Priyanka Prem Kumar
International Mountain Day
WOMEN'S STATUS IN INDIA
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Good morning ladies and gentlemen. My name is Priyanka Prem Kumar. I am an Indian and currently residing in New Jersey. I am a researcher and data analyst by profession and I primarily work on the areas of improving food security and sustainable food systems (SDG 2.4) for smallholder farmers, particularly in rural and mountainous regions. Today, I appreciate the invitation from the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University (UVU) to speak during International Mountain Day about the status of women and in particular mountain areas of India.

India has been ranked low on various indices that measure gender equality — including economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; political empowerment; and legal protection. Although some Indian women are powerful voices in diverse fields, still, most women and girls in India do not fully enjoy many of their rights. According to India's **National Crime Records Bureau** (NCRB), domestic violence accounts for 35% of all violent crimes against women annually. Gender inequality results in unequal opportunities and girls have low survival rates at birth. **The World Bank** also expressed concern regarding crimes against women showing an upward trend in India, in particular brutal crimes which have led to a decline in female labor force participation from 25.2% in 1990 to 20.3% in 2021.

At the same time as per India's Voluntary National Review, the political representation of women in Parliament witnessed a rise from 11.9% in 2014-19 to 15.1% in 2019-24. Meanwhile, 451 Research, a technology research group within S&P Global Market Intelligence, stated recently that a belief held by many in the West that gender inequality in the Information Technology (IT) area is much worse in regions such as India in comparison with North America and the U.K., is misleading. According to a study undertaken with the UK's Open University, women represented 46.8% of the postgraduates in IT and computing during the academic year 2014-2015 in India. This is more than double the rate seen in the UK. The number of women employed in the IT industry in India has seen a rapid increase over the past 10 years. Women now make up 34% of the IT workforce in India. Indeed, the youth (under the age of 30) has significantly powered its rapid growth, and the country is now almost at a 50:50 gender parity rate in STEM graduates. Analysis indicates that over 51% of entry-level recruits are women, over 25% of women are in managerial positions, but less than 1% are in top executive roles.

I would like to present my own professional career as an example of the growing role of women and girls in India in the IT area and in particular AI. I have my Master's in

Electronics and Communication Engineering from Anna University, Chennai, India. During my internship as a researcher for an organization called AI For Rural (AIR), we have previously worked in rural and mountainous regions of Ghana(2013), and Niger (2011-2014) to improve food security and reduce poverty in an environmentally sustainable manner, as well as to increase the income of smallholder farmers, processors, and traders in the area, especially women. AIR has partnered with UIMF and UVU since 2015 with a focus on the promotion of sustainable development for mountain communities in the State of Utah and globally. I have contributed to the research for AIR and presented its results at the UN Conference "Why It Matters" hosted at Utah Valley University last October. It focused on improving the livelihoods of mountainous people in India using sustainable development with the help of Artificial Intelligence. In this research, different intelligence data were collected by cognitive computing for the rural and mountainous regions. This would then be used as an integrated solution framework that will aggregate digital technologies to not only empower but also educate the farmers to maximize productivity.

I also believe that to achieve food security, investment has to be made in agriculture to educate mountain women, especially farm workers, who are more likely to re-invest in their own land. But unfortunately, they lack the power to make wise purchasing decisions. Greater food security would be achieved if mountain women had access to needed assets and resources and they need to be empowered to have a voice in the decision-making that has an impact on the lives of their households and communities. The ripple effects of Women-Led Development are undeniable as an educated and empowered woman will ensure education and empowerment for future generations

The role and status of women in India is a very hot issue that is passionately debated every day. All around the world, women are an untapped "resource" to fight poverty and violence. And even though their potential has been very clearly revealed time and again in difficult circumstances (world wars, independence movements) men have too often lost sight of it in times of stability. The idea of perfect womanhood is perfect independence.

I am honored to be associated with UIMF which provides a unique engaged learning activity that encourages learners like me to advocate jointly for sustainable mountain development for women.

THANK YOU.