



**UN Women UK National Committee Corporate Advisory Group Meeting on
Gender Perspectives on Water & Sanitation 13th November 2013**

Talk by Stella Joy and Tara Joy on behalf of Active Remedy Ltd.

Good Afternoon Everyone.

It is a great pleasure to be here today. I would like to say thank you to the coordinators and hosts for organising this event and giving us the chance to speak to all of you. My name is Stella Joy and I am here today with Tara Joy who is the Co Director of Active Remedy Ltd and my daughter. I will present the first part of this talk and she will present the second. Our talk will be on the subject of Freshwater and the potential for 'A Stand Alone Sustainable Development Goal for Water' within the Post 2015 agenda.

2013, The International Year of Water Cooperation reflects the global recognition that freshwater is an absolute necessity for achieving internationally agreed upon Sustainable Development Goals. These include the nexus between water security, food security, poverty eradication, gender equality, human health, equity, peace and prosperity. It also reflects the emerging global understanding that the safeguarding of ecosystems and their life-supporting functions, needs to be implemented to resolve current and future water challenges.

This issue has generally been overlooked, although it is a key factor in successfully achieving long-term Sustainable Development. This matter was given recognition and highlighted at the United Nations Sustainable Development Conference in Rio in 2012 and was ratified in the government signed document: 'The Future We Want'. Paragraph 122 states:

"We recognize the key role that ecosystems play in maintaining water quantity and quality and support actions within the respective national boundaries to protect and sustainably manage these ecosystems."

In 2011 we became involved in the Rio+20 processes, adding input into the Zero Draft paper and attending the Rio+20 Conference. The outcome document 'The Future We Want' clearly emphasizes the need for commitment on the part of the International community 'to the progressive realization of access to safe and affordable drinking water and basic sanitation for all. It stresses this as a necessity for poverty eradication, food security, women's empowerment and the protection of human health. Special Reporteur Caterina de Albuquerque, emphasizes that:

“A goal on universal access must be complemented with a call for the reduction of inequalities. One of the targets should consist in reducing the gap between the rate of coverage in terms of access to water, sanitation and hygiene in the best-off or dominant groups to that of the worst-off or minority groups.”

In relation to this, since early May 2013 we have been involved with the UN Commons Cluster, contributing input into the recommendations for ‘A Stand alone Sustainable Development Goal for Water’. We were pleased that this issue was given serious attention at the Budapest Water Summit in October 2013 where the President of the World Water Council, Benedito Braga announced:

“Water is the common thread connecting all of the sustainable development goals. A stand-alone water goal is critical as part of the Post-2015 development agenda”.

We were especially pleased when Sibylle Vermont of the UNECE stressed the need for a Water Sustainable Development Goal to address the whole water cycle rather than just water supply and sanitation.

Unlike resources such as coal, oil and gas the freshwater cycle is a renewable and regenerative one. It has the ability of being replenished. However this cycle is utterly dependent upon healthily functioning ecosystems such as mountains with their snows, glaciers and mixed forests. The critical importance of this issue was acknowledged as the central factor in achieving water security in the United Nations Water Analytical Brief, which was released on World Water Day 22nd March 2013. It states:

“Ensuring that ecosystems are protected and conserved is central to achieving water security – both for people and for nature. Ecosystems are vital to sustaining the quantity and quality of water available within a watershed, on which both nature and people rely. Maintaining the integrity of ecosystems is essential for supporting the diverse needs of humans, and for the sustainability of ecosystems, including protecting the water- provisioning services they provide.”

In July 2010 the United Nations General Assembly formally recognized the Human Right to Water and Sanitation. They acknowledged that clean drinking water and sanitation are essential for the realization of all Human Rights. The Right to Water emphasizes that water should be treated as a social and cultural good, and not primarily as an economic good. It also stresses that the manner in which this right is realized must be sustainable and in the interest of all, ensuring that the Right can be realized for present and future generations.

All Human Rights have their basis and foundations in freshwater security. However universal access to clean drinking water and sanitation is dependent upon there being adequate supplies of available freshwater. This is impossible to realize if the very freshwater cycle itself is compromised. The Analytical Brief affirms:

***“Maintaining the integrity of ecosystems before they become compromised is an essential component of achieving water security and reducing the potential for conflicts. The continuous pace of human development is threatening the capacity of ecosystems to adapt, raising concerns that ecosystems will reach a tipping point after which they are no longer able to provide sustaining functions and services, and will become unable to recover their integrity and functions.*”**

To truly implement the right to clean drinking water and sanitation for all in present times and inclusive of future generations, an adequate quantity of freshwater is required. How to potentially achieve this is a vital factor, which needs to be addressed within 'A Stand Alone Water Sustainable Development Goal'. This is critical in achieving a successful Post 2015 agenda, which accords with the Millennium Development Declaration. Government obligations need to include legislation that both protects and restores the environments, which the hydrological cycle is utterly dependent upon. These include mountains (the water towers of the world), mixed mountain forests, rain forests and wetlands.

We all generally understand the temporary crisis we would experience if the water tanks in our homes were not operational. In this case however, we are talking about the water towers of Earth and the potential long-term global crisis that would occur if they should cease to function. This situation needs to be both addressed and dealt with. If this aspect is yet again ignored and not attended to, we will soon all be asking the question. Who gets water and at what cost? As Maude Barlow from the Council of Canadians said:

***“If water in the future will only be accessible to those who can pay for it, who will buy it for nature?”*”**

Regardless of status or species nearly all life on Earth is presently threatened by the same looming freshwater crisis. Unless solutions are found and applied poverty, hunger, inequality and conflict will inevitably increase. This will not only happen in developing countries, it will also happen in places, which are presently enjoying relative stability. It has been predicted by reputable scientists that the majority of mountain glaciers and snows could vanish within 50 years. The effects this will have on the climate and hydrological cycle is virtually unimaginable.

Rather than ignoring or running from this threat, as there is ultimately nowhere else to run to, it would be in our best long-term interest to face it. The content of the Post 2015 agenda could establish the way, by which we use our highest intelligence to work collectively, in a concerted manner on remedying these problems, while it is still conceivably possible.

Thank you and now Tara will speak.

Good Afternoon.

I'm going to speak a little about the water of the world. Yet for a few minutes I would like us all to think past our kitchen sinks to how freshwater circulates around the world and finally reaches our taps. Consider what will happen if this cycle ceases to function, what is it dependant upon and how can we preserve this cycle?

Water covers more than three quarters of the Earth's surface but only approximately 3% of it is freshwater. Of this, approximately 2% is found in ice caps and glaciers and 1% in underground sources, rivers, streams, lakes and the atmosphere. Mountains are known as the 'water towers' of the world and source between 60% and 80% of the Earth's freshwater.

Many streams and rivers would cease to flow entirely if their headwaters and watersheds were not fed by the seasonal melting of these snows. Such valuable storage of freshwater is vital for all life on Earth. At present, mountain snows and glaciers are melting and receding at an unprecedented rate. This is an enormous loss of potentially available freshwater for countless generations. Many people do not realize how much they depend upon the survival of mountain eco-systems.

In the UK it is hard for people to understand the implications of water shortages because we often feel that we have too much rain. Yet the water cycle is a global cycle and the climate in the U.K, is regulated by mountains as far away as the Himalayas.

In the 'World Mountain Conference' in Lucerne in October 2011
Dr Ashok Khosla stated:

“Healthy mountain ecosystems are the foundation of healthy people, both in the mountains above and in the plains below. To save civilization, there is no greater urgency today than to regenerate and conserve our mountains. Their role in regulating our climate and water systems is fundamental to the sustenance of our life on this planet”

Between 2005 and 2011 we spent a great deal of time in the Himalayan regions of India and Nepal, conducting research into the relationship between mountains, mixed indigenous mountain forests and the global freshwater cycle. We met with mountain communities, university professors, scientists, trekking guides and those working in forestry. We wanted to understand directly for ourselves about receding glaciers and snowlines, the drying up of rivers and the large-scale deforestation that has been witnessed throughout the last fifty years.

We learnt that through precipitation and transpiration mountain forests play a crucial role in the creation of snow and ice at high altitudes. It is even possible that cloud formation at high altitudes would not be possible without the hydrocarbon isoprene that they release.

The protective function of healthy mountain forests, full of biodiversity provides the groundcover and shade needed to delay snowmelt, reduce evaporation from the soil and channel water into the underground aquifer system.

With this knowledge we needed to focus on finding ways by which we could potentially work collectively with the local indigenous mountain communities in a reforestation program. We were interested in seeing how their skills, traditional knowledge and local community practises could be blended with certain western reforestation practises to restore mixed forests effectively and speedily to eroded and denuded mountain regions and bring long lasting wealth to their communities.

We have been inspired by one of the great female environmental conservationists, Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai. She was the founder of the Green Belt Movement that has helped save and spread forests across Kenya, empower women and people at the grass-root level and inspire environmental initiatives around the world. The green belt model is one that can be combined with other modern and traditional methods for the reforestation of mixed indigenous mountain forests worldwide. When communicating with mountain people on these matters, we met with a very favourable response.

Mountain communities have developed traditional conservation practises over long periods of time. These are based on well-founded observations that document the most effective methods to sustain the local resources. They have been passed through generations into present times. They are also one of the most impoverished groups of people on Earth. In many cases, the majority of people living and working in the extremely difficult conditions found in mountain regions are women.

Rio+20 reiterated the importance of empowering rural women as critical agents for enhancing agricultural and rural development. It highlighted the crucial role that women play in the solution of water security and the need to recognize their significant position as water resource managers, farmers, educators and irrigators, contributing to the safeguarding of water sources and the environment.

On the 22 December 2005 the UN General Assembly passed a resolution on Sustainable Mountain Development, in which it states:

“Indigenous cultures, traditions and knowledge, including in the field of medicine, are to be fully considered, respected and promoted in development policy and planning in mountain regions, and underlines the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge, heritage and values in all development initiatives”

Mountain people are potentially the natural stewards of river sources and upper watersheds.

Without the recognition of the vital part that mountain people play in being the natural caretakers of the mountain forests, they will be forced by poverty to either degrade these resources even further or to migrate. These forests are essential water sourcing ecosystems. However if these communities are supported, they can provide the very important services of conserving, restoring and maintaining the natural mountain biodiversity and local ecologies.

We also ascertained that they are an extremely resilient and hardy people and therefore amongst the only people capable of living and working within such harsh and remote regions. We recognized that it is imperative to work with and empower the mountain communities throughout the world to achieve success for such large-scale reforestation endeavours.

Supporting them to protect and restore mixed mountain forests would not simply be an act of charity. It would be a means by which, all-lowland communities, including wealthy urban ones could safeguard their own long-term interests.

A poignant statement from the FAO in 1997 makes an important point:

“Those sharing in the benefits of mountain resources should also share in the responsibility for their sustainability”

The critical issue of protecting and restoring the ecosystems, which maintain the global freshwater cycle, needs to be included in the content of ‘A Stand-Alone Sustainable Development Goal For Water’ and included in the Post 2015 Agenda.

As the Kogi Mamas of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, in Columbia said in their message to humanity given at Rio+20

“You don’t have to abandon your lives but you must protect the rivers.”

They had left their remote homes and travelled to this Summit to impress upon everyone, the extreme nature of the crisis we will face, if we do not take the negative impact we are having on nature seriously and make some profound changes, in our consciousness and lifestyles.

“This is our World, our Water and our Responsibility. It is up to us to either care for it or lose it”

Thank you very much for your attention.