

Raising Justice Awareness of Mountain Women Through Student-Engaged Learning

DATE: **Tuesday, MARCH 10th, 2026**

TIME: **12:30PM-1:45PM EST**

On Tuesday, March 10th, 2026, a group of 19 students from the United Nations Sustainable Development class at Utah Valley University (UVU) participated in a pivotal event during the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70). The event, titled "Raising Justice Awareness of Mountain Women Through Student-Engaged Learning," took place from 12:30 PM to 1:45 PM EST, highlighting the challenges faced by women and girls in mountainous regions worldwide. This event, which was organized by the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), aimed to advocate for greater attention to the struggles of mountain women, and it exemplified the impact of the Student-Engaged Learning (SEL) model, which empowers students to combine academic research with real-world activism.



Screenshot of the Presenters

Leading up to this event, UVU students engaged in various service projects, such as assembling hygiene kits for refugees and mountain women, raising funds for Title I students in Utah County, and volunteering at Tabitha's Way, a food pantry for families in need. These activities, centered around advocacy and support for marginalized groups, particularly women, laid the foundation for

the students' research and presentations. The students chose countries that are members of the Mountain Partnership and spent several months researching the challenges and injustices that women face in these regions, including gender inequality, environmental challenges, and limited access to resources.

The SEL approach allows students to gain hands-on experience in international advocacy while contributing to meaningful change. The students collaborated under the mentorship of Dr. Baktybek Abdrysaev, who guided their research and presentations, making the event a significant learning opportunity that merged academic study with global advocacy efforts.

Event Overview and Presenters



Janessa-Michelle Purcell, President of the UIMF greets participants of the event

The event began with an introductory speech from **Janessa-Michelle Purcell**, the former president of the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF). In her remarks, Purcell reflected on UIMF's ongoing advocacy for mountain women and girls through the SEL model. She expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to mentor students in their international engagement efforts and highlighted how the SEL approach empowers students to combine their academic knowledge with real-world advocacy. Purcell also shared that she would be stepping down from her leadership role, marking the end of a significant chapter in her service to student diplomacy.

Serving as the moderator for the event, **Natalia Figueroa**, President of the UVU Foreign Affairs Club, emphasized the importance of raising awareness about the injustices that mountain women face across the globe. She introduced each speaker and discussed the experiences of Indigenous Mapuche women in Chile, whose ongoing fight for land rights exemplifies the broader struggles of mountain women facing both legal and social barriers.



Natalia Figueroa Moderates the Event on March 10, 2026

Aemish Brock, whose Bavarian heritage connects him to mountain culture, focused on the need for mountain women and girls to be recognized within international policy discussions. Drawing attention to gender inequality in mountainous regions like Kyrgyzstan and the Alps, Brock argued that the voices of mountain women must be included in the outcome documents of international events like CSW70. His talk emphasized the importance of having these issues addressed within the global policy framework to achieve meaningful change.

Next, **Ana Caballero** explored the legal and institutional barriers that hinder women's participation in decision-making processes within mountain communities. She stressed that, in order to achieve gender equality, mountain regions must adopt inclusive legal systems that empower women to take active roles in governance, ensuring their voices are heard in both local and international forums.

Shifting focus to environmental and economic challenges, **Matthew Erickson** presented his research on Nepal, explaining how weak implementation of sustainable development policies

disproportionately affects women in mountain regions. Erickson highlighted the environmental threats women in Nepal face due to insufficient policy enforcement and the negative impacts of climate change, which exacerbate gender inequality and limit women's access to resources.

Abigail Fisher then offered a comparative perspective on gender equality, focusing on the differences in governance and policy frameworks between Utah and China. Fisher emphasized the importance of improving data collection and refining policy frameworks to better understand and address the unique challenges faced by women living in mountainous areas. Her research underscored how different governance structures affect the experiences of mountain women and highlighted the need for tailored approaches to gender equality.

Several other students shared personal insights related to mountain communities. **Alley Holt**, who grew up near the Wasatch Mountains in Utah, discussed how education and leadership opportunities can empower women in mountain communities, enabling them to overcome traditional barriers. **Sophie Jackson** examined the difficulties women in rural mountain regions of Japan face, particularly focusing on how migration to urban areas creates additional vulnerabilities for young women, leaving them susceptible to social and economic challenges.

Policy solutions and community resilience were also prominent themes in the event. **Grace Jergensen** shared her research on Norway, showcasing how national policies can foster greater participation of women in leadership roles and sustainable development efforts. **Roland Kabongo**, reflecting on his own upbringing in the mountainous regions of the Democratic Republic of Congo, emphasized the resilience of mountain communities and how education plays a crucial role in empowering women and girls to challenge traditional gender norms and pursue their goals.

Other presentations focused on persistent inequalities in rural mountain areas. **Erynn Lammi** discussed the barriers faced by women in mountainous regions of Greece, particularly the limited access to education and employment opportunities, while **Louyoko Nianza** explained how international cooperation and education initiatives, particularly those addressing healthcare, are vital for empowering women in the Republic of Congo.

Several students also highlighted the intersection of poverty, culture, and gender inequality in mountain communities. **Angie Macias**, drawing from her personal experiences growing up in Honduras, discussed the impact of poverty and traditional gender norms on women in mountain regions, particularly in Armenia. **João Petter** focused on the challenges faced by Indigenous

women in Bolivia, where geographic isolation and language barriers frequently prevent them from accessing justice and social services.

Addressing issues related to violence and justice, **Antoine Mwamba** presented on the risks faced by women in mountainous regions of the Democratic Republic of Congo, particularly in areas affected by conflict. **Domenic Callor** discussed gender-based violence in Italy's mountainous regions, stressing the importance of policy reform and education to protect women from violence and promote social change.

In the concluding presentations, **Jonas Tanner** explored gender inequality in rural areas of China and emphasized the need for global policies that include mountain women's voices in decision-making. **Cristina Alves** presented research on Rwanda, highlighting how geographic isolation continues to limit women's access to justice, education, and economic opportunities. Finally, **Michael Lutz**, who grew up in a remote mountain community in Utah, shared his personal experiences and demonstrated how environmental vulnerability and geographic isolation significantly impact women's access to justice and resources.



Group Photo at the End

The event concluded with a 20-minute Q&A session, during which the audience submitted questions via chat. During this time, several students further elaborated on their presentations.

Louyoko Nianza discussed how his NGO, Smart-African, works to contribute to the goals of CSW70 in Africa and globally. **Aemish Brock** explained his choice of Kyrgyzstan and the Alps for his comparative case study and connected sustainable mountain development to women's rights. **Angie Macias** shared how her background in Honduras shaped her interest in gender equality. **Alley Holt** reflected on her involvement in student organizations and how these experiences deepened her understanding of sustainable mountain development. **Erynn Lammi**, a non-traditional student, discussed how her personal experiences shaped her advocacy for mountain women, reinforcing the importance of diverse perspectives in the SEL model.

Learning Outcomes and Reflections

This CSW70 parallel event underscored the effectiveness of the Student-Engaged Learning (SEL) model in promoting student-led initiatives on global issues. Through their research and presentations, students raised awareness of the unique challenges faced by women and girls in mountain communities around the world. These challenges included limited access to resources, gender inequality, environmental vulnerabilities, and barriers to education and justice.



Erynn Lammi Advocating

Reflecting on the experience, I realized the importance of including mountain perspectives in international policy discussions, especially within the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The event demonstrated how student-led initiatives, such as those developed through the SEL model, can create meaningful dialogue, promote positive change, and help

advance the goals of global development. The students of UVU made an invaluable contribution to advocating for mountain women and girls, while also learning important skills in leadership, public speaking, and collaboration that will serve them well in future endeavors.