

The Final Document of the Fourth International Women of the Mountains Conference

We, the participants of the Fourth International Women of the Mountains conference (WOMC), held October, 7-9, 2015 at Utah Valley University in Orem, Utah, under the auspices of the United Nations' Mountain Partnership (MP), within the framework of the decisions of the Orem Declaration of Mountain Women (2007), Thimphu Declaration of the Celebrating Mountain Women Conference (2002), and the follow-up on the decisions of the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in New York on September 25-27, 2015 in conjunction with efforts to reach the mountain-related targets in the post-2015 agenda, **declare that:**

- 1. Women and families play a crucial role in sustainable mountain development (SMD).** Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasizes the importance of "Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls." It can be provided through strong support of improving women's rights and welfare, including women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life. It is particularly important to ensure that these goals are reached.
- 2. Mountain communities and women play a key role in the protection of the environment and water sources.** Successful implementation of Target 6.6 of SDG6 to "By 2030, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes" will require active joint efforts of governments and local mountain communities to use monitoring frameworks for specific ecosystems to ensure sustainability for their livelihoods. The traditional techniques and knowledge developed by mountain communities could prove invaluable in building resilience and adapting to climate change, and women play a vital role as custodians of traditions that help achieve these goals. Therefore, mountain women play a key role in adaptation to and mitigation of climate change and the overall protection of the environment and water sources.
- 3. Improvement of livelihoods in the mountain communities for women requires joint policies and actions to protect ecosystems.** Target 15.1 of the SDG15 sets the goal to "By 2030, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements." Because mountains are of utmost importance for water, soil fertility, and other important downstream factors, it is necessary to encourage increased cooperation and coordination of work in the mountains in conjunction with downstream sustainability issues. Women upstream and downstream can play a very important role in these discussions and joint planning because they are promoters of innovation and development, and tend to cooperate for common benefits.

- 4. The transmission of family values, heritage, and culture is essential for sustainable mountain development.** Traditions and culture are passed on through the inter-generational transfer of knowledge. Women of mountain societies, as mothers, play unique roles in encouraging families and children to coexist with the mountains and preserve their ecology. There is an urgent necessity to protect the local and indigenous values, traditions and cultures of mountain societies. It is also important to advocate for thorough research on them, as they contain both tangible and intangible sources of knowledge concerning sustainable development, in order to encourage humankind's coexistence with nature. This cultural memory is crucial in achieving sustainable mountain development, and, therefore, the role of mothers must be protected.
- 5. Mountain communities and families should not continue to suffer from poverty.** To attain this goal, it is important to implement target 15.4 from the SDG15: "By 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development." It is necessary to ensure that development is sustainable and does not detract from rural ecosystems. Mountain communities, families, and indigenous populations in particular have the right to own, use, and develop the lands and resources based on their traditional ownership and to freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources based upon the principles of mutual benefit and international law. There is a direct link between women's development and economic growth. Empowering adolescent girls through education can be one of the best antidotes to the poverty cycle. Furthermore, sustainable development must provide social and ecological benefits for populations residing in both the highlands and lowlands. Capacity building of mountain women for livelihood generation, based on local resources, can help in supporting their families and communities.
- 6. Mountain women and their families in particular need to be protected from the violence of armed conflicts, trafficking of persons, and gender based violence.** The number of armed conflicts has increased significantly in recent times, which exposes a weakness in the legal systems on all levels in addition to the lack of funds and to corruption. This has had a substantial impact on the lives of women and families in mountain areas. Human trafficking is currently the fastest growing black market industry of which sizable portions are women and children, especially in sex trafficking. Moreover, pornography and sex trafficking are intertwined in sexual exploitation. It is important that victims are not further victimized and resources for victims are made available. It is necessary to eliminate such gender based violence within these rural communities and affirm dedication to this goal from local, national, and international authorities to ensure equal access to justice for all.
- 7. Development of women's entrepreneurship through fair business practices should be encouraged.** Women's entrepreneurship can be strengthened through the increasing role of women in expanding sustainable agriculture in mountains, like their work on MAP crops and introducing non-

timber forest crops. Economic justice can be promoted by encouraging development of equal pay and equal access to training, micro-credit loans and other financial services. Also while a substantial portion of agriculture in rural and mountain regions is attributed to family farming and provides much needed jobs, it is necessary to promote programs that value local knowledge and are focused on strengthening food security, encouraging entrepreneurship, promoting small scale agribusiness, and building resiliency to mitigate climate change effects. Along with agriculture, tourism entrepreneurship is now becoming more important as a means of empowering mountain communities, especially women.

- 8. Sustainable mountain development requires the introduction of leadership roles for women and their active involvement in political and economic decision-making.** It is urgent to engage more women in the discussion of policy development and promote inclusion of women in all political processes, decision-making, and protect their participation. Women must fulfill important roles in conflict resolution and crisis management. This can be accomplished through working together with partner institutions, organizations and individuals to develop the next generation of leaders by providing them, women and girls, opportunities for networking and knowledge sharing necessary to prepare them to take part in the political/economic process.
- 9. Gender equality and equal rights for women and men should be advocated on all levels.** It is necessary to promote an increase in the amount of available roles for women to fulfill in mountain regions. Women have to be provided much broader access to education, medical services, and the protection of their legal rights. Problems concerning mothers and child care still permeate local justice and health-care systems. Thus it is necessary to promote the implementation of programs, committed to raising awareness that mothers shape the nation and that the exploitation of women impacts the rest of the world.
- 10. It is necessary to protect the rights of women and children to have adequate access to healthcare, including reproductive and sexual healthcare.** In many mountain regions across the world, there is a high infant/maternal mortality rate, so access to healthcare for women and children is critical. Early detection and intervention are central in combatting many health disorders and growth monitoring can assist in defending against maladies caused by malnutrition among mountain families. Furthermore, increased access to education and funding directed at contraceptive and reproductive services is an imperative in combating health issues related to HIV/AIDS and other STD's, as well as empowering women to be able to better manage the needs of their family and community.
- 11. Alliances and networking among mountain women and youth have to be strengthened.** Exchange of information, best practices, and fundraising opportunities among mountain women and communities play an important role in their sustainable development. Increased engagement of youth and students in an interactive community in particular will encourage successful achievement of mountain targets among the SDG's.

12. Education of women is essential for SDGs implementation. There still exists in many modern nations a bias against women. This is especially true in rural and mountain communities where education is not readily available. Education is essential to overcoming gender inequalities and discrimination. So attention should be given to advanced educational programs including vocational ones in conjunction with local teachers, staff, and women themselves to ensure improvement of the social well-being of mountain communities. This entails ensuring broad access to information regarding business, STEM fields, financial institutions, and other fields that promote the improvement of living conditions while conserving the biodiversity of the environment. Access to technology and the associated training is important for communities, especially women, in mountain regions to bridge the Digital Divide that separates them from their counterparts in lowlands in order to access global information outlets critical to their sustainable development as well as contribute their local knowledge and indigenous experiences to wider community. Education through the arts needs to be strengthened since there is a positive correlation between the arts and academic success, and arts have always been vital part of family/ mountain community life. To help achieve the UN's goal to eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training, it is important to ensure that these SDGs focused on women's benefits be equally addressed in mountains and lowlands.

13. The international community must address the impacts of climate change on sustainable economic development for rural and mountainous regions. As stated in the Agenda 21, Rio+20 outcome, and *The Future We Want*, mountain ecosystems are often fragile and easily damaged. Climate change is causing glacial melting which is changing water availability. Further, water scarcity, already a problem in many parts of the world, could worsen if action is not taken. This would threaten the livelihoods of mountain peoples and local communities even more. Moreover, the rapid melting of glaciers and deterioration of watersheds is reducing the supply of life-sustaining water and increasing the potential of conflict. It is important to mobilize support on the local, regional, and global levels to minimize the hardships these regions face as a result of climate changes. Sustained efforts will help in reducing the migration of families from mountain regions.

We, the participants of the Women of the Mountains Conference:

- Support the continued efforts of Utah Valley University (UVU) and the International University of Kyrgyzstan (IUK) to convene regularly for the International Women of the Mountains conference (IWOMC) as a forum to advocate both gender and SMD agendas of the United Nations in North America, and to strengthen partnership between the local people with global mountain communities, in Central Asia in particular. In addition, it helps to create more incentives among local communities in North America for increased private and public funding of the mountains and the maintenance of the ecosystem both in the region and globally;

- Acknowledge that Mountain Partnership members in North America have continued contribution to the hosting of the WOMC in Utah and overseas which allows them to develop regional approaches in SMD advocacy, both in North America and globally;
- Highlight important experiences in gender and SMD advocacy at UVU, an undergraduate university with a focus on teaching and ‘engaged learning’ rather than research. UVU has been able to successfully involve its students in raising awareness among local communities of different gender and SMD issues, to provide them with important professional experiences and skills, and networking opportunities on all levels, especially internationally;
- Acknowledge the important role played by the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at UVU, and by local communities from the state of Utah in the successful hosting of the conference as a major grass-roots regional gathering, advocating the gender agenda of the United Nations in addition to contributing to such initiatives as the global social-media campaign to “Keep Mountains in SDG’s,” and petition signing to ensure that the impact of climate change on Mountain Peoples and Ecosystems is fully addressed in the UNFCCC COP21 new climate deal.

We recommend:

1. To support UVU’s efforts to involve other interested institutions in the state of Utah to jointly host the WOMC biennially with alternating sites between State of Utah and mountain nations from around the world;
2. To support efforts of Brigham Young University’s WomanStat project to expand their research areas on different aspects of women’s life around the world by focusing on mountain families and communities in particular, in order to develop adaptation measures, investments, and specific policies reflecting emerging challenges to the modern mountain communities;
3. To support efforts of Tatra Mountain Cultural Foundation in promotion of mountain cultures through research and documentation with an ultimate goal of creating special institution for that purpose.
4. To support Mountain Partnership members in North America efforts in promoting regional approaches in gender and SMD advocacy in addition to hosting WOMC: to commemorate jointly and with MP members from the rest of the world the International Mountain Day on December 11 in order to raise an awareness of the different aspects of the SMD agenda among local communities. The partnership between MP members in North America and Central Asia needs to be expanded to other parts of the global mountain communities and strengthened through expansion of such projects as traditional handicrafts sales from Central Asia in North America by Vista 360 from Jackson, WY and educational programs between UVU and IUK among others;

5. To follow up on the results of the business fair during the International Women of the Mountains Conference when potential partnerships were created between local companies in Utah and female entrepreneurs from Peru (agriculture), Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Nepal (tourism), and Indonesia (renewable energy).
6. To encourage new memberships in the Mountain Partnership and among educational institutions in particular as foundations to nurture future leaders in SMD advocacy both in North America and globally. It is equally important to involve youth and high school students in gender and SMD promotion as well as to create joint initiatives with youth involvement from different regions, as was envisioned by the UVU and the Mountain Institute.
7. To encourage students from other educational institutions and local community representatives in the State of Utah to collaborate with or join the Utah International Mountain Forum as an informal institution which will coordinate and report to the MPS on a biannual basis on the accomplished actions and initiatives with focus on gender and the SMD issues of the United Nations on local, regional, and global levels.

December 1, 2015; Orem, Utah