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Side event

“Advocating for mountain women and girls’ education through student-engaged learning.”

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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Priyanka Prem Kumar. I am a research analyst and I primarily work on improving sustainable food systems (SDG 2.4) for smallholder farmers, particularly in rural and mountainous regions.

India has been ranked low on various indices of gender equality including economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; political empowerment; and legal protection. As per India’s **Voluntary National Review**, the political representation of women in Parliament witnessed a rise. Meanwhile, 451 Research, a technology research group within S&P Global Market Intelligence, recently corrected the western stereotype that gender inequality in the Information Technology area is much worse in India in comparison with the west. The number of women employed in the IT industry in India now makes up 34% of the IT workforce, of which 51% are entry-level recruits and over 25% are in managerial positions. Indeed, the youth is now almost at a 50:50 gender parity rate in STEM graduates.

My professional career is an example of the growing role of women in India in the IT area. During my internship for an organization called AI For Rural (AIR), our work in rural regions of Ghana and Niger was to improve food security and reduce poverty among female smallholders. AIR has partnered with UVU since 2015 to promote Sustainable Mountain Development (SMD). My presentation at the UN Conference “Why It Matters” at UVU last October, focused on improving the livelihoods of mountainous people in India with the help of Artificial Intelligence.

Investment has to be made in agriculture to educate mountain women and to achieve greater food security while empowering them. It is inevitable that women are an untapped "resource" to fight poverty and violence and the ripple effects of Women-Led Development are undeniable as she will ensure education and empowerment for herself and for future generations. *The idea of perfect womanhood is perfect independence.*

I am honored to be associated with UIMF for sponsoring researchers like me to be part of the unique Student Engaged Learning model which encourages us to advocate jointly for SMD for women with faculty assisting us as mentors. I hope in the near future, this model will also be adopted by universities in India.

THANK YOU.