Background and Importance:

Nepal is a developing nation, with only the capital city, Kathmandu, serving as the focal point for the majority of its development. Provinces and neighboring areas still continue to live in extreme poverty. The southeastern part of Nepal, typically known as Madhesh, lies in Province 2 and has an MPI index of 0.109, which is significantly high. The locals are known as "Madheshi". They have historically been oppressed because of their subpar living conditions and proximity to India (having an open border with India, Madheshi are usually labeled Indians, and it's common in Nepal for their identity to be questioned). Being from the Madheshi community, we have seen and experienced this problem ourselves. This instilled in us a burning desire to solve the problem since we were very young.

The majority of Madhesi people lack access to quality education, healthcare, and job prospects. People move to the capital city in search of work in an effort to support themselves. The competition in the capital city is ruthless, and if one doesn't have relevant skills and connections, one can't sustain. Madhesis have resorted to lower-level employment, primarily as waste entrepreneurs. Despite the fancy title, it is deeply despised and carries a lot of stigmas. These waste entrepreneurs are referred to as 'Kawadi' in Nepal which literally translates as 'Garbage'. These "Kawadi" ride throughout the city on bicycles while carrying battered sacks full of recyclable trash that they purchase from locals and then sell to recycling warehouses. These warehouses buy waste from the Kawadis, and they have a huge monopoly with the prices and control over the recycling market, resulting in underpayment to the Kawadis for their waste collection. However, they don't officially employ these Kawadis, leaving them with no job security.

As of now, there are roughly thirteen thousand Kawadi in the capital city. They live in the worst of living conditions and have the least amount of certainty with their jobs and lives. Their social status and their being from a historically repressed area don't earn them respect in the community, directly lowering their self-esteem.

Mission:

Our project builds on the foundation of providing these waste entrepreneurs with certain skill sets, which will prepare them for better jobs and lives, while also increasing their self-esteem. All of this will be done through a concretely planned 3-month long program, where we will train a certain number of waste entrepreneurs (aged 16-40), and make it a long-term project by collaborating with appropriate organizations. Our goal is ultimately to diminish the conditions of poverty that they live in, but we are trying to impact this not from the roots but from the branches. We aspire to instill a growth mindset in these waste entrepreneurs, with the hope that they spread this mindset in Madhesh so that the region is eventually pulled out from the murky depths of poverty.

Project Implementation:

Creating financially literate waste entrepreneurs: The majority of the waste entrepreneurs lack a basic understanding of saving and banking. We will collaborate with Finlit Nepal, an organization working to promote financial literacy in Nepal. Together, we will develop a hands-on learning curriculum that will help waste entrepreneurs learn the strategies for saving, opening, and closing bank accounts, depositing and withdrawing money, using the ATM, using mobile banking, transferring money, and investing in share markets. This will help them stay up to date with the current economic conditions of Nepal and develop better saving habits.

Instilling interpersonal skills and a growth mindset: Since these waste entrepreneurs' first language is Maithili, they have difficulty communicating effectively in Nepali. We will help them learn basic writing, reading, and speaking Nepali. We will create basic conversation templates, emulate real-life conditions, and make these waste entrepreneurs practice. We plan to leave them with the skills of negotiation and an understanding of the market. We are working to make this a certificate program so that the waste entrepreneurs will have something tangible to carry, which will help them in their future jobs.
From the Branches: A step towards uplifting the life of Madheshi waste entrepreneurs
Location: Nepal
College: Franklin and Marshall (F&M) College

Encouraging a healthy lifestyle: The uncertainty due to waste entrepreneurs’ financial & social status keeps their physical and mental health in poor condition. First, they lack access to healthy foods. They also indulge themselves in the consumption of addictive substances, including, but not limited to, alcohol and tobacco. We will focus on providing them with proper knowledge regarding balanced diets with the limited food they have access to. We will cooperate with Nepali Student Awareness on Disease Awareness organization to inform them regarding their mental peace and the long-term consequences of the addiction. Our program will also encourage them to follow hygienic practices while handling recyclable wastes.

Providing job security to the waste entrepreneurs: We are looking forward to collaborating with Khaalisisi, an early-stage waste management and recycling startup who works closely with these waste entrepreneurs and provides them with the job security. We will invite a team from Khaalisisi who will promote Khalisisi's vision and its promises among our participants. We are hopeful to connect our participants with Khaalisisi after the program, which will be mutually beneficial for both of them.

Note: Our participants will be provided with a stipend so that it compensates for their time in the session.

Timeline:

Pre-Departure: Interview waste-entrepreneurs remotely, list their problems, and formulate our solutions. Work closely with organizations to do proper planning.

May 3rd - 4th Week: Work closely with FinLit Nepal to tailor their curriculum for our participants.
June 1st - 2nd Week: Reach out to waste-entrepreneurs’ vicinities & register participants.
June 3rd - 4th Week: Manage the logistics, Start the class on financial literacy, interpersonal skills.
July 1st - 2nd Week: Open bank accounts for our participants, and train them on how to use it, Healthy lifestyle session starts.
July 3rd - 4th Week: Health checkup for our participants. Make them aware of balanced nutritious diets, mental & physical health well being, and anti-addiction.
August 1st-2nd Week: Invite speakers, monitor progress, provide certificates, and reach out to the provincial government with our report.

Peace Building and Impact:

A society can only be peaceful when the people are fairly treated, tolerant of each others' differences, and certain about living a fulfilling life. Our definition of peace in the context of our project primarily means eradicating uncertainty from the lives of Madhesi waste entrepreneurs and ultimately reducing poverty in the Madhesi community. Building on this, our project aims to empower the Madhesi community by providing them with proper education, relevant skills, and a growth mindset. This will ultimately prepare them for numerous opportunities, and having proper knowledge will give them the confidence to pursue them, eventually bringing the community out of poverty, and giving them the chance to be treated more fairly, ensuring improved, more peaceful lives.

Sustainability:

Our project and its impact is self-sustainable. The organizations that we are collaborating with, in particular FinLit Nepal and Nepali Student Awareness on Disease Awareness, are interested in continuing this project by providing various workshops and sessions on a regular basis to the people from Madhesh. Moreover we will present a report on our project and progress of the participants to the provincial government. Our participants will be connected to emerging startups in Nepal, where their labor can be utilized and they can be paid justly. Also, the skills that we will have provided them will assist them throughout their lives. We will also track progress of our program and the participants virtually. Moving forward we will continue to make this a national level project to uplift the entire Madheshi community.