

Statement
Lillian Higginbotham
69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women
Parallel Event
Empowering Mountain Women Economically Through an Inclusive Student Engaged Learning
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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Lillian Higginbotham and I am an Environmental Science student from Northern Utah. I am honored to be speaking today.

Solutions to climate change depends on equitable participation, yet gender disparities often prevent women from having equal stance. Women play an essential role in climate resilience, particularly in mountain communities that are increasingly vulnerable to environmental challenges. Women often face disproportionate environmental burdens, and have less influence over environmental decisions than men, which can negatively affect their health. These injustices stem from systemic inequalities, as women typically earn lower incomes and hold less social status than men due to deeply rooted capitalist and patriarchal structures. By empowering women in leadership and decision-making roles, we can strengthen climate resilience and ensure that sustainable development initiatives consider the needs and contributions of all members of society.

At Utah Valley University (UVU), our Student Engaged Learning (SEL) Model empowers both traditional and non-traditional students in sustainable mountain development through hands-on experiences. Initiatives like International Mountain Day and the Utah International Mountain Forum highlight this model.

I'm researching native plant restoration (UN SDG 15.2) in high-elevation areas of the United Kingdom (UK) and how the decline of native plants affects mountain women in rural communities. The loss of native plants and the introduction of invasive species heighten the risks of landslides, floods, and droughts, impacting women in these communities. After centuries of agriculture and industrial development, the UK now faces the lowest biodiversity in Europe. In the UK, roughly 10 million people in rural communities experience challenges such as limited transportation, education, and mobile coverage. My research examines these issues by integrating the student-engaged learning model of Utah Valley University (UVU) while drawing comparisons between sustainable development models in mountain communities in Utah and the United Kingdom. My involvement with the Utah Lake Authority and UVU College of Science Native Garden in native plant restoration reflects my commitment to SEL and aligns with my research on UK environmental issues, preparing me for CSW69. This approach ensures students contribute as advocates in sustainable development.

By embracing models like SEL, we can empower mountain women, foster sustainable development, and drive lasting change that benefits both local communities and the global ecosystem. Thank you.