

6th Annual Celebration of the International Mountain Day at UVU

Utah Valley University (UVU) students hosted a celebration on December 2nd 2016 for the United Nations International Mountain Day by featuring speakers who contributed work to aiding countries around the world in order to implement sustainable mountain development goals. UVU is the only university in Utah that formally celebrates every year since 2010 the International Mountain Day and does that through students' efforts as part of experiential learning initiative. Student organizing committee comprised from members of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at UVU handled entire event by taking care of its logistics, funds, protocol and media coverage among many things. As a member of the logistics team, I was responsible for making reservation of the main venue for the event and logistics for that as well.



Christian Jensen, VP, UIMF, greets audience

At the beginning, Christian Jensen, Vice President of the Utah International Mountain Forum, introduced the event, and reported on the work accomplished by UVU students during

entire year of 2016, which contributed to the United Nations agenda on sustainable mountain development (SMD). Among the success stories, he mentioned a past student at UVU, Yanko Dzukhev, who successfully finished one after another internship at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and at the United Nations Secretariat in New York.



Dr. Patience Kabamba, makes a presentation about mountain communities in Congo

Among those invited to participate in the event, was Dr. Patience Kabamba, native of Congo and currently an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at UVU. He presented the audience results of his research about mountain communities in his native country. Throughout the last 20 years, the Congo has been in a state of war. Among those recruited participate in the war, was a village of civilians who lived in the mountainous region of Butambo, in the eastern part of the country. These civilians have lived in the mountainous area of the nation since the colonialism of Africa, and kept them safe from regional conflict. It was due to these mountains that the people

were kept safe, and allowed to thrive, relative to other people in Africa. The eastern rift mountain range runs across several countries, and boasts the tallest peak in the continent, Mt. Kilimanjaro.

The war in Congo has caused levels of suffering unprecedented in any recent war. The source of the problem, as told us Dr. Kabamba, was not in fact caused by actual violence, but rather by disease that came as a result of the war traffic and other causes from the war. As of 2006, out of 58 million Congolese people, as many as 4 million had died. Another cause of concern, was the diversion of power throughout the country. There are 3 main Congolese rebel groups, as well as various rebel groups from surrounding countries. The violence in the country was seen all throughout the country, except for the mountainous region in the eastern country. The self-sustained economy in the mountains was contained to the area, and even managed to provide the necessary ingredients to prosper.

The prosperity of the area was helped by tourist trade, and aided by what Dr. Kabamba called the G8. They were 8 to 10 importers who brought in goods in a wide variety, and exported agricultural goods and gold. This group of traders have built a structure of finance stretching across Asia, and maintain a level of trust despite the violence all around them.

Other than the traders in the area, there is also a close knit catholic institution that facilitates in keeping the local infrastructure kept in check, and maintains a tradition of distributing the wealth. There is also a local militia who participate to a degree in the violence around the country, and surprisingly help to maintain a synergistic relationship with both the traders and the catholic institution. The balance of power is very precise, and the structure of economics is kept in a tight checks and balances system between all three of the groups, who ultimately all rely on the equilibrium to prosper collectively.

The mountains of the eastern part of Congo have not only survived, but prospered throughout the latter half of the modern age. Despite the damages done by colonialism, the mountainous region of eastern Congo has created a space that has remained free from war, and features a successful self-sustained economy. This is due to a tight synergistic relationship between the traders that do international business, by farming the mountains, the catholic institution that helps the local community infrastructure function, and local militia groups who keep the fringe of war away.

This was very interesting presentation which encouraged many students in the audience, including myself to reflect about so many hidden resources which local mountain communities possess and use in order to sustain themselves and preserve their identities and cultures. We were able to learn about that thanks to the celebration of the United Nations International Mountain Day.

Spencer Monson, member, organizing committee of the 2016 IMD