Side Event

World Trade Organization
July 8, 2026

Empowering Mountain and Landlocked Communities Through Trade Facilitation, Market Access, and Student-Centric Learning: Lessons from the Kyrgyz Republic and the State of Utah, United States

STATEMENT

Abigail Fisher

Utah Valley University

Hello and good day. My name is Abbie Fisher. I am an undergraduate student researcher at Utah Valley University (UVU) with a background in psychological research, social impact assessment, and systems-informed strategy. I thank the organizers for the opportunity to speak today in support of mountain communities and to highlight how Student-Engaged Learning (SEL) can advance community-centered approaches to sustainable energy development through inclusive and collaborative educational engagement opportunities.

Through SEL and my work with the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), the Orem-Lindon Rotary Partnership, and with faculty mentorship, I have gained experiences in local research, community service, and collaborative international advocacy, alongside my wonderful fellow presenters. This past year I have worked through the SEL model to combine direct service with research to examine how community-centered green governance can improve equitable clean energy development for mountain communities. My comparative research draws upon China's rapid clean energy expansion to examine the benefits and redistributional risks of scaling clean energy systems. It finds that without meaningful local participation and community ownership for information and action pathways, the hidden environmental and economic costs of the energy transition can fall disproportionately on marginalized mountain communities. While free trade and expanding market access have substantially supported the global effort for clean energy through China’s production and trade mechanisms, a systems perspective reminds us that sustainable development depends not only on expanding markets,

but on strengthening the capacity of local communities to shape, own, and benefit from that transition through inclusive governance and education.

Mountain regions face disproportionate impacts from elevation-dependent warming, water insecurity, food scarcity, and climate-related disasters associated with the emissions-heavy impacts of the fossil fuel industry. These interconnected challenges reinforce the importance of SDG 6, particularly Target 6.6, which calls for protecting and restoring water-related ecosystems, alongside SDG's 7 & 15. As many mountain regions are central to freshwater systems and renewable energy production relationships, this water-energy nexus highlights the need for community-centered energy transitions, now more than ever. However, as cited by the Mountain Partnership, current reporting does not fully capture how clean energy expansion intersects with mountain sustainability, community ownership, or equitable distribution of benefits from global green energy scaling.

As my research continues, I have identified Jordan as a growing renewable energy leader in a mountain-influenced desert landscape facing climate and water challenges comparable in several respects to Utah. I look forward to learning from Jordan's 2026 Voluntary National Review at the High-Level Political Forum, particularly its work on the water-energy-food-environment nexus and localized approaches to green energy governance. Student-Engaged Learning democratizes access to knowledge and empowers communities to become active partners in sustainable development. When employed through education it capacity builds local mountain stakeholder's ability to address microcontext-specific challenges with solutions that reflect local needs and priorities. My recommendation to the World Trade Organization is to encourage Member States to integrate and promote trade policies that strengthen community ownership, especially in mountains, local capacity-building, and equitable participation in clean energy development. Ultimately, a brighter future is not simply about generating cleaner power—but generating shared power that reframes mountain communities from peripheral casualties of a growing system, to central stewards of one of the most critical global transitions.

Thank you.