short term, menstrual hygiene, classroom attendance, and the physical health of the students will be improved. Eventually, this will lead to overall educational growth, especially among female students as they will no longer need to skip their classes during their periods.

Time, weather conditions, and communication changed my plan. My initial plan was to start early and finish within a month. However, it took almost three months for me to finish my project. Even though I was communicating with schoolteachers as much as I could, it was challenging. I had a long commute from my home and was working 10-hour days. To save my time, I stayed at a homestay and focused on project work. I communicated with workers and listened to their personal life stories, and I found them interesting.

I learned that if you are ready to contribute, have a positive attitude, trust, and cooperation you can manage any demanding situation. The heavy and continuous monsoon rain destroyed roads, produced land slides, and floods the land. It made traveling difficult and catching the bus was challenging. Many times, I arrived home around 7 or 8 pm and I still had to walk for 30 minutes to get home from the bus station. That traveling changed my eating times and I had to adjust my schedule. I got sick multiple times throughout my project due to lack of food, rest, and poor air quality. In such a time, I learned that getting help from guardians, parents, and friends is the most helpful thing. I learned to share my difficulties with others to reduce my stress. Another problem that I faced was withdrawing money from the bank as banks are not located near the worksite. I had to travel long distances quite frequently to withdraw money and pay for construction materials. To solve this problem, I withdrew larger sums when I was in town. I kept cash and took funds with me when I went to school. I used that strategy frequently until I finish the project.

Through this work, I was able to change my parent's perspective of the work I can accomplish, and they now know that their young daughter has great potential. This perspective change will also help change the perspective of my community and even the world. One day when communities change their thoughts, the world will change. Today I have helped a community school and the students from that school have seen me dedicate my time at such an early age to make a difference in their community. After the completion of my project, students were happy to use the toilets. I could not be happier than when I saw happiness on their faces and inspired me to work more for these innocent students. After sharing my experiences and journey with students, they are looking forward to applying for a UWC scholarship and they said they want to improve their place by themselves.

Change is possible when you invest in the community.