



# GLN GLOBAL LEADERSHIP NETWORK

## Feature Stories of the Alumni of the Quebec-Labrador Foundation

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#### Nellie Catzim

NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK

Gulf to Gulf Exchange Program,  
New England, 2011  
QLF Congress, Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain,  
2016

*Originally a Protected Areas Manager in Belize, Nellie is a Technical Expert on Climate Change, Oceans Management, and Multilateral Environmental Agreements. Nellie currently negotiates treaties on marine conservation and other issues pertaining to small island states at the United Nations. Nellie's international exchange experience at QLF helped her on her path to giving a voice to disenfranchised groups on a global stage.*



Nellie Catzim, 2020

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF NELLIE CATZIM

#### Giving a Voice to the Most Vulnerable ~

As Technical Expert on Climate Change, Oceans Management, and Multilateral Environmental Agreements at the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), Nellie is passionate about advocating for those that are disenfranchised and “giving a voice to the most vulnerable.” At AOSIS, a coalition of forty-four countries that negotiate as a single bloc within the UN on climate change, oceans, and sustainable development, Nellie provides guidance for thematic negotiators working on issues under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and stays current on climate change discussions across fora within the UN. Presently, she is negotiating a new treaty on the conservation of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction. As someone who comes from the small coastal nation of Belize, Nellie is familiar with the day-to-day realities experienced by marginalized groups living in small island and coastal countries. She has continuously witnessed environmental degradation in Belize and surrounding regions. Consequently, her experiences drive her to seek out concrete actions and practical solutions to protect both the environment and communities impacted by a changing climate.

#### Local to Global ~

Nellie began her career in the field of conservation as Protected Areas Manager for the Belize Audubon Society. She soon discovered that managing protected areas

requires working with local communities, and so began her work with local groups, where she helped set up small businesses, such as Honey Production, a corporation of honey producers who were illegally harvesting resources from within protected areas, but were able to re-tool to cultivate, returning to their own honeybees and selling their produce in the local market. After years of engagement at the local level, Nellie realized that in addition to providing financial support, there was a need for financial planning services in conservation work. She decided to learn the skills necessary to fill this gap, pursuing an M.B.A in sustainable development, finance, and economics at INCAE Business School in Costa Rica.



Nellie at the UN Climate Change Conference, Madrid, Spain 2019  
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF NELLIE CATZIM

Soon after this feat, Nellie pursued the role of Executive Director at the Southern Environmental Association (SEA), an NGO dedicated to enhancing stewardship and community involvement in marine protected areas in Belize. While at SEA in 2011, Nellie was introduced to Brent Mitchell, QLF Senior Vice President. Brent invited her to participate in QLF's Gulf-to-Gulf Conservation Exchange Program. Nellie credits QLF for "expanding her horizons" with an appreciation for environmental challenges that occur across nations, as QLF provided the context of

working in a bioregion and sharing conservation innovations with communities worldwide.

Shortly after the Exchange, Nellie transitioned to the Caribbean Community Climate Change Center (5Cs), serving as Regional Project Coordinator, where she focused on the impact of climate change on coral reef systems in the Caribbean. Her work there prompted an invitation to participate in the UN Climate Change Negotiations as the Fellow representing the Caribbean region. This Fellowship enabled Nellie to continue her work on a global scale, first as Coordinator of the Ocean and Seas Fellowship Program at Islands First, and presently as Technical Expert on Climate Change, Oceans Management, and Multilateral Environmental Agreements at AOSIS. Nellie enjoys working with island nations; it is vital to her that all voices are heard, a persistent challenge when working with opposing interests across countries that are oftentimes resistant to change.



Nellie Catzim (Left) at the UN Climate Change Conference, Madrid, Spain 2019  
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF NELLIE CATZIM

Nellie's participation in the QLF Congress in Barcelona in 2016 was an affirmation of her commitment to people and to conservation, to sharing knowledge and innovation, and to giving a voice to those most vulnerable. These values are of importance when working toward change, particularly in the face of global pressing issues, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change.