



**Sustainable Mountain Development Advocacy through a Student
Engaged Learning Model at Utah Valley University**

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International Mountain Day

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Conference Room 11, United Nations Headquarters

I would like to thank the Permanent Mission of the Kyrgyz Republic, and the other permanent missions of the Group of Friends of Mountainous Countries, for inviting me to speak here at the UN during the observation of International Mountain Day for the second year in a row. My name is Samuel Elzinga, and I am both a student at Utah Valley University (UVU), which is a member of the Mountain Partnership, and the president of the Utah International Mountain Forum, which is a coalition of student clubs at my university. For UIMF the observation of the IMD every December 11 is very important in order to raise awareness about sustainable mountain development in Utah and globally as many mountainous communities still remain among the poorest and most neglected in the world. This year we commemorate the 10th anniversary of the annual IMD observation at UVU.

Since 2010, Utah Valley University has developed the student engaged learning co-curricular model to advocate for SMD in Utah and globally.

Utah Valley University (UVU) is the largest academic institution in the state of Utah currently enrolling almost 42,000 students. Over 30 percent of the student body are non-traditional learners who, in addition to their education, must work full- or part-time in support of a spouse or family, and can range between 25- to 75-years of age. Established as a vocational training school in 1941, Utah Valley University today addresses the needs of local communities along the Wasatch mountain range through a dual mission as a community college, combined with the rigor and seriousness of a four-year teaching institution. Because of its inclusive enrollment policies, students who might not have the chance to attend another university because of financial restrictions are able to take courses. Compared to other universities in the state, the average family income of a student at the university is \$30,000 dollars, an average much lower than other neighboring universities. UVU has sought to empower these students, especially when they are most likely to be forgotten, through a series of institutional policies. As many 51 percent of UVU students have gone hungry, and 17 percent have gone without food for multiple days. To address this challenge, UVU has provided emergency scholarships ranging from 50 to 500 dollars for students to pay rent and purchase food. These innovative scholarships continue UVU's mission of providing resources to those who live in our academic community that would otherwise be left behind or forgotten. UVU additionally has prioritized scholarships for first generation students in order to help them complete their degree. These policies, acting in conjunction with others, help the students at our university not only excel in their academics, but thrive in all aspects of their university experience. UVU is also innovating new approaches to empowering students within the framework of the Sustainable Mountain Development agenda. First and perhaps most exciting, we are in the process of developing a certificate in our political science department on sustainable development, which will specifically focus on implementing the SDGs in Utah and supplemented by meaningful visits to the United Nations to conduct advocacy work.

One of the cornerstones at UVU is its emphasis on student engaged learning, which means students take an active role in their education through real-world immersion in their fields.

The UIMF, founded in 2011, has served as a core of the model. It inclusively involves students across campus, including nontraditional learners with local community stakeholders in implementation of mountain targets in the State of Utah and globally. It consists of four parts: 1) Students are given a problem to solve (which is the advocacy of the UN mountain targets; 2) students must work together as a group to learn how to solve the problem; 3) faculty and stakeholders serve them as mentors, and 4) students are responsible for their own learning during the process of problem solving. As part of the advocacy campaign, students learn and share experiences about major achievements and challenges in sustainable development in Utah with mountain communities elsewhere.

The model allows students to gain professional skills, networking, and international recognition through implementing mountain targets elsewhere. Under the model, they raise funds for advocacy campaigns, manage logistics, develop agendas, reach out to UN officials, diplomats, representatives of non-governmental organizations, experts, scholars, write statements, host parallel and side events, and publish the results of their activities. It also demonstrates the ability of students, including non-traditional learners to contribute broad-range initiatives to the implementation of the three mountain targets on all levels. The model can be adopted by academic institutions worldwide, especially in mountain regions.

From 2013 to 2015, through this model, students advocated for the adoption of mountain targets at sessions of the UN Open Working Groups on Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs):

UIMF members for the first time successfully hosted through SEL the fourth International Women of the Mountains conference on October 7-9, 2015. The conference was held under the umbrella of the Mountain Partnership at UVU's campus in Orem, Utah. The organizing committee of the conference was comprised of more than 70 students, including nontraditional learners, from UVU, Brigham Young University and the University of Utah.

The United Nations Secretary General's Report on SMD A/71/256 of July 29, 2016 highlighted the students' advocacy of gender agendas by hosting the Fourth Women of the Mountains conference and adopting the outcome document, which contained the following observations:

- (a) SDGI 5 could be achieved through strong support for improving women's rights and welfare, including women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life
- (b) successful implementation of target 6.6 could be achieved by supporting the vital role that women play in the protection of the environment and water sources, particularly as custodians of traditional knowledge that builds resilience and allows for adaptation to climate change, and
- (c) with respect to target 15.1, women playing a critical role in joint planning as promoters of innovation, development and cooperation for the common benefit.

Since 2016, the UIMF has advocated for the implementation of mountain targets at several forums of the UN ECOSOC on sustainable development, including the fifty second session of the Commission on Social Development; the CSW62 and CSW63 and the 2018 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. During these forums, students, including nontraditional students, prepared written statements and hosted parallel and side events. Students also learned how to work with Member States in order to include language about the mountain targets and communities in the final documents of those forums.

Students were able to include language about mountain communities for the first time in the final document of the sixty eighth UN Civil Society Conference, held in Salt Lake City, Utah on August 26-28, 2019. The Preamble of the Conference's Outcome Document stated the need to address the specific conditions of mountainous areas and small island developing

states. At the conference, students also hosted a workshop and an exhibition about the student engaged learning model to advocate for mountain women and targets at the United Nations.

The UIMF's next priority is to advocate for mountain women and girls at the CSW64 this march, which will assess the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Declaration and Platform does not specifically mention mountain women and girls. However, it includes actions critical to empower such vulnerable groups, in particular through education. As a result, those actions also ensure the success of the advocacy of mountain targets' implementation by student members of the UIMF. For example, sub-chapter 4-60, paragraph (a) urges the inclusion of academic institutions and others in aiding rural and indigenous women; sub-chapter 4-82 speaks of the creation of non-formal, vocational, and gender-specific curricula for girls and women in the educational system, especially nontraditional women; sub-chapter 4-258, paragraph (b) subpart (ii) asks for the development of methodologies on the impact on women of environmental and natural resource degradation, stemming from issues such as global warming and natural disasters; and sub-chapter 4-88, paragraph (c) mentions the creation of flexible education, training and retraining programs for life-long learning that facilitate the transition between women's activities at all stages of their lives.

During the CSW64, our delegation will be comprised of students from UVU, Brigham Young University, and Utah State University. Delegation members will report their experiences in implementing SDG 5 on gender equality in Utah and elsewhere in interaction with SDG 2 on food security, SDG 13 on climate action, SDG 6 on water, SDG 7 on energy, SDG 4 on quality education, and SDG 12 on responsible consumption and waste management. It will also provide them an opportunity to conduct the advocacy campaign jointly with mountainous nations accredited to the United Nations. We hope to both learn and share experiences in mountain targets implementation with the newly created Group of Friends of Mountainous Countries.

We would like to make sure that CSW 64 will include the mountain women and girls in the final document of the forum and we urge all UIMF for that purpose members of the group of Friends of Mountainous COuntries to make sure that it would happen.

UIMF has already achieved the following:

1. Through the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences and Utah China F.I.S.H.D.C, both of which are NGOs accredited with ECOSOC and Mountain Partnership members, has included in their written statement the request to include mountain women and girls in the final document of CSW 64.
2. Requested and waiting for the approval of a parallel event at CSW 64 about mountain women and girls advocacy through the student engaged learning and a similar request about them to be included in the final document of CSW 64
3. Will apply later for an opportunity to make an oral statement and intervention from the floor to pursue the same goals with the language about mountain women and girls to be included in the final document of CSW64.

We would appreciate if any of the members of the Group of Friends of Mountainous Countries:

- 1) will include in the draft of the CSW64 final document a language about bringing mountain women and girls in the focus of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;;
- 2) urge in particular mountainous Member States to CSW64 report in national reviews about their actions to bring mountain families and women in the focus of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- 3) Will include members of UVU delegation to their side event, if they are hosting the one during the second week of the CSW64;

Thank you very much for your attention