

STATEMENT
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Utah Valley University Rotaractor
67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women
Parallel Event
“Inclusive Student Engaged Learning Model to Empower Mountain Women Globally”
March 6th, 2023.

My name is Maren Ostlund and I speak as a member of UVU Rotaract. My own Student-Engaged Learning experiences have enriched my education in Social Work, Systems Thinking, and Peace and Justice Studies. I have spoken at UVU’s U.N Why it Matters conference last fall, worked to develop interventions to social issues in our community as a UVU Social Impact Fellow; and currently work with other students to provide access to emergency shelter and housing.

These skills have helped me to analyze rural mountain Armenia’s socio-economic struggles, especially the issue of male labor migration and mountain women left behind in Armenia. My connection to Armenia began with friendship with an Armenian family in my home state of Maryland and it grew in Utah via Utah's partnership with Armenia through John Huntsman.

Over 80% of Armenia’s many labor migrants are male. This leaves Armenian women to run their homes and local communities, yet paradoxically they are underrepresented in public office (Badalyan et al, 2021). Without their husbands ¾th of the year, Armenian women are unable to utilize their traditional regional skills such as farming (Timmerman, et all, 2018). Approximately 40% of working women work in agriculture and find themselves doing the labor of mother, father, farmer, and small businesswoman. Families in Gunnison, Utah faces a similar plight, where men migrant for 3/4ths of each week coming home only for the weekend, in contrast to Armenia’s men returning only for winter.

Additionally in Armenia, as in Utah, women and girls’ participation in STEM and technological advancements are low due to the need to run the home and agriculture while men travel for work. However, this leaves these technological advancements to be made by people who may not understand the lived experience of rural mountain communities. If Armenian women are instead encouraged to pursue education and bring that education back to their communities via group community learning, then they will be able to use SEL to educate and innovate current practices. This has been the case with the Sunny Pastures initiative in Gunnison, to great success.

The Inclusive, Co-curricular SEL Model, is implemented through simple, inexpensive educational tools, like student clubs, that are available in any academic institution. It engages local women and students in group learning, education in STEM, and could serve to help address some of rural mountain Armenia’s struggles due to male labor migration.

Thank you.