
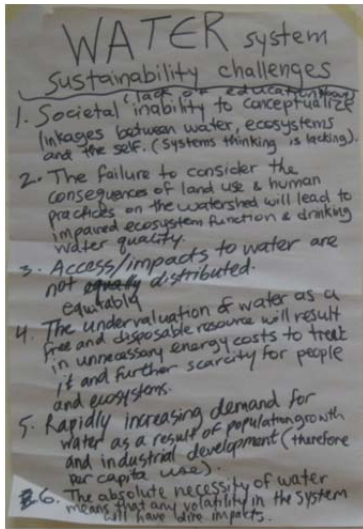


**“What I learned at IMPACT! 2011 Youth Leadership Conference on Sustainability”**  
**September 15-18 @ University of Guelph in Guelph, Ontario, Canada**  
**Kelli Ashley Armstrong · BSc Environmental Science · Acadia University ‘12**

When we arrived at the Conference Thursday evening, the agenda commenced with a discussion panel of professionals who have combated various challenges in the sustainability movement, ranging from social to industrial. Even though I was aware of the potential depths that this Conference could force my mind to explore, that was the moment things became very real for me. I listened in terror as Dr. Ann-Marie Zajdlik (founder of *Bracelet of Hope*) spoke about the unnecessary “death & decay” in Lisit, Tanzania, from the AIDS virus. I was familiar with these stories. The AIDS epidemic is still a relevant topic in The Bahamas, where I am from. However, because my interests have always been environment-related, I have always juggled my ideas of sustainability around them. The thought of identifying the AIDS epidemic as “unsustainable”, never crossed my mind. Though I had considered health problems, they had been environmental-health problems. Even when I thought about economic sustainability, I would always determine it to be as a result of the mismanagement of natural resources. I had been discounting the social perspective on sustainability altogether. But thanks to Dr. Zajdlik and her sobering speech, I was ready to take it all into consideration.

<p><b>“We must imp s prepared to act!”</b>          – Dr. David Suzuki</p>  <p>Dr. David Suzuki during his keynote speech at the IMPACT! 2011 Conference at the River Run Centre, (Downtown) Guelph, Ontario</p>	<p>Day Two of the Conference started with Dr. David Suzuki’s keynote speech on sustainability. Dr. Suzuki presented a lot of great arguments and while listening to him speak, I found myself only agreeing and taking notes. Here are a few of my favourite quotes from Dr. Suzuki:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ “When it comes to dealing with pressing issues that have immediate [impacts] we have a moral responsibility to take care of them and try to ensure a sustainable future, there is no “or”.”</li> <li>✓ “We can’t change the laws of physics, chemistry or biology, but we can change the things we invent, like economies.”</li> <li>✓ “We need to get focused on the real world we live in, get involved in our communities and be agents of change.”</li> <li>✓ “We must agree on a bottom line determined by our biological nature [...]”</li> <li>✓ “Without clean water, without clean air, without clean land, we’re sick or we’re dead.”</li> </ul> <p>After Dr. Suzuki’s speech I was left with one question – <b>“Sustainability how?”</b> As the day went on, answers unfolded from the activities we took part in; one must <b>BE STRATEGIC!</b></p> <p><b>Identify Challenges &gt; Identify Solutions &gt; Make possibilities happen!</b></p>
<p><b>System Groups: Water</b>          Alla Guelber  <i>Waterlution, Meaningful Work Project</i>          IMPACT! 2009 Alumni Facilitator</p>	<p>There had to be an organised way of sharing everyone’s view of sustainability. Because the weekend was far too short to get everyone’s opinion on every issue, we were divided into groups to focus on sustainability challenges for a given system. I was placed in the water system group.</p>

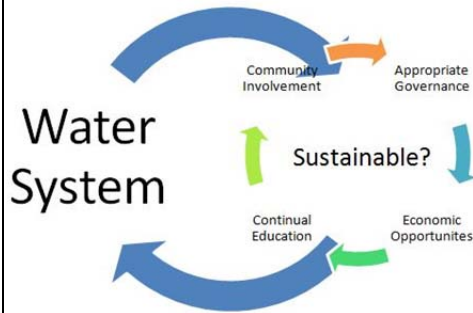


### Sustainability Challenges in the Water System

(as identified by the Water System Group\* at IMPACT! 2011 Youth Leadership Conference on Sustainability)

1. Society's inability (lack of education about) to conceptualise linkages between water, ecosystems and the self. (Systems thinking is lacking.)
2. The failure to consider the consequences of land use and human practices on the watershed will lead to impaired ecosystem function and drinking water quality.
3. Access/impacts to water are not equitably distributed.
4. The undervaluation of water as a free and disposable resource will result in unnecessary energy costs to treat it and further scarcity for people and ecosystems.
5. Rapidly increasing demand for water as a result of population growth and industrial development (therefore per capita use).
6. The absolute necessity of water means that any volatility in the system will have dire impacts.

\*Jennifer Albers, Melissa Brausse, Melissa Cederqvist, Shaun Fantauzzo, Gina Hickman, Keita Hill, Bonnie Klohn, Tatum Lawlor, Max Luke, Andrey Malyshev, Victor Ngo, Emilie Novaczek, Riley Pollom, Kayla Seguin, Monique Smith, Kelli Armstrong.



*By addressing a line of sectors: education, society, politics, economics; a loop can be created if the economic opportunities created by water can also be used to educate the public. By doing this, the break in the system that is responsible for the sustainability issue, will be replaced by that loop; allowing the system an opportunity to be sustainable (original figure by Kelli Ashley Armstrong).*

### Solutions?

Because water is a universal resource, issues surrounding this system are limitless and vary; this makes finding relief for the system very difficult. When dealing with any sustainability issue in a system there is always a myriad of other sustainability challenges tied in to that one from other systems, especially when it comes to water. Therefore, significant relief will be a possibility only if support comes from multiple sectors: these include the obvious like education, society, politics, economics. For example, in order for people to be aware, they have to

- be made known about the vitalness, versatility and vulnerability of water;
- be encouraged to evaluate their water consumption and distribution in their homes, communities, schools and workplaces;
- challenge their authorities to enforce environmental policies and other related laws; and
- think creatively to develop sustainable opportunities for persons to be employed by the water system.

It is also important to have diversity within those sectors to avoid bias and hidden agendas, but more importantly, to gather ideas from different perspectives. One may also realise that by addressing that line of sectors, a loop can be created if the economic opportunities created by water can also be used to educate the public. By doing this, the break in the system that is responsible for the sustainability issue, will be replaced by that loop; allowing the system an opportunity to be sustainable (see figure).

The IMPACT! Conference was the most incredible thing I have experienced in my college life. It was so enlightening to hear sustainability veterans talk about their various experiences over the years and to give encouraging words. It was also reassuring to be around so many young bright people with similar visions of a sustainable future, who are willing to work together and mentor each other. Overall, it was a truly motivational experience and I left the Conference inspired to change the world, more than before.