

Graciela Salaberri

BY MARÍA ASUNCIÓN PASTOR SAAVEDRA

Interview with Graciela M. Salaberri Vacani (from República Oriental del Uruguay), permanent secretary of Ibero-Latin American Federation of Meteorological Societies (FLISMET for its acronym in Spanish standing for Federación Latinoamericana e Ibérica de Sociedades de Meteorología) on the occasion of her election as one of the Authentic Women for 2023.



Graciela Salaberri (2022).

She is a meteorologist, chair of the Global Board of the Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction (GNDR) and GNDR's South American regional representative. For two consecutive terms, she has been president (2014-2019) and vice-president (2019-2022) of the Uruguayan Network of Environmental NGOs (Red Uruguay de ONG Ambientalistas). She is a senior advisor for South America and the Caribbean with the Action at the Frontline-Community Resilience Program. She has 30 years of experience working in the public service as Director of Weather Forecasting of the National Meteorological Directorate of Uruguay (2000-2003) and as trainer in early detection of severe weather and climate phenomena. She has been responsible for the management and implementation of technical areas such as data preparation, forecasting, warnings and information to the public (Meteorological Services for the Public), promoting for the first time the incorpo-

ration of the "early warning" concept in the Meteorological Services for the Public, together with the timely dissemination of preventive meteorological information through the media.

She has been the Coordinator for the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Pilot Project on World City Forecasts in Uruguay. She has pursued specialization studies in the following areas: Integrated Risk and Disaster Management at Universidad Politécnica de Cataluña (2005); Local Development Management at the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization (Delnet ITC/ILO) in Turin, Italy (2009); Professional Training: Building the Organization of the 21st Century (International Telecommunication Union ITU) in Geneva, Switzerland; Training in the Promotion of Sustainable Development Goals in Buenos Aires, Argentina (2019). She has authored several research papers and educational materials and has been the national coordinator and leader for the Views from the Frontline global project. Since 2003, she has been an active member of the organization Amigos del Viento (<https://www.amigosdelviento.org/>) of which she is a founder. She is responsible for promoting and disseminating a culture of prevention, and for its research in the technical, scientific and human dimensions. She is the Permanent Secretary of the Ibero-Latin American Federation of Meteorological Societies (FLISMET) since 2010.

APS: Could you tell us more about the role that FLISMET plays?

GSV: The Ibero-Latin American Federation of Meteorological Societies (FLISMET) is an entity formed by associations related to meteorological sciences since 1986 that carries out its activities in support of the member associations through the priorities that they themselves determine. Currently, the Federation, under the leadership of the Council of Representatives

and chaired by Dr. José Luis Sánchez of the Spanish Meteorological Association (AME, for its acronym in Spanish), is carrying out various social actions such as training activities, supporting our members in their annual activities, forming specific working groups, reviewing the statutory provisions, among others. Specifically, in 2023 a working group has been formed to make research on meteorologist's professionalism, a controversial topic in our part of the world.

APS: What are your plans for the future?

GSV: In all honesty, my plans go hand in hand with the present and the many responsibilities I undertake on a daily basis. I confess that life continues to fascinate me, with its ups and downs. To keep on learning every day, recognizing that there is much to be done and that we can still be of help, supporting each other and acting as bridges, in solidarity, committed to service and united together.

APS: What would you say to the younger generation? How can we insist on continuous training and development?

GSV: Rather than insisting, I believe that one must be able to influence through one's own genuine behaviour. Personally, I am an example of permanent growth. Without a doubt, I encourage ongoing training and capacity building at the community level. A greater preparation that fosters training, learning, empathy and service towards society.

APS: How can capacities at the community level be strengthened in the most vulnerable communities?

GSV: My work is a constant incentive to promote community practices and actions that reduce vulnerabilities as a risk factor for the society. I am a woman who has been trained and specialized in en-

vironmental, climatic and disaster risk reduction issues throughout my life. My path is oriented towards the empowerment of the most vulnerable communities and a transparent, inclusive, and collective governance in the integrated management of disaster risk reduction to reduce current risks while avoiding creating new ones.

APS: What has this award meant to you?

GSV: It has been a recognition of the path walked, our solidarity and even the way we are perceived outside our immediate environment. I was nominated by a very valuable woman, so it has had a greater meaning for me.

APS: Looking back, do you remember having a particular mentor, who had a special impact on you?

GSV: I admire those who are able to overcome inequality and capitalise their experience to live powerful lives with values and respect for others. I admire my mother for her teachings, her humbleness, and the spark of hope and inspiration that she has passed on to me.

APS: What do you think is wrong with weather information?

GSV: Weather information is key. I understand that we must work on communicating risk; weather information must be dialogical and address the target audience with their own culture and knowledge. Although the role of the media is undeniable, the trivialization of meteorology prevents information from being clearly communicated and from guiding and promoting actions oriented to prevention or recovery.

APS: When you were asked as a child what would you like to be when you grow up, what did you say?

GSV: I said I would be a poetess, that I would be single, and that I would become an agronomist. Now, I realize that I have not become a single one of them, even though I have written poetry for my loves and especially for myself.



Mass plantings in degraded watersheds of native flora during PLANTATON initiative (2019) in the northern area of the country.

APS: Did you have a hard time getting to where you are today?

GSV: I am a woman who believes in the power of personal stories, those that inspire and influence. I have learnt to rebuild from the ruins. Build from collaborative leadership, promoting empowerment through education, training and personal and collective development. In order to get this far, it has been necessary to live, to make mistakes, to fall and to get up again.

APS: Could you tell us about weather or climate natural phenomena related to natural disasters in Uruguay?

GSV: Natural hazards in Uruguay always have an atmospheric or climatic origin: Storms; floods; drought; hail; tornadoes and other local high winds; heat waves; cold waves; late frosts; forest and rural fires. Violent weather in our country is associated with temporary atmospheric disturbances and the definition of "violent" depends on operational considerations in forecasting. In Uruguay, violent weather is associated with lightning strikes, tornadoes, descending air currents (strong wind gusts of more than 90 km/h), strong hail (usually of at least 2 cm diameter) and very heavy rains, which cause flash floods (due to extremely heavy rainfall, often more than 35 mm/h and generally in a limited area). Monitoring, prevention and

mitigation measures involve working on four fundamental aspects that we, working with the civil society, believe need to be strengthened: 1. knowledge of risk, prior knowledge of the possible risk scenarios faced by the community; 2. monitoring and warning service: risk monitoring capacity + rapid and reliable decision-making mechanisms to trigger early warning; 3. communication: dissemination of understandable warnings to all those exposed to the risks; 4. capacity to respond: knowledge, preparedness and availability of all links in the information chain. Real-time meteorology involves tracking and forecasting atmospheric structure and processes on the scale at which severe events occur. Part of the daily task of monitoring and prevention carried out by public meteorological services includes the proper reporting of the events that cause these disasters.

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APS: What would be the local impacts of climate change in Uruguay?

GSV: The impacts of climate change in Uruguay are the sea level rise, the increased water flows and the reduction of the winter barrier against disease-carrying insects. In a country like Uruguay where 70% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) is generated in the coastal areas where most of the population is concentrated, these impacts are of concern to us and we are trying to reduce them through adaptation measures, land use planning regulations and coastal management. Tourism, fishing, maritime transportation, forestry, infrastructure, industries and urbanization will be the sectors that will suffer the impacts. Sea water penetrates areas that are further and further away from the coast, causing erosion, flooding of wetlands, contaminating groundwater and agricultural land, and thus impacting biodiversity and production.

Thank you very much for your answers and your kindness. We are sure that our readers will enjoy the interview.