

In the Major Leagues

Grupo Energía Bogotá, one of the main multi-Latin companies in the energy and gas sector, is led by Astrid Álvarez, an executive who began an ambitious plan to further strengthen the company.

Until a few years ago, few women reached senior executive positions, especially in the energy sector, which is considered a male bastion. However, because of their capabilities and leadership, this paradigm is being broken and more female executives are climbing stairs. Yet there is still a long way to go.

A study from the *Peterson Institute for International Economics* and Ernst & Young (E&Y) showed that female participation in leadership positions in this sector is lower than in other corporate positions - between 8% and 12%. Last year, women only represented 5% of the members of Boards of Directors and 14% of management positions in the top 200 electricity companies in the world. Ironically, the study notes that companies' performances improve when there is a higher proportion of women in leadership positions. Companies that have at least 30% of their senior executive positions occupied by women have 15% more profits than those that do not.

The good news is that female executives are paving the way and showing they can be great leaders. One success story is Astrid Álvarez, Grupo Energía Bogotá's (GEB) President, a civil engineer from Universidad Javeriana in Colombia, who has vast experience in managing big companies and in transforming companies in the public service sector.

Álvarez presides over this Latin American conglomerate of the electric energy and natural gas sector since 2016. It emerged 121 years ago as a small local company and is now a multi-Latin company present in Peru, Guatemala, Brazil and Colombia. In Guatemala, it operates through Trecca, which is the main electric energy transporter, with more than a 20% market share.

During her management, she has led the Corporate Strategic Plan to bring energy and natural gas to Latin America's major cities, such as Bogotá and Lima, and earnestly venture into renewable energy. The goals Álvarez has set are very ambitious: to double the number of clients in 2015, from 6 to 12 million, increase the gas pipeline network from 4,000 to 8,600 kilometers and increase energy transmission networks from 12,500 to 24,900 kilometers.

Álvarez believes in the important role women perform in all areas. Proof of this is that women occupy 30% of GEB's executive positions, including the Legal Vicepresidency, Human Resources Management, Corporate and Subsidiary Affairs Management, and others.

"We must allow more of our women into leadership positions," says the group's president, who emphasizes that diversity is one of the keys to successfully achieving sustainable growth.

And she has demonstrated this throughout her professional career, during which she has occupied positions seemingly destined for men. She worked at concrete and mining companies, and was then Manager of the Empresa de Acueducto y Alcantarillado for six years. From there, she went to Ecopetrol, Colombia's largest company and Latin America's fourth-largest oil company, where she led the transformation of the recruitment process.

In tandem with her work in the energy sector, Álvarez also carries out important social work by supporting Father Javier de Nicoló's foundation, which has rescued children and youths from the streets for over 20 years. And she has time to spend with her family, for she believes it is important to prioritize children and the home. *"We must be successful for our families. That has been important in my life,"* she adds.

Female leadership ceased to be nothing more than a gender quota. There are more female leaders in large organizations every day, such as Astrid Álvarez, who leaves a mark on every position she takes.

Highlights

"We must allow more of our women into leadership positions. Diversity is one of the keys to successfully achieving sustainable growth."

Álvarez has opened Grupo Energía Bogotá's doors to women, who now occupy close to 30% of its senior executive positions.