

Preparations to advocate the mountain targets at High Level Political Forum



Andrew Jensen communicating officials at the United Nations

In recent months student members of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University (UVU) continued partnership with the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, and the Utah China Friendship Improvement Sharing Hands

Development and Cooperation, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to attend the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development of the United Nations (UN) convened under the auspices of the ECOSOC branch of the UN.

This year HLPF reviewed the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among seventeen adopted by the United Nations: Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss, and Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, that will be considered each year. Two among those SDGs comprise three mountain targets, responsible for the monitoring the sustainable development of mountain communities: Target 6.6: by 2020, protect and restore water related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes; Target 15.1: by 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements; Target 15.4: by 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development.

I, along with several other students, intended to attend the conference to give an oral statement regarding UVU's commitment to student engaged learning by bringing much-needed focus to the issue of mountain communities within the two Sustainable Development Goals among six under the review of the HLPF. Considering that the focus of this year's HLPF was transforming communities into ones that are more sustainable and resilient, it was a legitimate opportunity for UVU Sustainable Mountain Development club members as a part of the UIMF to attend the UN gathering and present an oral statement. Additionally, as an active member of UVU's Model UN club, I had a pertinent desire to engage in collaboration and negotiation within the UN. In the Model UN club, we work heavily to understand how UN documents are drafted, and discuss the various policy nuances that accompany a formal event at the UN. This opportunity to attend HLPF 2018 provides unique real-world experience in understanding the inner functions of the UN. Thus

it fulfills the UVU model of engaged learning when my peers and I have to work together as a group to implement practically UN agenda with focus on mountain communities with relying on support of our teacher as a mentor only if we are not able to do that by ourselves. This experience has given me unique insight into the functioning of the UN and how better the simulation in class can be run to better fall in line with the actual policy priorities of the UN.

As a member of the student delegation, my duties varied however, most of the time I served as the lead link of communication between our delegation and different non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and offices within the UN and delegations of different countries attending the HLPF. I communicated with other NGOs, who are involved in the UN activities for a while in an attempt to deepen ties between UVU and other organizations across the world with similar goals and desires, and additionally communicated with various officials and liaisons within the UN. Additionally, a main task of mine was to research the Voluntary National Reviews of 47 countries which agreed during HLPF to report about their progress with implementation of six SDGs under the consideration of this years' HLPF. A VNR is an opportunity for a specific country to review their progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, and thus provided an opportunity for our student delegation to observe and make commentary surrounding each country. My particular task was then to identify among the countries under review those which are members the UN Mountain Partnership, a coordinator of the implementation of the mountain targets globally. I identified that among the countries presenting VNRs, fourteen form part of the MP. Next step was to submit questions about implementation of mountain targets by governments of those fourteen countries. I didn't expect how that was challenging to do because there were so many NGOs asking questions on a variety issues and many of them were very powerful and comprised from numerous groups worldwide. While communicating with various UN officials and representatives of NGOs who were in charge of the VNRs of those fourteen countries, I had the opportunity to contribute specific language and questions about situation with implementation of mountain targets to the Voluntary National Review of Romania only. Additionally, I collaborated with several members of the membership of the HLPF in order to create a joint cross-cutting statement for the Voluntary National Reviews. This involved collaboration with many NGOs including the Global University System (GUS) and Energy Mentors International. Through many exchanged emails I was able to persuade to a certain degree them to bring attention to the UVU model of engaged learning to implement mountain targets. As a member of the delegation attending the HLPF of 2018, I am

eagerly anticipating the opportunity to talk with other members of the global community and further support for mountainous communities.

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