

# Joint UN Advocacy for Mountain Women & the Mountain Agenda

A Mountain Partnership Event at Utah Valley University

2 October 2017 — Orem, Utah

**Context:** preparation for student visit to

- (i) the *Mountain Partnership Global Meeting* this December, and
- (ii) the *62<sup>nd</sup> Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women* next march.

## Talk Points

- ❖ The theme of this roundtable is a fascinating confluence of two critical issues—Women and Mountains—that overlap in the UN’s Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030
- ❖ As I look across all 17 SDGs [with which I am sure you students are familiar] I am struck how critical addressing both “women’s issues” and “mountain issues” will be for attaining many of these goals—not just those in which mountains and/or women are specifically mentioned.
- ❖ I am also reminded of the “motto” for the SDGs which is that “no one should be left behind” and add that this is proving challenging for both **Mountains** and **Women**.
- ❖ In the previous slides presented by The Mountain Institute’s board member Jed Shilling we heard reasons why mountain regions are vital for global sustainability and vitality. Here, I wanted to provide a couple illustrations from TMI’s work where women and mountain issues come together—they often seem inseparable. Both are from Nepal, but the issues are similar in many other mountain regions
- ❖ One: We have been working for more than a decade to help remote Himalayan farmers cultivate high-value Medicinal and Aromatic Plants for sale to huge markets in India and China. This can be lucrative —some farmers make 1,000’s of dollars annually in a country where average incomes are less than \$600/year. We are not just reducing poverty, but actually building prosperity.

Moreover, it turns out that **40% of the 18,000 farmers we work with are women** given that so many of the men have migrated away in search of jobs. These brave women take care of the children and the elderly; but are also doing an amazing job at improving livelihoods while sending their daughters to school. They, are truly some of my heroes.

- ❖ Two: last week I was pulling together a proposal to reduce the negative social and environmental impacts of roads being built through remote mountain regions in Nepal. Shoddy construction, combined with increasing torrential rains and earthquakes are increasing the number of landslides—which kill hundreds of people annually in Nepal. New roads can worsen environmental degradation, but also bring

economic benefits and services—hopefully enticing some of the young male migrants home. They also could end up promoting shoddy roadside businesses that end up exploiting women. A major issue we need to address in our proposals is how to insure that these roads bring healthy economic opportunities for local women.

- ❖ Finally, I wanted to say a few words about the UN Mountain Agenda more generally.

Its main champion in the UN system is the FAO-based Mountain Partnership. This is an alliance of some 56 countries and over 230 non-governmental and other organizations dedicated to advancing sustainable development. Recent accomplishments include (i) advocacy that led to the highlighting of mountain issues in two of the Sustainable Development Goals; and (ii) production of an important study that showed that 40% of the world's hungry, some 320 million people, live in isolated pockets across the mountain world. A horrifying statistic that has yet to illicit a specific global response.

However, we have yet to see the development of a strong alliance of mountain countries at the global level that advocates together to insure that mountain issues are addressed within UN fora. Nor, is there a strong civil society public movement for mountains that will push the world' mountain countries and the global community to insure that remote mountain areas are not left behind. Here, I would say that the women's/gender movement has been far more effective even if much more remains to be done.

Finally, I am excited about those students who will be going to the various UN events. Those communities very much want to hear from your voices – and I encourage you to use them.

Many thanks for giving me an opportunity to speak to you all today.