

Daniella Conser's COP28 Reflections, December 2023

In the quiet aftermath of COP28, I find myself in a sea of thoughts, where waves of emotion and newfound understanding collide. My journey was veiled in uncertainty of what it would behold, however, deeply rooted in gratitude and the intent to absorb, learn, and, importantly, to share and amplify voices that often go unheard.

I discovered that the heart of the environmental movement resonates most profoundly in the hands of those who stand at the frontline of climate change. The five-day journey of my friend Wia from deep in the Amazon to COP28 is a story etched in dedication—a testament to the relentless spirit of those who care deeply for our planet.

It was an incredible privilege to meet conservation defender and guardian Wia from Yasuni, Greenlandic artist Jessie Kleemann, Nordick Senoir Advisor for Culture Eva Englund, Water Artist Charlotte Qin, The Pacific Climate Warriors, Izzy-Zhu Macquire and Gabriela Fernando from Monash and Parneet Kaur from Poetry for Planet, to name a few. I could not encourage you more to follow their work and connect with their communities.

The conference laid bare the unequal burdens of climate change, affecting diverse groups from women and girls in remote communities to our Pacific Island neighbours and developing nations. Their stories painted a vivid tapestry, each story unfolded a different aspect of this global challenge, from the daily realities of gender-specific hardships to the existential threats faced by low-lying island nations, illustrating the uneven canvas on which climate change paints its strokes.

Amidst the tapestry of COP28, some initial scepticism was met with rays of inspiration. Encounters with individuals in corridors of power, genuinely striving for change, and community leaders radiating hope and resilience, illuminated the path ahead. These moments were a stark reminder of the privilege of being there, a privilege not shared by all, and a haven for advocacy that is scarce in some parts of the world.

The interplay of storytelling and art in these global conversations emerged as a beacon of hope. While the arts are still finding their footing in the halls of policymaking, they are potent tools for connection, for weaving together the narratives that ground our environmental discourse. This journey at COP28 underscored the vital need to bridge the gap between grassroots stories and the tables where decisions are made.

As the event drew to a close, a gentle shadow of disillusionment crept in, pondering the transformation of dialogue into impactful action. Yet, nestled within this contemplation, my faith in our collective power to foster change remained.

Reflecting on this experience, my thoughts return to a bag I took with me from my family in Greece, inscribed with the quote from Socrates: 'All I know is that I know nothing.' This phrase echoed throughout my time at COP28, a humble reminder of our shared journey.

It speaks of the vast expanse of challenges we face, the dancing of complexities and uncertainties in our quest for solutions and answers to this overwhelming crisis. Yet amidst this, one thing stands clear to me: the urgent, necessary action we must take as a global community to mitigate, adapt, and increase our resilience. This isn't just for ourselves but for everyone, for the generations before us and those yet to come, for nature, for life as we know it.

In the face of the Climate Emergency, we each hold a key role. In this crucial endeavour, our collective climate actions, big and small, forge a path towards a more resilient, equitable future. It's a call to all of us, in our unique capacities, to contribute to shaping a world that not only responds to the challenges of today but anticipates and safeguards the needs of tomorrow. In this interconnected dance, every step, every effort, and every voice is pivotal in making a tangible difference. Our journey of continuous learning and action paves the way for a legacy that honours the history of this earth and safeguards the future.



Image credit: *Respect Your Mother* by Daniella Conser, photograph on display at COP28, 2023