



RIO+20
United Nations Conference
on Sustainable Development



Utah Valley University: Contribution of the MP members from the Rocky Mountains in promoting gender and SMD agendas in North America

**Statement of the Professor Sara Ulloa,
On behalf of the delegation of Utah Valley University
At Mountain Pavilion,
U.N. RIO+20 Conference on Sustainable Development**

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Why Sustainable Mountain Development? Because of the geography, natural conditions and history of the people of Utah it was natural for Utah Valley University (UVU) to focus on the sustainable mountain development (SMD) agenda. Because there are still so many areas of growth and research in the area of SMD, UVU's choice to focus on this area has given the school a chance to uniquely position itself on both the national and international scene. Several of UVU's contributions to the global SMD agenda have been recognized by the U.N.

How did UVU come to embrace the SMD agenda? The partnership of Utah Valley University with a number of nations overseas, and Kyrgyzstan in particular, was established because of similarities in the way of life between the regions. In 1999 the Ambassador of the Kyrgyz Republic to the USA, Baktybek Abdrisaev and his wife Cholpon Akmatalieva, visited Utah at the invitation of UVU. In 2005 those ties were further strengthened when UVU invited Ambassador Abdrisaev to teach at the university. With Ambassador Abdrisaev's help, and through the direct involvement of UVU Associate Vice-President for International Affairs and Diplomacy Dr. Rusty Butler, and Dr. Asylbek Aidaraliev, President, the International University of Kyrgyzstan (IUK), a mutually beneficial partnership was created between Kyrgyzstan and Utah to promote joint SMD-activities under the umbrella of the U.N.

What does UVU value most in its partnership with Kyrgyzstan? Kyrgyzstan was among a core group of mountainous nations, which helped initiate a special 1998 U.N. resolution that declared the year 2002 as International Year of Mountains (IYM). The highlight of the celebration occurred when Bishkek hosted the first Global Mountain Summit in October-November, 2002 in Kyrgyzstan. Dr. Asylbek Aidaraliev was a major driving force behind these efforts. After the Summit in Bishkek he was instrumental in the U.N. adopting a number of resolutions focusing on the SMD agenda, including a U.N. special resolution on sustainable development in mountain regions 58/216 in 2004. This document became the official program for international communities to promote SMD goals and priorities under the lead role of the U.N. Currently, Dr. Aidaraliev has proposed a new initiative from Kyrgyzstan for consideration at the RIO+20 summit in Brazil, focused on the creation, under the UN, of a category of developing mountainous nations, especially those most vulnerable. This approach aims to help them cancel external debt to multilateral creditors in exchange for sustainable mountain development and adaptation to climate change thus reducing the major threats to sustainable development. The bold and far reaching initiatives proposed by IUK will require joint efforts from many players belonging to different nations, regions etc. Also, it presents the need to build wide-range alliances and group efforts by UVU while jointly advocating with the IUK SMD-agenda. Kyrgyzstan has achieved all this only by relying on the close cooperation and involvement of the brightest and best known international experts in SMD activities: Dr. Jane Pratt, Director of the Mountain Institute (1996-2004); Dr. Frederick Starr, Chairman, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Johns Hopkins University, Washington, D.C.; Jed Shilling, former economist, the World Bank and many others.

When did UVU officially become involved in SMD promotion? In 2006, UVU officially became a member of the Mountain Partnership, a coalition of global institutions which promote sustainable mountain agenda globally along with the United Nations. Because of the important role of family and women in Utah's heritage and culture, UVU decided to focus their efforts specifically on the gender/family issues of the SMD agenda.

What was most important about the first “Women of the Mountains Conference”? As a practical step towards implementing the gender agenda, UVU, along with the International University of Kyrgyzstan, hosted the first Women of the Mountains Conference in March 8-10, 2007 in Orem, Utah. The conference highlighted women and children’s issues and the need for Mountain Partnership members in the region to work jointly in addressing these issues. This conference continued the traditions of the Thimphu Declaration, a document created during the 2002 celebration of Mountain Women Conference. The Thimphu Declaration highlights issues that are critical to women and children within mountainous regions. The Conference in Utah was unique, because for the first time in North American history, diplomats, experts, and scholars, from a 22 nations and from MOST ALL MOUNTAIN STATES of the Rocky Mountains gathered together for a first-ever regional event discussing both the gender agenda and the United Nation’s SMD agenda as a whole. Representatives from Montana and Wyoming, who were already involved in different types of cooperation with Kyrgyzstan, have been among the major contributors to the success of the conference. Vista 360 from Jackson, WY, like UVU, joined the MP in 2006.

The final document produced by the conference, the *Orem Declaration of Mountain Women*, has become one of the official documents of the international community on gender issues. It emphasizes the need for local communities to contribute to the global gender and mountain agenda with the aim to improve the conditions of women and family life in mountain communities around the world. The document focused its attention on the need to expand networking and knowledge-sharing, and an invitation to other regional institutions interested in the SMD agenda, with the hope they too would join the MP.

The conference established UVU as an important player in the international arena and caught the attention of the United Nations. As a result, the Secretary General of the United Nations in the report on sustainable mountain development to the General Assembly of the U.N. on August 03, 2009, highlighted UVU’s efforts: *“In response to the Orem Declaration of Mountain Women (the final document of The Women of the Mountains Conference, 2007, organized by Utah Valley University and the Utah-Russia Institute in Orem, Utah, United States of America), several institutions in the Rocky Mountain States of North America established a regional network on sustainable mountain development and gender issues. This led to exchanges of state legislatures/parliaments between Rocky Mountain States and mountain nations in Central Asia; including support of sales by Vista 360, a non-governmental organization based in the United States of hand-made local handicrafts from the mountains of Central Asia in the United States and the funding of cultural exchanges.”*

What was most important about the second “Women of the Mountains Conference”?

Continuing in the traditions of the first International Women of the Mountains Conference, and implementing the decisions of the Orem Declaration of the Mountain Women, UVU again co-hosted with IUK the second international conference on gender issues in 2011. The conference was mentioned in the Report on North American SMD of the Mountain Partnership at the RIO+20 Conference in Brazil: *“The second conference served to strengthen the regional approach for advancing the SMD and gender agendas by expanding the network of North American Mountain Partnership members and involving youth from Utah high-schools and UVU*

students in the conference activities.” A special feature of the second conference was the focus of the organizers on the involvement of members, new and old, of the MP in North America. Thirteen MP members from the region took part at the Conference, including Vista 360 from Jackson, WY and the famed Aspen International Mountain Foundation (AIMF) from Aspen, CO, which together with UVU and IUK created a core group who were actively advocating SMD goals in the Rocky Mountains. Another important step in developing networking regional ties within the MP was the participation at the conference of representatives of the MP hubs for Central Asia and Latin America, in addition to the incoming and outgoing coordinators of the MP secretariat in Rome, Italy, Olman Serrano and Douglas McGuire. As part of the activities of the conference and a further step in the development of a regional approach in promoting the SMD agenda, a number of discussions were held about creating a North American hub of the MP. As a result, the MP secretariat selected AIMF as the most appropriate and deserving candidate for that role. AIMF confirmed its special role by leading efforts of the Rocky Mountain communities in preparing in January 2012 a report on SMD in North America for the RIO+20 Conference on sustainable development. The creation of the North American hub of the MP in Aspen, CO will help to advance the SMD agenda in the region and involve the Rocky Mountains more actively in the activities of the global mountain community. UVU will support the efforts of its traditional partners from Wyoming, Montana and Colorado in a joint promotion of the SMD agenda.

What is most important about the third “Women of the Mountains Conference,” which UVU co-host in Puno, Peru, June 13-14, 2012? The Third international “Women of the Mountains Conference” in Peru was dedicated to the activities of the United Nations Rio+20 Conference on sustainable development and commemorated the 10th Anniversary of the International Year of Mountains.

UVU reached a number of goals during the gathering in Peru:

- a) Continuing the traditions of the two previous international conferences, organized by UVU and IUK in Orem, Utah in 2007 and 2011;
- b) Discussing pressing issues concerning mountain communities in the Andean regions of Peru and surrounding countries;
- c) Implementing a number of decisions of the *Orem Declaration of Mountain Women*, which aimed to:
 - Strengthen the alliance between the Rocky Mountains and Latin America in the promotion of gender issues;
 - Encourage three institutions in Peru to join the Mountain Partnership as a new members;
 - Alternating convention sites between Utah and the other mountainous countries around the world, with the aim of identifying and resolving problems which women in mountainous regions face; and
- d) Expanding Utah Valley University’s approach on “Community Engaged Learning” in the international community by sending to Peru and Brazil a UVU delegation comprised of Professor Sara Ulloa from the Languages Department, John McClure the president of Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF—a coalition of students clubs at UVU), and Jared Martin a UVU student.

The efforts of UVU in organizing the third international “Women of the Mountains Conference” in Peru were supported by many partners from the Rocky Mountains and overseas: Vista 360, Jackson, WY; AIMF, Aspen, CO; and IUK, Kyrgyzstan.

Why Latin America? The Andes Mountains embraces 8,000 km down the length of South America, with an approximate area of 2,500,000 km² and a population of almost 85 million (45% of total country population). The Andes are essential for the economies of seven countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela) in Latin America, providing agricultural areas, mineral resources, water and some of the largest business in South America. However, some of the poorest areas and most challenging living conditions exist in the Andes, especially in Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia.

Utah Valley University has a strong interest in Latin America due to a strong Latino presence among faculty and, as of 2010, among over 2,000 Latino students. In addition, there are numerous students and faculty who have lived in Latin America and are interested in cooperating and getting involved with activities that deal with sustainable mountain development. Since the first international “Women of the Mountains Conference,” hosted at UVU in 2007, Professor Sara Ulloa, who contributed to both of the “Women of the Mountains Conferences” hosted by UVU in 2007 and 2011, has been one of the most active promoters of that agenda. Moreover, after the second “Women of the Mountains Conference” in March 2011, she has agreed to be the first advisor of the newly created UVU student Sustainable Mountain Development Club and to coordinate UVU efforts dealing with the promotion of the SMD agenda through cooperation with mountain nations of Latin America.

Why Peru? Cuzco, Peru is located at the center of the Andes. UVU Professor Sara Ulloa, a native of Peru, in 2007 decided to initiate a variety of service learning projects in her courses as part of the Service Learning Distinction Program at UVU. She was the director for the first humanitarian initiative to aid more than 800 children, victims of several earthquakes in Peru (2007) and has continued providing aid to orphanages in Latin America since then. In 2011, organizers of the second international conference “Women of the Mountains” expanded the network of the Mountain Partnership in the Rocky Mountains and strengthened ties with regional hubs in the Central Asian and Latin American MP. The selection and advocacy of the latest was due to the efforts of Professor Ulloa who was able to start working collaboratively with Miguel Saravia, director of CONDESAN (Lima, Peru), institution which represents the MP regional hub in Latin America and has contributed to the SMD-agenda for more than 17 years. Since then, she has been able to engage students in research projects that ultimately benefit the Andean community in order to mobilize the wealth of the Andes to overcome poverty and social exclusion, including collaborative work with environmental engineer German Espinoza in Puno, Peru in March 2012. The joint efforts of Professor Ulloa together with German Espinoza made it possible for UVU to co-host with the Universidad Privada de San Carlos, PELT and HOPERU Humanitarian, the third international “Women of the Mountains Conference” in Peru (see the paragraph about the conference in Peru). In addition to the several goals of the conference, aimed at following up decisions of the Orem Declaration of Mountain Women, this event has been dedicated to the Rio+20 U.N. Conference on sustainable development and to the 10th anniversary of the International Year of Mountains, making the gathering in Peru a very

important event for the international community and the Mountain Partnership in promoting the global gender agenda.

What kinds of other UVU activities promoted SMD jointly with other MP members?

Activities initiated by UVU together with its traditional partners and aiming to promote joint SMD activities included, for example, co-sponsoring a tour of the folk music group “Kut” from Kyrgyzstan in the Rocky Mountains in 2008, celebrations of the International Mountain Days during 2010 and 2011, hosting the first and the second Utah high-schools students workshops and essays contests on gender issues in 2011 and on sustainable energy in 2012 among others.

What is most important about the United Nations Rio+20 Conference on sustainable development on June 20-22, 2012? As per the official web-site: “Rio+20” is the short name for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development to take place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012 – twenty years after the landmark 1992 Earth Summit in Rio.... At the Rio+20 Conference, world leaders, along with thousands of participants from the private sector, NGOs and other groups, will come together to shape how we can reduce poverty, advance social equity and ensure environmental protection on an ever more crowded planet.” The integration of the SMD-agenda at the landmark 1992 Earth Summit in Rio became the first step in the U.N. and the international community paying attention to the unique issues that mountain people face throughout the world. Thanks to the efforts of many mountainous nations such as Kyrgyzstan, the priority of SMD-activities in the U.N. agenda has significantly expanded since the 1992 Rio conference.

During the “RIO+20” Conference, the global mountain community will be pushing to garner more U.N. and international attention. While UVU will take part in a variety of activities, the most important tasks for the delegation from Utah will be participation at a special event – presentation and exhibition at the Third Global Mountain Meeting of the Mountain Partnership on June 19, 2012. The goal of the last meeting is to define a five-year plan for the international global mountain community to promote common goals and place the mountain agenda more squarely on the radar of the United Nations.

Through its presence and participation the UVU delegation will strengthen the University’s status as an important player in the promotion of the SMD-agenda. Additionally, it will be a great experience for faculty and students to be involved in real-life advocacy and decision-making at the U.N. level. Participation in this conference will have a positive impact on the future development of the University and the professional careers of its students.

What are the future plans and priorities for UVU in SMD promotion?

UVU will be involved in a number of activities focused on promotion of SMD and follow-up on the decisions of the U.N. RIO+20 Conference on Development and the Third Global Mountain Meeting of the Mountain Partnership. It will be important also for UVU to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the celebration of the International Year of Mountain 2002 under the umbrella of the United Nations. As a part of those plans, UVU together with IUK and the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Johns Hopkins University, Washington, D.C., plan to co-host an international Conference “Conflicts and Peace in the Mountain regions” in the city of Osh, Kyrgyzstan, which will address for the first time the influence of the way of life of the mountain

people on the proliferation of conflicts around the world, as well as develop some solutions for prevention of violence and wars there. Also, UVU will continue to focus on annual celebrations of International Mountain Day. This event allows us to sustain gender and SDM activities on the agenda of the mountain communities in Utah and beyond.

Major priorities for UVU in the future advocacy of SMD agenda will continue to be:

- To support the actions of the global mountain community on a green economy to achieve sustainable development;
- To work closely with its traditional partners, the North American hub for MP and MP secretariat on coordination of activities for sustainable development;
- To continue efforts in implementing the decisions of the *Orem Declaration of the Mountain Women*, the final document of the first international conference “Women of the Mountains” on regional and global expansion of networking and knowledge-sharing. Also, to extend invitations to all interested institutions in the region and globally to join the MP and on sustaining efforts in co-hosting on an alternating basis the international conference “Women of the Mountains” between Utah and other parts of the mountain world; and
- To involve youth in the implementation of all the above mentioned activities aimed at the promotion of SMD-activities.

Organizing Committee of UVU on Participation at the U.N. RIO+20 conference on sustainable development