

UIMF attends a side event on mountains at HLPF 2018

On Monday, July 16th, delegates from the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of clubs at Utah Valley University (UVU), were able to attend a side event at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development titled *Mountains and the 2030 Agenda*, hosted by the Government of Andorra under the initiative of the Mountain Partnership (MP). This was one of the most important side events that the UIMF delegation to attend because it dealt specifically with sustainable mountain development (SMD) and was co-hosted by the MP, a subunit of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO-UN) that we were associated with. The meeting was substantive, and it was a great way for us to learn about SMD policies around the world.



Panel of presenters during the side event on mountains

The side event was focused on the implementation of mountain targets affiliated to sustainable development goal (SDG), 6 and 15, which were reviewed by HLPF. They relate to

clean water and sanitation and life on land respectively. Target 6.6 reads, “protect and restore water-related systems, including mountains. Target 15.1 reads, “ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystem and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands.” Target 15.4 specifically focuses on mountains by “ensuring the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity and to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development.” There were 3 objectives of this side event that tied into these SDGs as well. The first is “to advocate for pro-mountain policies and actions in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the country level;” second, “To encourage the submission of Voluntary National Reviews from all Mountain Partnership member governments and from all mountain countries at large;” and third, “To build a coalition of key mountain governments within the Mountain Partnership to increase the visibility of mountain issues in the national processes for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.”

The host country of the side event, Andorra, presented first at the event. The Honorable Silvia Calvó Armengol, Minister of Environment, Agriculture and Sustainability from Andorra, presented her country’s progress in implementation of SDGs related to SMD. She opened her presentation by stating that her country is uniquely situated in a wonderful position to be a leader in SMD. Andorra is taking this position very seriously and is implementing many policies to preserve mountain ecosystems. Andorra is striving to protect endangered species within the country and has protected 70% of all fresh water in the country from pollution. Andorra also has worked to protect its forests, which occupy 40% of the land area in the country. The Andorran government has also worked hard to educate its citizens on sustainable development, and 75% of Andorrans think climate control should be at the top of the government’s environmental policy. The Andorran Minister of Environment concluded her presentation by reminding us that what happens to the environment in the mountains foreshadows what happens in the lowlands. I quite liked this presentation, and I do agree that Andorra is doing a lot to become a global leader of SMD.

The next presenter was Mr. Rene Castro, the FAO Assistant Director General. Mr. Castro opened his presentation with a dire warning. He said that the humankind is reaching a global population of 10 billion people, and there is no a firm plan to feed everyone. He then proposed some ideas to help save mountain climates. He proposed planting trees in mountain pastures to

help reduce carbon emissions in mountain climates. Mr. Castro also suggested greater coordination between local government and non-governmental organizations to better help coordinate environmental policy. Overall, Mr. Castro's presentation, though short, was filled with interesting information.

Jorge Iglesias, Deputy Permanent Representative of Chile to the UN ~~also~~ gave a presentation concerning his country's implementation of the SMD targets as well. Chile is a mountainous country that is very resource rich, but unsustainable practices are impacting food security and water quality. Recently, Chile has reinforced its mountain policy programs, which also happen to align with MP goals. Ultimately, Chile is looking to transfer from development to management that receives input from all levels of government and civil society. This transfer is aided by a mountain council, which was founded in 2007. At the end of the presentation, Mr. Iglesias reiterated again how fragile mountain communities are and how it is our duty to continue fostering sustainable development.



(L to R) Christoph Lang, Andrew Jensen, Damon Ashcraft, and Samuel Elzinga after the side event

Mr. Christoph Lang from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation presented regarding Switzerland's implementation of the mountain targets. Mr. Lang first spoke on the disparity between the Swiss farmers and those who live in the cities. Mountain communities,

even in an extremely developed country like Switzerland, are still underrepresented in infrastructure funding. To alleviate this, policy makers must consider the needs of those living in mountain environments when determining environment and sustainability policy. Switzerland is particularly interested in food and agriculture security. Mountains are often the backbones of these communities, and so Switzerland has a vested interest in ensuring mountain environments are preserved. It is understandable why Switzerland has a vested interest in ensuring their mountain environments are preserved as the country is over 66% covered in mountains. This presentation was very interesting, and it was interesting to note the differences between Andorra and Switzerland as they are both mountainous nations in Europe with similar development goals for their mountain communities.

After the presentations concluded, we were given the opportunity to ask questions and share insight into our contribution to SMD agenda. Dr. Baktybek Abdrisaev, UIMF faculty mentor, shared some insight concerning UIMF's experience in promoting SMD in Utah. He also emphasized the importance for the MP to involve NGOs in the monitoring of SDGs and implementation of mountain targets. At the conclusion of his remarks, Dr. Abdrisaev also invited all present at the side event to the general debates on Thursday, July 19th to witness our oral statement that related to the mountain targets implementation.



Samuel Elzinga, Damon Ashcraft, and Andrew Jensen after the side event.

This side event was also a great way to follow up with Mr. Grammenos Mastrojeni and Mr. Giorgio Grussu, whom we met with earlier that day. Mr. Mastrojeni was moderating the discussions and presentations and Mr. Grussu as a representative from the MP Secretariat spoke about how the Green cover index assists in monitoring the implementation of the mountain target 15.4. Following up with them at the event was a great way to show how serious UIMF is about continuing its work with the MP and its promotion of SMD. This event was very insightful. It was a great way to tie in all of our work with SMD-focused activities. I am hopeful UIMF can continue to foster good relations with not only the MPS but also with Mr. Grussu and Mr. Mastrojeni so we can further SMD in the United States and abroad.

Samuel Elzinga, President, Foreign Affairs Club at UVU