

Priyanka Prem Kumar
68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women
Parallel event
“Empowering Mountain Women Economically Through an Inclusive Student-Engaged Learning.”
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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Priyanka Prem Kumar. I am a researcher and primarily work on improving sustainable food systems (SDG 2) and sustainable education (SDG 4), particularly in rural and mountainous regions. According to **Statista**, India’s demographic dividend, in terms of one of the youngest populations in the world, is considered the driving force of its future economic growth. But, children in rural and mountainous areas usually have low access to private schools and digital technology thereby creating an opportunity gap for economically weaker sections of society. Since independence in 1947, the literacy rate has increased by six times, and at the same time, it has the largest illiterate population of 287 million. Based on **National Statistical Office** (NSO) data, the Indian state with the highest literacy rate is Kerala(96.2% which is 43% mountainous) followed by Mizoram (91.58% which is 91% mountainous). The literacy rate in urban areas is 87.7% and in rural areas, it is 73.5%.

India has been ranked low on various indices that measure gender equality. **The World Bank** expressed concern regarding crimes against women, leading to a decline in female labor force participation. Meanwhile, **451 Research**, a technology research group within S&P Global Market Intelligence, recently corrected a Western stereotype that, gender inequality in the Information Technology (IT) area is much worse in India in comparison with the West. In reality, the number of women employed in the IT industry in India now makes up 36% of the IT workforce, of which 51% are entry-level recruits and over 25% are in managerial positions.

My professional career is an example of the growing role of women in India in the IT area. During my internship as a researcher for an organization called AI For Rural (AIR), our work in rural and mountainous regions of Ghana, and Niger was to improve food security and reduce poverty amongst female smallholders. AI For Rural has partnered with Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at UVU since 2015 with a focus on promoting Sustainable Mountain Development (SMD) through Student Engaged Learning (SEL) in the State of Utah and globally. My presentation at the UN Conference “Why It Matters” hosted at Utah Valley University last October, focused on improving the livelihoods of mountainous people in India using sustainable development with the help of Artificial Intelligence to empower and educate the farmers to maximize productivity. I have my Master's in Electronics Engineering from Anna University, India and now pursuing my second master’s in data science from Indiana University, Bloomington.

I was honored to speak in support of mountain women in India and globally at the side event during CSW67. I thank the UIMF, the Permanent Representative of the Kyrgyz Republic to the UN, Ambassador Aida Kasymalieva, and the Mountain Partnership for providing me an opportunity to do this last year. The outcome of the SEL model highlights mainly the efforts of the students to build jointly new ideas for SMD and to help their communities while their teacher mentors them. Also, SEL could help in the implementation

of the UNGA resolution “Five Years of Action for the Development of Mountain Regions.” I hope soon, this model will also be adopted by universities in India.

I am proud to participate in this event of the 68th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.
THANK YOU.