

Women Move Mountains at International Mountain Day



On December 6, 2022, Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University celebrated the 13th International Mountain Day. The theme for this Mountain Day celebration was “Women Move Mountains.” UIMF through a student engaged learning (SEL) model encourages students at UVU to advocate for the sustainable mountain development in the State of Utah and at the United Nations. SEL allows students to work on important problems as a group with faculty mentoring them in this endeavor.

Dr. Lago, the Chief International Officer for Utah Valley University, gave opening remarks and elaborated on the significance of this year’s theme. He emphasized that women play a hero role in their mountain communities across the globe. Women in mountain communities are leaders. and oversee the details of day-to-day life in their homes, tribes, and communities. Before the event started, I helped with purchasing and arranging gifts for the speakers, writing thank you cards, and shopping for the right cords for camera equipment. His remarks reminded me that

sometimes, as a woman from a mountain community, moving mountains begins with intentional preparation and little details.



Dr. Baldomero Lago (seated at the front) and Utah Valley University Students listening to remarks at the International Mountain Day Celebration

During Dr. Rusty Butler's presentation, I had the opportunity to help shuffle through slides as he spoke. Dr. Butler is the UN ECOSOC representative for the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences (an NGO in General Consultative Status). During his presentation, he took great care to commend students, faculty, and dignitaries for taking interest in and promoting the good work that can be done in mountain communities. He showed various slides of mountain projects, and Ambassador visits that students had played a pivotal role in making a success.



Dr. Rusty Butler presenting on Women of the Mountains and the (SEL) Student Engaged Learning Model

Dr. Butler opened up his remarks for a small question and answer session. One student asked for specific examples of inequality for women in mountain communities. Dr. Butler mentioned his amazing wife and the efforts she had made to bridge the gap for women in mountain communities. Alitha Thompson, President of Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF) and a non-traditional student at UVU, also responded to the student's question, sharing her experience growing up in rural mountain farming community in Utah. In her community the accepted age for women to marry was 15 or 16.

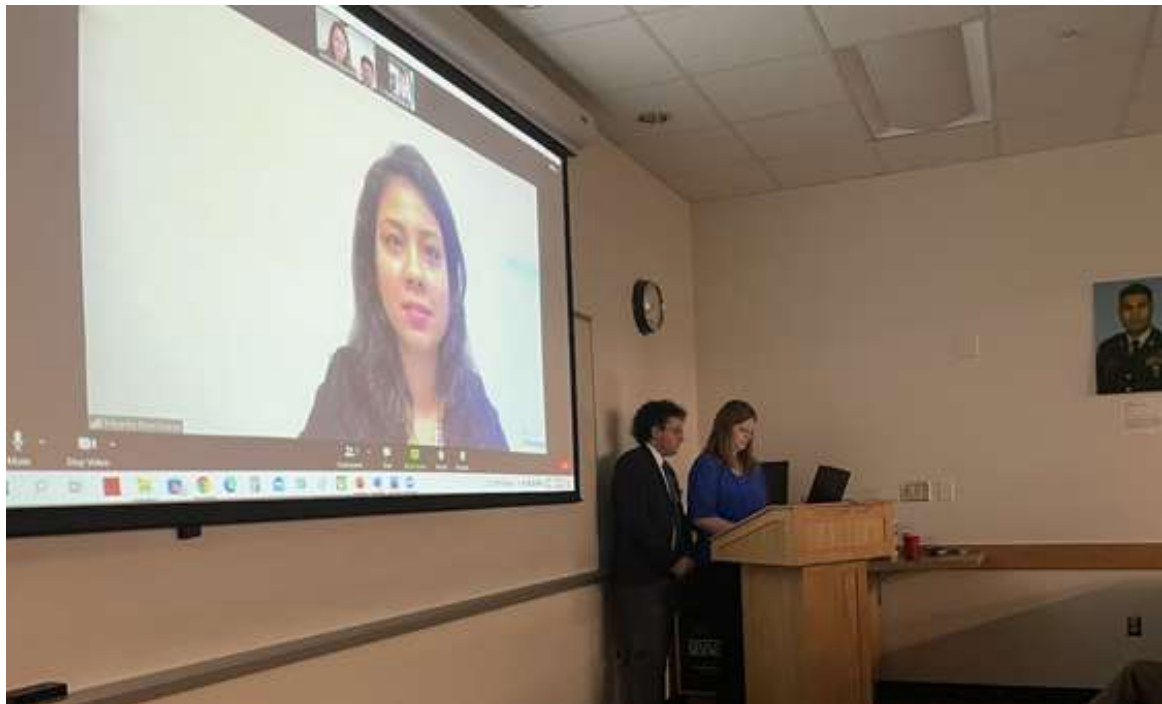


***McKay Brooks, Leila Mitchell, and Alitha Thompson (UIMF club members)
introducing speakers at International Mountain Day***

Several other students shared their stories about advocating for mountain communities. One student was Winnie Jada, a member of the Immigrant Refugee Student Union, with the goal of promoting gender equality in South Sudan after graduation. Her speech remarked on some of the current gender gaps in Sudan and South Sudan. One gender gap with alarming statistics was child marriages. Over 52% of the population in Sudan is married before the age of eighteen. Winnie expounded on initiatives the UN have in Sudan to help with several of these inequalities. Winnie is a great example of utilizing Student Engaged Learning (SEL) to prepare to move mountains with her education.



Winnie Jada (UIMF club member) speaks about women in Sudan and South Sudan



Priyanka Prem Kumar presenting at International Mountain Day Virtually

The celebration concluded with an award presentation of certificates from the UN FAO's Mountain Partnership to recognize efforts of many who advocated in 2022 for Sustainable Mountain Development. Priyanka Prem Kumar, a research analyst for improving food security and sustainable food systems (SDG 2.4) for smallholder farmers especially women in the mountainous region, and our virtual keynote speaker, is a recipient of this award. Others in attendance that received this recognition were Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev, Dr. Baldomero Lago, Dr. Rusty Butler, and Amy Barnett to name just a few. I helped compile the list of those who received certificates. The list totaled well over 100 people—students, professors, dignitaries, and friends coming from all over the world. It was amazing to see one by one how we can make a difference in our mountain communities.

Rachel Welker, Vice President, Foreign Affairs club