

Utah International Mountain Forum and Advocacy of Mountain Women

Utah Valley University (UVU) with its unique situation has many connections which help it to grow in the international community, giving its students tremendous and engaging opportunities. UVU has been able to make lasting connections with British Parliament and the United Nations. The university resides in the mountain filled area of Utah, giving it a unique situation. Mountainous regions tend to hold the largest amounts of poverty, but great resources. Utah is an outstanding example of a mountainous region that has become sustainable. Through this example and prompting interactions with the university, we as students can contribute to the efforts around the world and mountainous regions to become more sustainable.



Panel of scholars discuss how to advocate mountain women at UN

The University was honored with hosting a forum of distinguished speakers that discussed the importance of mountains and their effect on the community, especially on women on October 2nd, 2017. The Utah International Mountain Forum, a coalition of student clubs at UVU was able to host of the event as a student engaged learning approach where students learn professional skills and experiences throughout the practical actions and initiatives with faculty advising them when necessary.

Dr. Shilling, member of the Board of Trustees at the Mountain Institute in Washington, D.C. emphasized that the mountains hold numerous amounts of resources that all individuals need, one specially being fresh water affecting ½ of humanity. The resources of the mountains are important to all societies, and especially to the ones living and cultivating them, with a large majority of their workers represented by women. Mountain workers, women workers, have to survive in difficult situations, and by focusing on mountains and women we can start to implement major United Nations (UN) sustainable development goals (SDGs): reducing poverty, gender equality, clean water/sanitation, etc. As Dr. Andrew Taber, Executive Director of the Mountain Institute said: “Through the United Nations and using Utah as an example with assistance from the university, we can work on several SDGs with specific focus on two of them: women, which means gender, and mountain development.” These two areas are often left behind in development: the mountain areas are usually among the poorest ones globally and often women are in a majority of the workers. Working towards substantiality in these areas will greatly reduce the poverty prevalent in these regions.

“When evaluating mountain regions compared to other parts of the world, like the tropics, or small island nations, mountains get less attention and aid,” stated Dr. Taber. In order to become stronger, mountain countries and groups need to bind together to get greater support and develop further. Dr. Taber said that there is no strong civil movement for the development of mountain regions, but if women’s groups and mountains can join for the same cause, both groups will be strengthened. Women’s success in mountainous regions can often be stifled, but combining these groups and looking to Utah as an example can help both groups grow stronger. Being a young woman living in Utah, I have had many opportunities even though I have a close proximity to the mountains. I believe we should continue trying to spread the model to other nations and regions to improve the standard and sustainability of life.

The conference panel encouraged the participants to vocalize their positions and become involved in issues that really matter and make an impact in our lives. Dr. Taber said, “The people want to hear your voice, the young and engaged voice.” One of the beautiful things about UVU is that the students have the opportunity to become engaged and involved in issues that have large impacts. The model of engagement can have an impact on the advocacy of mountains and women because of the efforts of the university, said Dr. Butler, the main representative at the UN of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, an NGO with ties to Utah. The role of this

initiative gives me and other students the ability to advocate and get involved in our community, especially with these concerns, where we have life experience with mountains, women, and development.

Throughout the panel, it was made clear that if students can have a great impact, “they need your voice,” said Ms. Jyang, President of NGO from Utah, which is also active at the UN in advocating women and Utah. She continued, “Tough projects are for tough people, and that’s good.” The growing generation will be the next generation to make international and domestic decisions that affect all groups. Our voice will make a difference and now is a good time to start. Being engaged in our community we can spread the message about the sustainability in the mountains and the effects on women.

Kymerlee Anderson, UVU student