



**BLOOMING**  
Inclusion and Diversity in STEAM

## Interview Questions

**STEAM Journey:** "Can you share your journey and what inspired you to pursue a career in STEAM? Were there any key moments or influential figures that directed you towards this path?"

*I guess I started my journey during my secondary school when I fell in love with genetics and Mendel's law. For my college degree, I went to study agronomy in Portugal, and I remember that on the first day of the degree registration I looked at the syllabus I realized that there was a Major in Plant Breeding and all the modules were related with genetics like quantitative genetics, breeding and genetics etc. I knew then and there that that was what I wanted to do- get a degree in Plant Breeding. Everybody said: "you will not find a job in breeding, you should go to something safer", but I really wanted to work with plants and genetics. Later on, after finishing my degree, I was working as a research assistant with Professor Margarida Oliveira at ITQB-UNL, and we were putting together a PhD project for me, on that day we received a phone call from an agronomic advisor, Ing. Serafim Andrade, who suggested that it was good if I could work on rice breeding and old Portuguese rice cultivars so that they could have an improved agronomic performance fitted to nowadays needs. My Ph.D. was on rice breeding, and I loved it! Getting my boots and cap on and being in the field made me happy. I was also very lucky to have part of my PH.D. degree being done in the Philippines at the International Rice Research Institute; it really changed my life.*



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**STEAM Achievement:** "What do you consider your most significant achievement or contribution to your field? How do you hope your work will impact the future of STEAM?"

*Sounds silly, but I am delighted that the breeding lines I developed so many years ago in Portugal during my Ph.D. are being used in the National Rice Breeding programme.*

*I also worked for five years at the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) in Saudi Arabia. While there, I co-supervised and mentored several women in STEAM, and I hope that my guidance will stay with them forever and build up the future of the next generation of women in STEAM. I gave them small pieces of advice such as "You should not believe in everything that has been published, you need to think critically and see what the authors did" and "I know it is hard to complete your degree, but once you finish it, you will go back and teach young girls on how to use the scientific method. I am so proud".*

**Challenges and Overcoming Them:** "Throughout your career in STEAM, what were some of the significant challenges you faced both in your personal and professional life? How did you overcome them? How did these challenges shape your professional journey?"

*Throughout my career in STEAM I faced many challenges. I guess the major challenge was having to leave my home country, family and friends to further develop my career and get the permanent position of my dreams. Also, to become a mom while juggling everything in a lab, including mentoring students, and being away from home without my family's support was hard. Becoming a mother really has an impact on your career, it changes your perspective of work/life, and you also notice that the relationships around you are different. It was extremely hard, but I was able to succeed, and I did what was required for me to continue progressing in my career. The biggest loser? My sleep.... The biggest winner? My anxiety... But I found that I am stronger than I thought.*

**Advice for Young Women:** "What advice would you give to young girls who are interested in STEAM but might be hesitant to pursue it due to stereotypes or the fear of failure?"

*Listen to your heart! If I had gone down the safe path like others told me to, I would be miserable today doing something that was boring for me and that I didn't enjoy. Today*



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*I am a mother of twins, a lab PI, a teacher, a mentor and I am happy. Sometimes you really need to make a leap of faith and always believe in yourself.*

**Future of Women in STEAM:** "Looking towards the future, how do you see the role of women evolving in STEAM fields? What changes do you think are necessary to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in STEAM?"

*Unfortunately, discrimination and "old ways of thinking" still exist at many levels in society and go way beyond gender. But we have made great progress in the past few years! The new generations (Gen Z and Gen Alfa) are more aware of misogynist behaviors and ready to make a stance. Hence, I see that women will continue to make great science. I think that the key changes are to call off people for their negative behavior and to continue having role models and supporting women in STEAM or who want to follow STEAM education or have a job in the field. Do not be passive if you witness an inappropriate behavior towards a woman who gave a talk at a conference or who was shut down during a meeting... Call out the person, do it privately, do it at a coffee break of the conference or after the meeting. Stand up! If we come out of the shadows, we will make a positive change and create a more inclusive and supportive environment so that women become empowered to pursue their STEAM passion.*



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