



Count Down to Earth Day 2020 – Our Personal Journeys

April 22, 2020 will be the 50-year anniversary of Earth Day. This is the first in a series of articles by the College of the Environment office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to address Earth Day 2020.

Terryl Ross, Assistant Dean Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

1. How did you get involved in environmentalism?

In January of 1989, I was a Syracuse University graduate student and I stumbled upon the special edition Time magazine, entitled, "Planet of the Year." It featured stunning pictures and over 30 pages of information about the future of our planet. It was thought provoking, scary and hopeful at the same time. I got so excited I wrote them asking if my campus could be part of a movement to educate students around the country about environmental opportunities and challenges. That magazine changed my life and I have been interested in environmentalism ever since.

2. In terms of environmentalism, what's working?

Since that time, several environmental subtopics (e.g. clean energy, climate change conservation, Earth Day, global warming, recycling, etc.) have become commonplace in the public discourse.

3. In terms of environmentalism, what's not working?

The field lacked racial and economic diversity when I started and I'm sad to say that it is not much better, today. This is particularly problematic because many people of color and economically disadvantaged communities are disproportionately affected by environmental hazards and conditions.

4. What are your hopes and aspirations for environmentalism going forward?

I would like to see Earth Day 2020 be remembered as a transformative time for a more inclusion movement to address climate change. I'm glad the United Nations [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) (IPCC) came out with a stern warning about the environmental challenges society will face in 2030 if fail to make significant changes by then. I just hope we don't wait until 2029 to get started.



Isabel Carrera Zamanillo, Program Operations Specialist Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

1. How did you get involved in environmentalism?

I have always been attracted to nature, even though I am an urbanite. I grew up in Mexico City and in the mid-nineties we had terrible air pollution problems; birds were falling from the trees death and respiratory problems were constant. However, I did not really understand what I was able to do as an individual to promote a positive change. Trying to figure out this I decided to complete a bachelor's degree in Biology, but it was until I was in my Master's program and I had the opportunity to collaborate with indigenous communities living in the Lacandon Jungle in Chiapas, Mexico, that I started to understand the impact of an individual and a community in the protection of nature, but overall, I started uncovering my own biases as an academic.

2. In terms of environmentalism, what's working?

The fact that climate change is now incorporated into K-12 curriculum and it is part of everyday news has increased the level of awareness of the impact of humans on the environment. But I am happily surprised to see that environmental and climate justice topics are also being weighed in policy-making processes.

3. In terms of environmentalism, what's not working?

There is still a top-bottom approach in policy-making and in academia, where authorities and experts are the ones considered to have the knowledge on how to address environmental problems. It is important to recognize that these institutions have been shaped by Western ideas that falsely dichotomize culture and nature. This is a type of prescriptive discourse that emphasizes this perspective and promotes "solutions" that do not consider other forms of knowledge linked to cultural values, resulting in approaches that are disconnected from the reality of many local communities around the world.

4. What are your hopes and aspirations for environmentalism going forward?

I would like to see a more inclusive environmental discourse that really embraces all forms of knowledge. In order for this to happen there needs to be structural changes, but overall everyone's commitment to the principles of equity and inclusion.