

Resetting the Future

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SPEAKERS

Britt Duffy Adkins, Dr. Claire Nelson

Britt Duffy Adkins 00:12

You're listening to the Celestial Citizen Podcast and I'm your host, Britt Duffy Adkins. Celestial Citizen is a space media company with embedded urban planning values, looking to help shape a more equitable and just future for all of us in space. This podcast seeks to provide an opportunity for conversation about how to be a better interplanetary citizen, and responsible steward of Earth and the Cosmos. By engaging the global public, providing greater access to the space industry, and amplifying a more diverse set of voices, progress in space can equate to progress on Earth. We, who are bursting with stardust, can become Celestial Citizens. Today, I'm very excited to be speaking with Dr. Claire Nelson.

Dr. Claire Nelson 01:10

We belong to the Cosmos. It does not belong to us, we are caretakers for the time that we're alive, and we should caretake in such a way as to leave something good for generations that will come after us. That is what, to me, being a Celestial Citizen is.

Britt Duffy Adkins 01:28

We'll discuss how humanity can pivot from pandemic and crisis into a bright and flourishing future, both on Earth and in space, by shifting to a mindset rooted in sustainability.

Dr. Claire Nelson 01:40

To lose focus on your little corner, and that corner could be, 'I am an advocate for prison reform. I'm an advocate for health for all. I'm an advocate for water. I'm an advocate for education.' I don't care what you advocate for. That little corner of the world, that tribe to which you belong, can do a job. Local, local, local, local, local, local. Until all of a sudden, 1 million local seeds of hope becomes a global force.

Britt Duffy Adkins 02:24

My guest on the show is Dr. Claire Nelson. Dr. Nelson has been actively engaged in the business of international development for more than 25 years. She works in the area of project development and management with a particular focus on private sector development. A renaissance woman, she is a

development engineer, social entrepreneur and futurist. Dr. Nelson is also the first Jamaican woman to earn a doctorate degree in an engineering discipline, and the only Black student in her graduating class. She is the founder and president of the Institute of Caribbean Studies, Chief Ideation Leader at the Futures Forum, and Lead Futurist at the Center for Sustainable Futures at Morgan State University. She is recognized as a White House Champion of Change, and sought after as a speaker on issues pertaining to economic development, globalization, and issues concerning the Caribbean and its people. And I'm very excited to have the opportunity to chat with you today. Thanks so much for joining the Celestial Citizen Podcast, Claire.

Dr. Claire Nelson 03:28

Thanks for having me.

Britt Duffy Adkins 03:29

So, Claire, tell us a little bit about yourself and how you became interested in international development and then eventually topics related to space sustainability and ethics of space exploration in particular.

Dr. Claire Nelson 03:42

The long story, I am the first Jamaican on the Moon, and the short story, I got into international development because I grew up in Jamaica, and as a child, observed the process of development, and got very excited about being part of the change-making of the country. I was 13 when the Prime Minister, at that time, talked a lot about Jamaica being a part of the new economic world order. And I went to an all-girls high school. And we were told that we were going to become the leaders of this new Jamaica. And so I got very interested in engineering as a potential place for me to live out my fantasy of being the first female prime minister of Jamaica. And I really thought if I studied Industrial Engineering, I could become the Minister of Industry and Planning. So, working at the UN and the World Bank was always on my radar. Why not industry? No, because I wanted to manage the industrial environment of the country. So I studied Industrial Engineering and ended up having a career for 30 years at the Inter-American Development Bank, which funds projects of all sorts and types across the member countries in Latin America and the Caribbean region. And so I had a very broad experience in project design, of different types of projects. I kind of worked on a technical assistant front end of portfolio development. So really had a rich experience, getting the opportunity to be very creative and designing feasibility studies for things that could make life better for the people in Latin America and Caribbean region.

Britt Duffy Adkins 05:18

And so how did that bring you then eventually, into being interested in issues related to space?

Dr. Claire Nelson 05:23

I got very involved in being, I would say, the leadership space, not so much that I had a title of leader, but I got very involved in being a leader in changing some systems that weren't working in terms of how the bank and the Washington consensus organizations were treating the issue of inequality. I thought that the financial bottom-up approach was not working. And I wanted to see more development with equity. So I kind of went off and became a pioneer in changing the way the Washington institutions work with Black communities in Latin America. And I sort of standardized that to be development with equity. And in doing that process, I start thinking about social change, and the engineering and

architecture of social change, and thought that maybe as an industrial engineer, I could bring something to the table. And my idea was, believe it or not, what if I were to create a planetary mythology that would allow people to see themselves as one global species, and therefore design systems that worked for a planetary level civilization? That then meant I had to go off-planet. So I started off by trying to write a story about this group of people who were living on the Moon. And that group of people were charged with coming up with a way in which we could create the mindset shift that we needed to create a planetary consciousness that would allow us to design systems that could work for a planet, which saw them as one system, as opposed to be 187 countries with borders, and you know, all of that stuff. So that is how I kind of got interested in space. Writing the story, MOON RUNNINGS: The Life and Times of the First Jamaican on the Moon, set in the future, got me on the Moon. To write the story in a plausible way, I had to start researching what was happening in space.

Britt Duffy Adkins 07:26

Such an interesting way to sort of make your way into the space industry especially. But I think that also speaks to the power of storytelling, and the power of just starting to ideate on what would these different futures look like if we consider them from different perspectives and things like that? And you're absolutely right. I mean, there's so much complex thinking and systems engineering that goes into planning, whatever that future does look like on the Moon someday. And so of course, you've mentioned here, MOON RUNNINGS, which you have an upcoming presentation with the World Parliament of Religions on October 17. So, can you provide a little sneak preview as to what this presentation will cover?

Dr. Claire Nelson 08:06

But before I get to that, let me see, the presentation is, again, another set of my fantasy stories, but I then got into space. Because just before I did the story, I had an opportunity to be one of several futurists that were invited to the Pentagon, to the Air Force to talk about the future of the US Air Force. And they were very interested in me in particular, because I write stories and write plays. But I was also an engineer and sitting there thinking about the future of human security, I realized, wait a minute, alarm bells were going off, my head was doing that thing it does when you're having this momentous thought, this space thing is not just a fantasy! If we don't secure space, if we don't have wholesome, ethical, equitable use of space, this thing could go to hell in a handbasket very fast. And so that was also the main thing, that the security part, along with this 'how do we create peace and justice?' part that kind of came together. And I have the ability to kind of hold two opposing things in my head at the same time. So I focus on the positive thing of what I want to create, recognizing the risk on the other side. And so my first story was about idea then of creating the Moon as a space heritage site. That came to me because in one of my conferences I attended as a futurist, one of the people from one of the lunar organizations was there, and he was seeking opportunity to get the permission to mine the Moon. And I started thinking about the complicatedness of okay, when the Outer Space Treaty was written, there was no idea that the private sector will be doing this. Now we have private sector companies raising billions of dollars to go up and mine the Moon, but then who gives the authority to one country to make that determination, and who sets the standards by which this manner will be done? Because everything in engineering has a rulebook and a standard. Yes, it's all emerging technology and emerging science. But who was at the table when this conversation is happening? So then I got even more anxious to sort of create this group of people, which turned out to be my fictional

organization called the United Planetary Society, to assure the rights to space, the UPSTARTS. And so the UPSTARTS have taken up a huge hunk of my psychology, sociology, spirituality - I'm living with these people know, that exists all in my mind, but of which archetypes exist around the world. So by the time I got into doing the show, the first time I did the show was 2016, for the Emerge Festival of the Future at Arizona State. And their theme that year was sports on Mars. So I call cold and I made a pitch like, hey! I'm a storyteller, and I can talk about how we got to the Moon, they said, 'no, no, we have to go to Mars,' I said, 'well, but we have to be on the Moon first so we can practice, this sport, so we can then go to Mars. And that's how I had the opportunity to actually finish the story. And it was very exciting for the world to actually get an opportunity to develop my fantasy of becoming a future storyteller. And so I had to make the science real and the technology real. Yes, of course, I'm using foresight to project where the technology might go. I'm making it real. So it doesn't sound like speculative fiction, because I really want this story to be, like an implanted idea of how we can actually emerge or co-create the future that we're going into.

Britt Duffy Adkins 11:07

And as mentioned at the beginning, you wrote this wonderful book, which I just finished last night, called SMART Futures for a Flourishing World: A Paradigm Shift for Achieving Global Sustainability. And I strongly encourage everyone listening to purchase a copy of this book. It's such an intriguing vision for the future. I'm just wondering, what was your inspiration behind writing this book?

Dr. Claire Nelson 11:39

Well, I got a call from a publisher that runs an imprint at John Hunt Publishing called Changemaker Books. And he was doing a series called 'Resetting the Future' in response to COVID. And somebody had told him about me, somebody who is a futurist, who was running an organization called Communities of the Future, out of North Carolina. And so he would say, 'hey, I hear you have some interesting ideas. What are you working on in your dream world?' I said, 'well, in my dream world, what I'd really like to do, is that.' Well, 'you're thinking of making a book out of it?' And I'm like, 'eh, make a book? I don't know, I've never written a book!' But I think that one way to get your passion to be real in the world, is to have a book that expresses what it is you're trying to create. And after a moment of panic, I decided, yes, I would do this. And basically, I took the ideas, I've been mulling around, the things I've been doing in practice, to say, hey, we're [_____] entities out there. Normally, we're building smart cities. But the smart cities are focused on the things of the city. Smart cars, it's the thing of the car. A smartwatch is the thing of the watch. And it's like we've lost sense of the sight that we still want to have human futures. And so if they're planning for smart, everything except Earth, it's like we're being dumbed down, so that this machine life can take over. I have a very strong aversion to the idea. I have a strong aversion to the idea that somehow a universal basic income would make for loss of jobs, because AI and robots are doing these jobs. At the same time, you can't be a Luddite and turn back technology. So how do you co-create a world in which technology serves human futures, as opposed to just building technology because we're so excited? And then we forget that we still have to live, happy, joyous, flourishing lives. So SMART Futures is about us being smart. It's not just about having smart cars. Smart foods is about us as humans, creating smart futures, where humans design systems that support them. And so the SMART isn't really an acronym, for a way of thinking. It's an acronym for a thinking style, I think can be done by anybody from every background. And it's not meant for engineers. It's meant for whether you're a policy person, in education, a nurse, I don't really care. I'm saying if you

ask these five questions when you're designing a new program, and your policy and your product, a new process, you're more than likely to come up with a solution that works for the most amount of people.

Britt Duffy Adkins 14:37

What I love about this book, too, is the way that it starts off the way that it sort of frames everything that is to follow, is talking about how there is this 'great reset,' and this is particularly something that we feel like we're experiencing now as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. So, can you explain what you mean by the 'great reset'?

Dr. Claire Nelson 14:58

The 'great reset' is we imagine, we are now fully aware of Earth as a global species, most of us, because even those people who are offline before, those children in rural Africa, those children in rural Jamaica, some of them had to be thrust into this new world order, because they've had to get tablets in order to go to school. So of the 7.8 billion of us, I would say, a good probably 50-60% of us are now online in a different way, and even if you don't have the most high profile smartphone, we have at least a cell phone that is doing something. How can we go forward now, knowing what we know about viruses? Knowing what we know about climate change? We might be a water-starved globe, with the same idea that we had before COVID. We have to reset the future. So this moment, I'm kind of glad that this kind of dragged on for longer, because one year would not have been enough for us to sort of really understand the critical place we are in human history, we can self destruct several times over. And on my let's say, biblical Apocalypse side, I now almost believe, yes, actually, Revelations actually was correct. But it is not God who will send this thing to us. It is we who have done it to ourselves! Because, if we think about Chariots of Fire, think about a satellite, or a shuttle falling out of the sky. What does that look like? It looks like Chariots of Fire. Chariot is something that carries people, falling from the sky. So it's highly likely to think that if we had a solar flare, for example, and we didn't design for things that could withstand a solar flare, we could have chariots of fire fall from the sky and the Earth and crashing and destroying lots of people. That's not the God doing it. It's we did it. So I sort of have melded this concept of, first of all, we have a mythology that is the substrate of everything we do, whether you're an atheist or not, you have a mythology that is the subject of everything you do. It is human, it is part of who we are. We are aware that we think we're a homo sapien sapien. But as the writer of homo deus says, we're actually approaching god-like qualities. However, we don't have benign god-like qualities. We're more like those destructive, gods [_____] and Chaos and all these people. So I think the reset is about us recognizing number one, there should be at least, I would go to 11% of us, who are planetary conscious beings, who are planetary systems thinkers, who are able to make the leap of imagination to have a conversation with a nuclear engineer that you don't agree with, with an atheist that you don't agree with and still find common ground with the recognition that we are one great flock of either the blessed, or one big flock of the condemned. So I believe if I can find my tribe of the rest of us, 11% of people in the world who are ready to make that shift, then hopefully, my book will give these people the same five questions to ask. And my very aspirational dream is that by doing that, we will prevent the worst that could happen, and live what I call a normative future, as in it's a normatopia. It's not going to be, we'll all be singing in harmony, and that there will never be worries again. I don't think in our lifetime, we're going to see that. But I would like to think that we could prevent ourselves from going down the Area 64 or the matrix version of the future, are all the other very

dystopian views of the future. Do we really want to become a species that becomes embedded in a matrix of make believe? Do we to be programmed to believing we have gone to the beach in Jamaica or Bali, when in fact, we've been stuck in a chair? In our 6x4 hovel? I don't think so. Is this the future we want to leave to our great grandchildren? No. So we must reset ourselves now. We must take ourselves seriously. We must try to find enough of us to find common ground. Okay. The world agreed in principle that we have these global goals, but we're kind of limping along and we can't make it because we don't want to make it because we don't want to change. But I think if we have any conscience and consciousness at all, you would want to leave your little corner of the world better than you found it. So if you just focus on your little corner and that corner could be 'I am an advocate for prison reform. I'm an advocate for health for all. I'm an advocate for water, I'm an advocate for education' I don't care what you advocate for. That little corner of the world, that tribe to which you belong can do a job. Local, local, local, local, local, local. Until, all of a sudden, 1 million local seeds of hope becomes a global force. And that's the aspiration of the book, that it doesn't require a government to tell you or your supervisor to tell you, no, if you feel like this is wrong, something's not working here, you will go out and make it happen. And so the book is not about trying to have an accredited new seminar to teach XYZ. This is a thought form. I'm taking this thought form and making it real. And I believe it's possible because I know that I have done it.

Britt Duffy Adkins 20:42

What a beautiful sentiment too around how every person can have that paradigm shifting moment, every person can take that opportunity, as you said, to improve their little corner of the world. And if enough people do that, then we can really see meaningful and lasting change. So I think that's a wonderful way of framing the book. Much of your book also covers the current climate crisis, and discusses the ecological deficit that humans have been in as of 2019. So can you explain what this means and also what we have to do as humans to course correct for the future, from an ecological perspective?

Dr. Claire Nelson 21:22

I tried to put, I would call it, the blame on our current conundrum, on the fact that we have a belief at the core of all our economic systems that in Jamaica we would say, Massa God fish can done, right? So, God is infinite, and therefore the resource will be there forever. And in fact, we now know it is not so. There's a current capacity. We have nine planetary boundaries of which climate change is one. We have the aerosol capacity, there's a water capacity, if the groundwater reserves cannot be replenished, because there's no rain, we have a water capacity. So I start with this concept of recognizing that the Judeo Christian ethic and understanding of the mythology of creation, which still drives a lot of our economic rules, cannot go forward into the future. We cannot talk about preparing to have India's 100 million middle class, or China's 100 million class or Africa's 100 million plus operating at the same rate of consumption of America's middle class and Europe's even bigger class. But we've all grown up on a diet of the American version of the future, because most of the film that most of the world sees are American films. So we now have to shift our desires and our wants which have been sold. Okay, and I'm guilty of this, I'm not pointing fingers, right, you will believe that I could be able to be happy in a house that's 2000, maybe 500 square feet, that's probably the size of my house. But I have so much art, I'm thinking, Okay, it's either I stopped buying art, or I find someone to give it to, a museum, or I have to change the way I think about how I consume art. I have to stop wanting to buy art, because

there's nowhere to store it. So I'm working on myself, working on myself, I'm going to work at myself, and I'm beginning to diminish that need, I feel I should consume. I can look at it. I can support artists or do something else. But I don't have to buy it and own it and walk by it everyday to feel that it's something. But artists have to live. So how are they going to live if we're no longer buying art because all of us have smaller homes? So even that becomes a question. So then, can we think of new ways in which these artists can share their work with the world that we can move away from this free consumption of free download or even pay \$1. I'm also guilty of that. I don't want to pay though, because I'm free, I have to talk to myself, Lord it's only \$1. You're not gonna stop. These are things that we have to do for ourself, to transform ourselves to being the change, we want to see. How do I as let's say, an evangelist for the shift, myself begin to look at my own, quote unquote, sins as they are, and committing things that contribute to waste, and begin to change my own behavior. It's a journey have to make, but the thing is, for the children who are now going through high school, or first year of college, especially, they're still like becoming who they will be in the world, in the short term. In other words, they're going to be in leadership in four to eight years, when we still have to hope that we can turn this ship around. When we still have the hope that we can save. Greta and her gang did a very good job. They're being kind of silenced because they can't go out on the street. But I hope to god they are out there plotting something that we don't know about because they can't stop now. We need them to be our conscience to drag us forward. And how do we as the elders quote unquote find common ground with these young people and say, 'hey, by the way, 20 years ago, I tried this and it didn't work. Perhaps you can work differently because you know have Instagram or Tiktok, or whatever that can get the word out faster. This is how we have to work, intergenerationally. One, we have to work transnationally, transdisciplinary. And it requires all of us making a shift or some of us anyway, because [_____] which I talked about in the book, their theory of change, the study they did, it says it takes 10% of people believing a particular paradigm, which they said is what happened when we had the environmental movement in the 70s, and then Earth Day and all that stuff, then the gender movement, Beijing and all that stuff. There's the LGBTQ movement. So they're saying that all these movements required 10% of people seeing it as a possible and plausible norm for the world to shift. So we really only need 10% of us to believe that SMART Futures thinking is possible to be applied to the climate issue, or to the water issue, or to the carbon reduction air issue. But education for all issue. There's all different issues that make up the Sustainable Development Goals, which are not in fact, 17 distinct goals. They're actually 17, intertwined system of systems challenges that we have to work on.

Britt Duffy Adkins 26:12

Well, and I think when you put it in that context, that was definitely something that struck me in the book as well was this 10% number. It actually doesn't feel that insurmountable. Like that feels like an achievable goal. It actually made me feel very encouraged and hopeful for the future that we really just have to reach, you know, not necessarily every single person on this planet, but just enough to start to have that really big shift in movement towards this smart futures thinking. So that was certainly something that made me really hopeful.

Dr. Claire Nelson 26:44

Now, there's also number called Dunbar's number. According to Dunbar theory, when you get over 150 people in your circle, it becomes almost meaningless, you can't do much more than that, it's no longer gonna be a tight fit. So I've been thinking, okay, if I have 150, people who become let's call it, the

people who really buy into this theory, and they each have 150 people that they're running, and then you do it that way, it's actually highly plausible that this could really in the next 10 years reach the a number of the 10-15-30-100 million people that I'm thinking this idea can get to, so that they can take it and work with it, they can. Because at the end of the day, if they have signed on emotionally, to be, 'I really want to work on waste. It really bothers me this waste problem, it really bothers me plastic in the sea. It bothers me that people don't have food.' Whatever bothers you, these five questions can help you when you're working together. And so that design the solutions in a better way. So more people are impacted by your decision making.

Britt Duffy Adkins 27:46

And another thing, sort of on the same line of thinking, your book also discusses meaningful and moral metrics, as you put it, for measuring effectiveness of programs and policies. So what would those kinds of metrics specifically look like?

Dr. Claire Nelson 28:03

As an engineer working in international development, I have been stymied by the inequality question, for example, is the GDP really working for us? No. Are we happier, because we have a gross national product that is big? So all these dead ideas of measures that value consumption and production, but don't put any value under waste that we're doing to meet the consumption are problematic. So our books for accounting for a company's success doesn't factor in how much damage that company has caused to the environment. So thank God ESGs, environmental and social safeguards, and I environmental social goals and are part of many companies' at least statements. The question is, if this company is in Community Y, do enough people in Community Y understand the ESG construct enough to hold the company accountable to what they say on their books? So you have this greenwashing. So first, we must have metrics that are more meaningful. We need to do away with, or at least don't have the GDP be the God of all creation, that every country must bow down and worship and serve. I have a problem with that. We need to have a God that is called wellbeing metric. Wellbeing metric is what California say, 'you know what, for us to feel like we're more or less able to live comfortable lives, we really want health care for all, for us that would be a value we care about. We really want peace of education. In America, this idea of freedom seems to be insurmountable. But are you really free if you alone are free? No, you're not. Because you're gonna have hordes of savage hungry people as a constant reminder that the world can be very ugly.

Britt Duffy Adkins 29:53

Obviously this is a global issue, but especially within the US it's very disturbing that we can be in some ways such a quote unquote developed or advanced country and yet, we still have such a problem providing quality housing for the unhoused population in our country. I think that's really devastating. For me, I think that's one of the constant conflicts of when we have these conversations about the future and what it looks like. And still feeling like in the present, we're woefully behind in terms of where we could be, if only we decided to, much to what your book points out, shift our way of thinking about how we solve these problems, I really hope for in the future, we all start to apply more of that framework, so that we can really start to measure success differently. So that it doesn't mean success for a few but success for all.

Dr. Claire Nelson 30:46

And that's by the A in SMART. So the S is sustainable systems, the M is meaningful metrics. And the A's about agency. We have all this idea of freedom and everybody's actualized an American way of thinking. I really think America is a great, let's say for the last three centuries, certainly has been a great model. That's why everybody wants to come to America. It's a model of humanity's aspiration of itself. It's kind of frightening the fear people have of the term democratic socialism, because it's been so heavily, let's say afflicted by the idea of communism, which it's not, I understand that people always be one choice. But if the choice is to be comfortable with more, where you feel more safe, because there's this crime and violence, I wouldn't give up one of the bedrooms in my home, for example, to have peace of mind that one less person is homeless, so what are you willing to give up to have more peace of mind? So the A, in the design process focuses on the agents in the system. Therefore, if you're going to be removing 3000 jobs from the marketplace, because you're putting in robots and AI, we must think about where those 2000 people are going to go? Where do we need people? Okay, we need more teachers, because they've been complaining, the duration is not good. We need more caregivers, because we're complaining that people locked up in home with nobody to talk to, we need more environmental green people because the forests need to be conserved and we need to be able to plant trees, things that can be done to give a person's spirit and soul a sense of purpose. Because when we don't have a sense of a positive purpose, humans become depressed and destructive. I think having a livable wage, and have that be the law, that there has to be minimum wage must be livable wage, it must provide what I call that basket of goods that makes it so that nobody in America should be going to bed hungry, for example, or malnourished. That is madness. And do we really want to put in place a robot order where humans are dispensable? Is that what we really want as a species? I don't know. I won't be around to see that partly because that may have happened to the year 2100. But my point is, the children who were born to be who were supposed to have gone into elementary school this year, or last year, so far have gone to school online. Therefore, their socialising skills are very different. Therefore their idea of a friend will be definitely an online friend. Therefore, we don't even know if they don't have cousins that they grew up with, or neighborhood kids they're playing with. It means that they may have completely different levels of empathy. How are we going to educate the teachers of today and tomorrow to teach empathy, if the children are going to be locked at home, you're an only child with an adult parent, you don't have anybody else in your building that's your age group. How are you teaching the child empathy for their own peers? So this group of people who make up this, the tribe that I know in this global consciousness space, have to do better work among ourselves. First of all, we have to become more transdisciplinary is not that we have to become experts on other people's things. And this happened to me when I was working on the race agenda. I was the only person working on the Black Agenda. And I went, okay, everybody hates me. All right. I'm the only Black person in the room, the women are working on woman agenda, indigenous person, working on their agenda, but at the same time, I am Black and female. So I'm not taken seriously. At that point in my maturing process, I've got to find a way to reach over to my white counterparts who think I'm a problem. Have them not to see me as a problem. And moreover, have them to take up my issue as their issue. So if I'm not in a room, they will think 'if Claire was here, she would say this, so I'm gonna say it for her.' And I was able to find emotional maturity to make that shift, to let go of the agenda, to now be able to talk to those white allies who are comfortable enough, ask me the question without them thinking I was gonna jump down their throat, if I get angry, don't respond from that place. You answer the questions because at the end of the day, you have to have at least one or two or three people who will take up your cause if you're not in a

room. And that's why I got into the whole environmental thing. I was not originally environmentalists, I'm now a big term environmentalist, because I sort of think about, wait a minute, I have water, I have food. But what about my cousin who is poor in Jamaica? All of a sudden, I started worrying about them. Now, I go and speak on behalf, they're not in the room. But when we design these things, when we sit down to design, a policy change policy, water management in California, which is a water-starved state, then we must have as many agents as possible in the room. The users of water, who are both homeowners at different price points of the structure, the companies, the small businesses, the bigger companies, the engineers, the lawyers, all the people who make up the water ecosystem. So we're part of the conversation. So you can get the best design possible for the long run good of the entire state of California.

Britt Duffy Adkins 36:08

You bring up so many interesting points here, I especially want to kind of emphasize some of the points that you made too around the fact that like often throughout your career, you were the only Black woman in the room. And so as we sort of think about how we're shaping the future, how problematic is it that much of our decision making still to this day, about the future predominantly reflects the views of those who have already experienced great privilege and being able to shape the current world? So how do we start to shift that so we're not just getting the same status quo outcomes?

Dr. Claire Nelson 36:45

Because of people like you really seeing me. That's South African concept of Sawubona, you see me. And so when we met a couple of months ago, if at all, we might have something in common, not what we had that's different about us, but what do we have in common? And so that's the first place that we have to start. That's why I had to write the book, because it's no good of me complaining, I would say things like, I'm tired of hearing from XYZ, every time they're invited to these talks, and nobody like me is on the stage, well they don't know that I exist. Now, nobody can now say that I don't exist, because I could have written a book that says, 'hey, I have a vision of the world. It's informed by my birthplace as being a Jamaican from a small island, who came to America at a very young enough age that I went to most of college here, I went to one year in Jamaica before I came here, and then worked in a global space from day one and all through my life. So my perspective on the world is very global. It's not shaped by an American worldview, because I was fully formed politically before I got here. But my point is, my worldview represents a large percentage of the world that is not heard or seen at these tables of change. And so I believe that I have number one, first of all, as the publishers have been, what is your authority? I say my authority is my life experience, I have been at the forefront of change making, I was able to, in the institution I worked in, I would say, compel them because I didn't have titular authority. But by being who I was, and refusing to change, I kind of forced certain agendas, such as, for example, when I was upset that the whole structure of blending the World Bank, lends a big loan, IDB, all these big banks, and then the consultants who are undergoing these small countries get nothing or they get crumbs, and then they don't even learn how to do it, but they don't qualify. They don't do XYZ. But you have not written into the proposal or the procurement process, an opportunity for them to learn. So I harangued and harassed until the IDB did its first ever conference on how do we improve procurement opportunities for local consulting firms? That was not that they wanted to do that. But I was able to harass and harangue and find the right potential allies who saw a point there until I finally got the Minister to act because if I had said it, I'd run out of the room as usual. I'm used to being run out of the

room. And normally, being human, I would flounce out in a rage, spend a couple minutes crying, maybe a couple hours sometimes, then I would wipe my face and say, 'okay, well, let's see about that. You will not silence me, because I happen to have been born in the 70s when we were very much ripe for that sort of condition. And I had a Prime Minister who said, 'we are going to be leaders of a new world order and Jamaica. Poor Jamaica, a little bit of Jamaica, a little bit of Jamaica, right? And then a high school principal, 'I tell you girls are gonna be leaders of the new Jamaica.' So you couldn't tell me at 18-19-20 that I wasn't something already because I just knew that I had been told my whole life. So if any of you wonder why Jamaicans seem to be everywhere doing so much. We have a national pledge that actually says, when we're children growing up in Jamaica in the 60s and 70s, that national pledge says that we Jamaicans are going to become part of the brotherhood of mankind and serve the whole human race. So we grew up believing that we are larger than our size on a world map. And that's why we operate at that level of confidence. We have the fastest man and fastest woman, song of the century, for us it's like, okay, yeah, we're supposed to do that.

Britt Duffy Adkins 40:28

That's so interesting that from such an early age that that was really instilled, and then obviously, how that has very deeply impacted you in your life. I think that's really amazing. You know, one thing that I want to also kind of shift to here a little bit is also, there are a lot of people who don't feel like they engage with the space industry at all. And so what do you say to people who remain unconvinced that we should be pursuing space exploration and technology as a priority when the world around us does seem to be falling apart? How do we engage those people in the space industry?

Dr. Claire Nelson 41:05

I think it's important for people to recognize that space exploration has provided a lot the technology that we use today. Number two, we're on a laptop today, we're able to communicate today, because we're really utilizing space. However, we have a different level of engagement in space. We're talking about mining the Moon, we're talking about settlements on the Moon and settlements on Mars. And the question we must ask ourselves, then, is going to happen whether we engage or not, because now, even if countries pull out, billionaires have the funds to do it on their own and the technology. Do we want as a regular people who vote to have a hands off approach, and allow what I call billionaire buccaneers to operate in space as if it were the wild wild west? I think not. And therefore, it's very important that we find an entry point, whether it's the Earth scientists, but you will be our social scientists, whether you be a minister or whatever, have conversations on what does it really mean to be a spacefaring nation? Are we going to set up for a society in space where we now have wars on the Moon? Or laser wars in space? Is this really the future we want to create as a species? Or do we want to be able to practice peace? So my story is about creating the Moon as a space heritage site, and our village is called Pax Lunarville, and the village of our people and for our people. So my little village on the Moon in my story is one that was funded by us and for us. People around the world that said, 'hey, I'm going to put up \$100, \$10 million, but because there were a billion or 7 billion people in the world, right, so if even 100 million was decided we can do this, we can raise a billion dollars.

Britt Duffy Adkins 42:58

That's really interesting to think about, as well as that an entire community could start out as being almost crowdfunded, in a way, which is really interesting to think about. And pivoting a bit here, but

Celestial Citizen is all about the idea that humans can become not only better stewards of Earth, but also better interplanetary citizens. So, in your opinion, what is one important way in which people can work toward becoming Celestial Citizens today?

Dr. Claire Nelson 43:24

First of all, Celestial Citizens recognize that the Earth is a part of the solar system. So we're not giving up our Earth citizenship to become Celestial Citizens. Celestial tends to some of us who come out of a Judeo Christian tradition, to also connote a sense of angelic, heavenly, good beings, not negative beings. So it also connects this idea of us as being predisposed to lives that see abundance as a way forward, lives that see ourselves as doing good unto others, which is at the core of all religions. And so for me, Celestial Citizens offers us an opportunity to see yourself as being larger than just the nation state into which we're born. So I'm not just a Jamaican, and not just an American, because I'm both of these things. I'm also Caribbean. So I'm three things. I'm also African. So I'm four things. Now I'm also planetary, so I'm five things. Now I can go even higher and say, 'you know what, in order that enough of us, the same 11% of us have planetary consciousness, a few of us have to start saying we are Celestial Citizens,' because we're not just Earth citizens and planetary citizens. We're also willing to see ourselves as citizens in the sense of, we have a responsibility for care for the cosmos. And so my foray into speaking at the World Parliament of Religion is about having a, beginning a conversation of the responsibility of the world religions to have a conversation about not just Earth stewardship, but also celestial stewardship. We need a new covenant for the Cosmos that recognizes not the Judeo Christian perspective of 'we will have dominion over their will if we can mine and use and move and terraform Mars and drop a nuclear bomb to move the Earth. No, no, no, no, no, no! We belong to the Cosmos, it does not belong to us. We're caretakers for the time that we're alive. And we should caretake in such a way as to leave something good for generations that will come after us. That is what to me being a Celestial Citizen is.

Britt Duffy Adkins 45:43

Wow. Such really poetic sentiments around the future. And I couldn't agree more, I think we do need to shift from that sort of belief of dominion over or entitlement to or things like that. Instead, really seeing ourselves as interconnected. And again, to restate your point as belonging to the cosmos. I think that that's really key for shifting towards a more hopeful future. All right, we're going to try something a little different now. This is our lightning round of quick questions. So you can feel free to give a brief explanation or no explanation at all. Are you ready?

Dr. Claire Nelson 46:17

Yes, I am.

Britt Duffy Adkins 46:18

Okay. Would you rather live on the Moon or Mars?

Dr. Claire Nelson 46:22

Nowhere. But I guess I should say Moon.

Britt Duffy Adkins 46:26

Okay. All right. So then on the Moon, your favorite space hobby would be what?

Dr. Claire Nelson 46:32

Growing herbs in my rock garden.

Britt Duffy Adkins 46:36

And what is your favorite space TV show or movie?

Dr. Claire Nelson 46:40

Well, actually, on the Moon, I run a show. And it's 'Live from Lunarville,' and it's beamed down to Earth.

Britt Duffy Adkins 46:46

Oh, nice. Okay. So a futuristic answer there. I love it. Okay, Star Wars, or Star Trek?

Dr. Claire Nelson 46:53

Star Trek.

Britt Duffy Adkins 46:54

Favorite character on Star Trek?

Dr. Claire Nelson 46:56

Captain Jean Luc Picard.

Britt Duffy Adkins 46:58

Nice. Something most people don't know about you?

Dr. Claire Nelson 47:01

I like to play the congo drums.

Britt Duffy Adkins 47:04

Oh, well, that's fun! How long have you been playing?

Dr. Claire Nelson 47:07

Uh, well, I have about six drums in my house. So every now and again, I go and bang. And then my husband and we sometimes go to drum circles.

Britt Duffy Adkins 47:16

Oh, nice. Very cool. Alright, advice that you would give to young women interested in pursuing a career in the space industry?

Dr. Claire Nelson 47:25

Persist.

Britt Duffy Adkins 47:27

I love it. I love it. You just got to keep trying. Okay, thing you're looking forward to most in 2022?

Dr. Claire Nelson 47:34

Being able to return to live events.

Britt Duffy Adkins 47:38

Yeah I think we're all, we're all looking forward to that for sure. Okay, permanently grounded on Earth, or a one way trip to Mars?

Dr. Claire Nelson 47:46

Permanently grounded on Earth.

Britt Duffy Adkins 47:47

And let's say that you have the opportunity to go back in time and change one major event that occurred in the history of the space industry. What's the event? And what do you change?

Dr. Claire Nelson 47:58

I would change the shuttle crash.

Britt Duffy Adkins 48:01

I wish we could do that. Yeah, that's a good answer. Alright, you get the opportunity to live off-Earth temporarily. Would you rather live underground, on the surface, or in an orbiting space station?

Dr. Claire Nelson 48:14

I think probably in the lava tube. I'm afraid of flying. So quite fun. I don't like orbiting, and don't land nowhere. I want to land somewhere, solid ground.

Britt Duffy Adkins 48:24

Yeah, exactly. Okay, and you're sent on a long duration mission. What's more important, choosing your crew, choosing the food or choosing the destination?

Dr. Claire Nelson 48:34

Choosing the crew.

Britt Duffy Adkins 48:36

And finish the sentence: in 50 years, we'll all be... what?

Dr. Claire Nelson 48:41

In 50 years, we'll all be better off, because we will have adopted a SMART Futures framework.

Britt Duffy Adkins 48:50

I love it. Great way to end. Well, unfortunately, I think that's all the time that we have for today. Thank you, Claire for joining Celestial Citizen Podcast. This was such an interesting discussion about global sustainability, and how we begin the important work of resetting our future as we look to thrive not only

on this planet, but in space as well. And of course, don't forget to pick up a copy of Claire's new book, SMART Futures for a Flourishing World, which we'll provide a link to in the episode summary and also on our website. So thanks again, Claire, for taking the time to speak with me today.

Dr. Claire Nelson 49:23

Thank you for having me. And as I like to close, Ubuntu!

Britt Duffy Adkins 49:27

Oh, nice. I remember that from the book as well. Can you explain what that means for the listeners?

Dr. Claire Nelson 49:34

It's South African Zulu philosophy that says I am because you are. We are in each other. So I see you you see me and together we go forward.

Britt Duffy Adkins 49:44

And again. You can read more about that as well in the book, so definitely check it out. And to our community of Celestial Citizens. Thank you so much for tuning in to this episode of Celestial Citizen Podcast. This episode would not be possible without the terrific work of this show's editor, Victor Figueroa. Thank you, Victor. Also a very special thank you to Graham Clark who created the amazing intro and outro music for this podcast. If you're interested in learning more about Celestial Citizen, and I hope you are, then check out CelestialCitizen.com. You can also follow along on Twitter @celestialcitzn and Instagram @thecelestialcitizen. And be sure to sign up for the Celestial Citizen newsletter on Substack. You can find the links to all of these on our website. If you're interested in supporting the mission of Celestial Citizen, consider making a donation on our website. Or you can always reach out to learn more about opportunities to sponsor this podcast. A major component of Celestial Citizen is feedback and public participation. We want to hear what you have to say so let us know what you think about humanity's future in space and what it should look like. Please share your voice and your unique perspective on social media. Or if you prefer, all of the Celestial Citizen articles can also be found on Medium. So, drop a comment and join the conversation. If you love today's podcast, please have your friends and family subscribe on whatever device or platform you listen to podcasts on and leave a stellar review so others can get hooked as well. That's all for now Celestial Citizens. I'll be back next week for another episode. In the meantime, don't be afraid to take up space.