

## Why I am advocating Sustainable Mountain Development



*Regan Warner*

From the time of birth until I was 18 years old I lived in a small town in Utah, nestled right under Mt. Nebo, one of the tallest peaks in the state. From a young age I was fascinated with politics, economics, and international relations. Throughout high school I was a captain on the speech and debate team and due to this I spent most of my time researching these topics. I knew once it was time to enter into my tertiary studies that I would pursue a major in that field. I began at Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas as a Political Science major. After starting my studies, it became clear to me that I wanted to pursue a career in human rights and fighting human trafficking. Additionally, while at Harding, I took an environmental biology course; this first sparked my interest in sustainable development issues. After leaving Harding University to transfer to Utah Valley University, I continued to pursue a degree in Political Science, but I also added a minor in Environmental Management. I realized then that the combination of these two courses of study would allow me to not only work to prevent human rights abuses, but also to help build sustainable societies where these abuses would be less likely to occur.

It was around the time of this decision that I had the fortune to enroll in an International Relations course taught by Professor Baktybek Abdrisaev, the advisor of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at UVU. After hearing Professor Abdrisaev mentioned about advocacy of the sustainable mountain development (SMD) through students efforts and UIMF in particular during his lectures in class I asked him how I could get involved. From there it has been an absolute whirl wind of activities and responsibilities, for

which I am incredibly grateful. Despite the fact that new activities added a pressure on my education schedule I agreed to become a Vice President of the SMD Club at UVU, one of the clubs within the umbrella of the UIMF, directly after joining, and from then it has been a trial by fire learning experience. The UIMF is run entirely by students in an experiential learning style. From running the website, to arraigning for visits from world dignitaries, to studying how to advocate SMD on professional level, we as the student members do it all.



*Ambassador Kamau and Regan Warner*

My first experience with this was with the visit from Permanent Representative of Kenya to the UN, Ambassador Macharia Kamau, who came to UVU to talk about his contribution as one of the co-chairs of the United Nations Open Working Group on sustainable development goals (SDGs) to the adoption of 17 SDGs which define a progress for humankind for the next 15 years. It was such a great opportunity for us, UIMF members to report to UN dignitary how our coalition members advocated for inclusion of the mountain targets among SDGs. We talked to him how mountain communities are the most neglected around the world with rampant poverty, unemployment and mass migration to the cities and that international community has to pay much more attention to the worsening of situation there with new emerging challenges such as climate change.

I was extremely encouraged and empowered by this event, especially after seeing the emphasis the SDGs put on gender equality which also means mountain women. In my time researching sustainable development, I have seen time and time again that the weakest part in development projects throughout the world is the involvement of women. Hearing from Ambassador Kamau the importance of this factor to him, as well as to his colleagues at the UN Open Working Group on SDGs, fueled my drive to continue to work for implementation of this goal as well.

As I continue to work with the UIMF and pursue a career in sustainable mountain development, I will always remember this time with Ambassador Kamau as my first experience with someone doing the work, on a global scale, that I want to be doing someday. I will never be satisfied with a life here in beautiful, mountainous Utah, with its highly advanced infrastructure and high quality of life, knowing that millions all over the world are living in mountain communities, like my own, that are struggling to develop, or that women, like myself, are being oppressed and abused in horrific ways. Because of that, I want to spend my life and career working to share those things that I was born into by luck, with those who were not.

*Regan Warner, Vice-President, Sustainable Mountain Development Club at UVU*