

## **Margaret Groff Interview Transcript**

### **BRUNA**

My name is Bruna Hoffmann from Brazil. On behalf of GWNEN, the Global Women's Network for the Energy Transition, I am presenting the next portrait of the Energy Transition Role Models series. This initiative is supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy.

Today's interview is with Margaret Groff. Margaret Groff holds a degree in Civil Engineering from the Federal University of Paraná and was the CFO of Binational Itaipu. Currently, she acts as speaker, advisor and consultant of different third sector entities in the areas of diversity, innovation and management. In addition, she is a founding advisor of the MEX (Executive Women) group of Paraná, a leader of the Women of Brazil group of Paraná, and the coordinator of the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) Brazil Award - Companies Empowering Women, having received the award for "The Most Influential Women in Brazil 2007" in Economics and Finance, as well as the Honorable Award "Oslo Business for Peace Award 2013"

Welcome Margaret! Thank you for giving us this interview today.

So having worked for years at the largest hydroelectric plant in the world and having developed important projects both in the area of technology and in the social area, for example, the smart mobility project and the gender equality initiative that you implemented at Itaipu, I would like to know...

### **Question 1 - What has your journey to sustainable energy entrepreneurship/business looked like?**

#### **MARGARET**

It's a pleasure to be here talking to you! I'm a civil engineer, but I've spent almost all of my professional career at Itaipu Binational. I stayed there for almost 30 years. That's a lot of time!

I initially dedicated myself to the technical area, always focused on the areas of operation, maintenance, structuring, planning and services contracts. Later on, I moved to the area of finance. I also identified with this area, because I have always been an engineer who really liked statistics. Then, I grew in this area, and I had the opportunity to work in the pension fund where I was later deputy superintendent director, and then I started to specialize in the financial area, mainly at capital markets. In 2006, I was invited to be the CFO of Itaipu Binacional, being the first woman ... Not the first woman, the first employee on the staff who was invited to be a director and I was appointed by the President of Republic at the time.

And it was very interesting that as a CFO, besides acting in the financial area, which at Itaipu involves the logistics, accounting, finance, supplies, inspection and equipment's transportation ... So it's a very large area, but I really like to work in team, and I think that the management solution and the success of management are the teams, when you have good teams and can delegate. I think this is an important point of my characteristic as a manager.

So I had the opportunity at Itaipu, which is a very innovative company, a company that was innovative since its beginning, since its conception. Because everything there was so big, everything there was so different, and we also followed the care that Itaipu has with its reservoir and the care with people. And there is also the technology development, trying to get ahead! Because if we generate energy, a renewable energy such as Itaipu has, considered a renewable resource for its quality and for so much efforts made to take care of its reservoir, the water has quality. And we started to deploy in 2006, an electric mobility project when I started to investigate the issue on how

we could keep up with and bring this technology to Brazil and Paraguay because we are binational, and I got involved.

From 2009, I took over the executive coordination of this project, and in parallel, we had already, since 2003, a gender equality program that when I took over the financial board in 2006, I started to coordinate too. Then I started to gather some of these technology subjects because I think women have everything to do with this new vision of technology, with these new applications! It's all about women, with the way women act and with women's views. So women will help to complement and they will also be protagonists of this technological transformation that the world needs and that Brazil needs too. Then I got involved, and I also involved the gender issue so we could arouse the women engineers and all the women, not just the engineers but all the women who worked at Itaipu. And also the ones who were in the technological park of Itaipu, which were in the community near to us. So we could insert them into new technologies.

This is more or less what happened over the time I was there as a director, which was a great opportunity to be able to introduce this new way, this new look at the management of Itaipu.

**BRUNA**

**Question 2 - What is it that motivates you in your day-to-day work?**

**MARGARET**

What motivates me is to DO! I really like challenges, I think I'm moved by challenges. I am a person who can't stop, I'm always looking for something. Today I am retired and I keep working a lot, and what really motivates me are the challenges to make things better. Help people, help groups! And always with a lot of determination with a lot of love, involving teams and being able to teach.

I learned so much throughout my life, I learned a lot... Because we graduate from university and we must always keep learning. And people learn by studying, doing their postgraduate, their MBA's, then doctorate, which is not my case. I attained my postgraduate, but I've always lived too much of the day by day; and we learn with people, we learn by doing. I think that, for example, working at Itaipu was a great privilege in my life. I was lucky to get in there.

It was not only luck!

It was because I also sought to be there, and to develop myself in my career. But it was very important for me to be able to do many things and to learn a lot!

So everything I've learned until today, I keep working because I want to share this with other people and other groups. And I always work to share knowledge because I think this is the way of success for any professional.

**BRUNA**

Yes, for sure!

**Question 3 - What has been your severest hurdle and your proudest success?**

**MARGARET**

In my professional career the question of knowledge was always very strong with me because I was always determined to do something and planned it. I always planned the following steps because I think that planning must be the basis of everything in our lives. And even our personal lives! Of course, we don't need to think that planning has to be what is written, that plan that is very detailed,

that's not it! We have to make our plans, what are we going to do? We're coming to the end of 2019, we are going to a new decade! What does each of us want for this new decade?

So this has always been a very strong thing for me. To take a new step, I always had to study. So technical knowledge has never been a problem or an obstacle for me.

In my personal life, I have always lead very well! But yes, I had another obstacle, because my career was developed at an energy company, a very masculine company, and I also studied engineering. At my home, it also had more men than women, but always with a very strong force, that came mainly from my mother, to conquer, to do and to not be intimidated, to superate the obstacles.

At Itaipu, however, I had a hard time trying to rise in my career. I was always way ahead, always looking for the opportunity. I managed to become a manager, but It was very difficult for me to ascend to a higher position. And I had a dream. I wanted to be a director! Since I arrived, I thought "One day, I'm going to be a director at this company!" And I had this obstacle because I was a woman! How many moments could I have been a superintendent, for example? And it wasn't because I was passed over by an engineer, a man. And as I always say, it's not men's fault and it's not our fault too. It happens because the society is like that, it has always given more space to men, because a man is already there and it seems that he already knows, and we have to prove 10 million times that we know something.

But this is changing, thanks to God! It is a strong fight!

So it was an obstacle for me, yes, many times! And 2003, was my first big opportunity when I was appointed as superintendent director of the Social Security at the Itaipu Foundation and it was a unique opportunity, I went to get it, I went after it! I was ready, graduated and I went after it! I said "I want to do this!". And I made my resume available. So that was when I managed to get there for the first time ... It was the time I won. I had tried other times, and it didn't work out, but this one I won!

And then, consequently, came the invitation to take over the board of directors of Itaipu in 2006. So I would say my biggest obstacle was really that issue, the fact of being a woman and the difficulty of career advancement, and it was not because of knowledge and neither by competence. It was because I was a woman!

And a great achievement for me was becoming Itaipu's CFO, and I have managed to do a good job ... A good job not only in the technical area and in the financial area, I have succeeded to be able to work with renewable energies, with electric mobility, with gender equality, with finance and with the project of financial education in some needy communities.

All this was very important to give me knowledge, a national and an international network, and even prizes, mainly, the Oslo Business for Peace Award, of which I'm the only Brazilian that has received this award. It is a prize that is awarded by a committee made up of Nobel prize winners of Peace and Economy. So that's one thing that I'm really proud of! Thus, I try to keep working, doing it myself on account of deserving this recognition.

**BRUNA**

**Question 4 – Based on your experiences what are the opportunities and challenges for women wanting to make a difference as sustainable energy entrepreneurs/executives?**

**MARGARET**

Well, it's known that renewable energy is already a great opportunity that we have today for all generations, for boys and for girls. Because here we are making a transformation, even in the way we live, in the way we use energy, and also in our society.

Now, renewable energy brings an opportunity for urban mobility. Because I think the application of renewable energy to urban mobility gives women the opportunity to perform more! Even by the way they work, by the way they look at the projects and how they act. So I think that together, diversity will always bring more quality in the application.

Now, as a challenge for women, I think there are a lot of issues: one is the opportunity for both companies and the public sector. I see that we still need many public policies to give more opportunity to women. Because society is still quite sexist, and what I always say: women have to prove more than once that they are very competent for them to hold leadership positions. And sometimes, a man, just because he is a man, he already has this opportunity. So this is a challenge.

And another very big challenge I see for women, which was there for past generations, and that is still there today, but it will be the future, is motherhood! Because motherhood is a matter inherent to women, we will continue to be mothers... And it is very important for us to have this role. And this is the challenge!

I think both the public and the private sectors have to think about how to provide better conditions for women to keep working, to keep leading projects and companies. Because it is possible to do it and there are many companies today in Brazil, who are doing important actions in order to win this stage of motherhood and being able to empower women to work. That is possible!

This is very possible! But the challenge is great for both Brazil and the world. So I think that we need a little bit of attention.

**BRUNA**

**QUESTION 5 - And do you have a recipe for combining your career with family life/kids?**

Well, it was always a dream for me, I always wanted to have my children and I planned to have them! I had them later, when my career was stabilized. That was an important point. I also had to take time to be a mother, to have my children.

But one important thing was to structure myself at home. I think this is very important because you have to give emotional stability inside your home for you to have emotional stability at work. And I think that was the most important point!

In my case, as in Brazil, it's easier for you to have a babysitter, I had babysitters throughout my kids growth, until they become teenagers. But I invested in babysitting, I gave qualification, I gave training and appreciation! Because we are all professionals, and the person who raises our children is a very important professional to provide stability for us to work. We have to give stability to those who will be taking care of our children to make us able to work.

So I think it's a balance! Balance at home for you to have balance at work.

**BRUNA**

**Question 6 - Which governmental framework conditions are needed to support women as entrepreneurs or executives?**

Public policies are important, we have to give opportunities. As I said, this issue of motherhood is a point ... It's a very important point, more attention has to be paid on it.

Sometimes women don't want to talk about it, sometimes men don't want to talk about it, but it's a important issue. But one of the issues I see is that women need to be more involved in politics? Women have to get closer. Politics is a woman thing!

Women have to be participating in how we are going to do things. We need to do public policy, for example, the application of renewable energies for electric mobility, for sustainable mobility. Anyway, how are there no women discussing this issue, if mobility is such an important issue for women too?

We live in large centers, and today we are more than 50% of the population. We are mothers and we are educators of the other 50% too! So, there is a great need for women to be ahead of politics. We need to give them more opportunities to participate in public life.

**BRUNA**

**Question 7 - What message would you give to the next generation of women aspiring to become entrepreneurs/executives in the sustainable energy?**

First, I would like to say that, and I already said, but I repeat that the renewable energies are a great opportunity; the innovation is a great opportunity. We, women, because of our characteristics, have a lot of capacity to participate in this transformation! And the good scenario is 50/50, all of us working together, women and men, for a better world, for more justice and for more sustainability on the planet.

And the message I leave is: having technical knowledge is very important, being well informed, studying and all that is very important! But most importantly, besides that, is determination and to be ahead of the opportunities.

Sometimes women retract themselves a lot, and I think you have to go looking for opportunities. If you are looking for opportunities, if you have competence, you will surely shine, you will do your best. And always share your knowledge. It's something that I find very important, share knowledge, and work as a team. I think if each one, each person contributes a little bit, we can do better.

So teamwork is a very important thing. And the message I leave is this one! There is always a challenge. Search for what you want to do, plan and pursue your dreams. But if you find an obstacle, don't give up on your dream! Look for a new way... As water seeks its ways in the river, you may also seek a new path.

But never give up on your dream, go ahead!

**BRUNA**

Thank you so much for participating, Margaret!

It was a pleasure having this interview with you, and learning more about your professional and personal experiences as well. And congratulations for this beautiful career you have charted and you are still charting!

**MARGARET**

Thank you, Bruna! It was great talking to you. I want to thank GWNET for this opportunity to be able to talk about myself and to inspire many women who are there in this innovation, in the world of innovation!