

National Student Commonwealth Forum

Video Message

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by

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Greetings from the Commonwealth of Learning or COL. We are the only Commonwealth intergovernmental organisation outside the UK. Canada played a critical role in the establishment of COL. Canada's proposal of using communication technologies for education, captured the imagination of Commonwealth Heads of Government when they met for CHOGM in Vancouver in 1987. COL was born and continues to grow in beautiful British Columbia.

What does COL do? Our mission is to help Commonwealth Member States and institutions to harness the potential of technologies for expanding access to education and training. COL believes that learning is the key to sustainable development. This means that learning must lead to: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation.

The theme you have chosen for this year on Global Water Issues has a direct bearing on environmental conservation. We are fortunate to be in Canada which has substantial freshwater resources. But as you know, the Commonwealth is very diverse and many countries are not so fortunate. For example, in one city in Asia, the water supply is released once every three days, for 20 minutes only. In another country in Africa, women walk for hours every day to fetch a few buckets of water of dubious quality. It may be difficult for you to imagine such scarcity and deprivation. Which is getting progressively worse. Experts believe that the future wars will be fought over water. We will also witness mass migrations and the displacement of humans and animals around the world. Why should it concern us? Because when such events occur, none of us can be immune to the impact.

Did you know how much water goes into producing the sugar in your coffee? One spoon of sugar requires more than one gallon of water. And if you have a hamburger, you'll be surprised to note that it takes 660 gallons of water to produce (Betty Hallock, 2014 from National Geographic). So you can calculate your 'water footprint' based on your food consumption. And each one of us needs to be aware of the amount of water we consume.

What is COL doing to address these challenges? In collaboration with the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, COL offered a MOOC on Climate Change to raise awareness about developing sustainable practices such as conserving water. COL worked with the University of Seychelles to develop a course on the Blue Economy, which is being offered as a MOOC this month and you could check it out since it is free and online. COL developed the Green Teacher programme under which school teachers were trained in various environmental subjects including water resource management, impacting thousands of school children in India. COL also works with marginalized agrarian communities, as farming accounts for approximately 70% of the water consumed globally. Therefore it is essential to help farming communities to

understand how to conserve water.

We have a very young Commonwealth, where 60% of the population is under 30. You young people are our future and have a key role to play in determining the destiny of our planet. This meeting can help you to collectively decide on how you can be involved in working with other young people around the Commonwealth. What are the possible innovations? Do we have concrete solutions to address global water issues? How can we make a difference? Good luck with your deliberations.