

Portrait: Sophie Zurquiyah

An interview with SMART WOMEN recorded on Saturday 12 July 2025

SMART WOMEN is presented by Marie-Claire Capobianco on the French B SMART business channel

English translation (via ChatGPT) of the original French interview transcript.

Marie-Claire Capobianco :

Hello, Sophie Zurquiyah. Thank you for accepting my invitation. You're the CEO of the Viridien group, a major high-tech company — we'll talk about that — with many engineers in your ranks.

Now, the topic of engineering is one I've discussed several times on this show. Last month, I interviewed Aline Aubertin, president of the "Femmes Ingénieures" association, who lamented the underrepresentation of women in these fields and roles.

You, yourself, are an engineer. So, first of all, — how did it happen? What made you choose this career path? Where did the desire come from? What can we do to inspire others?

Sophie Zurquiyah:

First of all, thank you for having me — I'm delighted to be here. Why did I become an engineer? I think the system steered me in that direction. I was drawn to science and mathematics, and I was lucky to have teachers who inspired and encouraged me. I was also told early on that engineering could open all kinds of doors — a career that wouldn't lock me into a narrow path too soon. That seemed like a smart way to keep my options open.

Marie-Claire Capobianco:

That's really remarkable — especially because, if I understood correctly, you're not from a family of engineers. Often, family background plays a role, and school guidance doesn't always point students — especially girls — toward these fields. It sounds like you had some personal interest and support that made a difference.

That said, the numbers are still clear — and stubborn. Not only are there still too few girls going into STEM fields, but the trend is even declining. What do you think can be done? Aline Aubertin suggested a major awareness campaign.

Sophie Zurquiyah:

I agree — campaigns could help. But more importantly, we need to show role models. We need to explain what engineering jobs are — because they can seem abstract — and inspire girls early, like in 8th or 9th grade, when they're thinking about their future.

I grew up in a family of teachers and intellectuals. It was assumed I'd become a professor or a translator — and I believed that for a long time until I realized it wasn't for me. So, the question

is: can we help girls envision themselves as engineers? Can we plant that seed earlier, and show them science and math are for them too?

Marie-Claire Capobianco:

And when we talk about role models — here you are! A high-level engineer leading a major tech company.

Let's talk about your journey. You joined Viridien in 2013, but you had an impressive career before that. Tell us briefly what you did between your studies and joining Viridien.

Sophie Zurquiyah:

After my studies, I had the opportunity to join an exceptional company: Schlumberger, now called SLB. It's a very international company that promotes based on performance. I met them during my final internship and was drawn to them. I started in very technical roles for about 10 years — in engineering, design, and manufacturing of technologies for oil wells and fields.

I took on increasing responsibilities and eventually led several centers across multiple geographies in the U.S., managing an R&D budget of around \$50 million.

Later, I moved into operations and led the business in Brazil, covering nine business lines with clients like Petrobras, and markets in Argentina, Bolivia — from deep offshore to land-based operations. That role sparked my interest in business strategy and growth.

After that, I held roles in HR and IT — not obvious moves, but strategic within SLB. I became CIO and learned a lot about digital transformation. HR taught me how critical team selection is — it's 90% of a leader's success.

Marie-Claire Capobianco:

Absolutely. And eventually, you chose to leave this large, structured company and join a smaller one — CGG, now Viridien — in 2013. What motivated that move?

Sophie Zurquiyah:

Several things came together. I wanted more direct impact — in a big matrixed organization, even at a high level, your impact can feel diluted. I was looking for a more end-to-end business role, with visible results.

I also wanted to be closer to corporate governance and board-level dynamics. And with two young daughters and a dual-career household, I needed more stability — especially as they entered high school.

And then I met CGG's CEO at the time, Jean-Georges Malcor — the connection was strong, and that helped seal the decision.

Marie-Claire Capobianco:

You started in Houston in 2013, and by 2018, you were CEO. But in between, you faced a major crisis and transformation. Can you tell us how you approached that?

Sophie Zurquiyah:

I joined shortly after an acquisition — there was a need to bring teams together and create

cohesion. That kind of transformation attracted me. Then in late 2014, oil prices collapsed — our market shrank by about 30% almost overnight.

We had to cut costs and manage a crisis. My division was more resilient, but others were hit hard, leading to cash flow issues and a restructuring in 2017. That led to a governance change, and I became CEO in 2018.

Marie-Claire Capobianco:

And what is Viridien today? How would you define the company and your strategy?

Sophie Zurquiyah:

We're a high-tech company specialized in geoscience, digital, and Earth data. We help clients develop natural resources responsibly.

Currently, 90% of our revenue comes from oil and gas — and we are market leaders, with over 50% share in two of our three core businesses, globally.

We're also developing new markets that now represent 10% of our revenue: low-carbon solutions like carbon sequestration, mining, high-performance computing, and infrastructure monitoring.

We rely on our expertise in sensors and geophysics, and our goal is to grow these future-focused sectors.

Marie-Claire Capobianco:

So, you're building on existing strengths and client relationships — especially in oil and gas — while expanding into emerging areas?

Sophie Zurquiyah:

Exactly. Our clients — TotalEnergies, BP, Shell, ExxonMobil, Chevron, Saudi Aramco, and many others — already trust us. In fact, we're considered a strategic subcontractor.

We may not represent a huge part of their budget, but we're critical to their success. We create high-resolution subsurface images that help them avoid wasting capital.

Marie-Claire Capobianco:

And in newer sectors, like mining or infrastructure?

Sophie Zurquiyah:

We began exploring these in 2021, post-COVID. The pandemic gave us time to rethink our strategy. In mining, we started from scratch — no reputation, new clients. But now, we're recognized. At industry conferences, people approach our booth asking how we can help them.

Marie-Claire Capobianco:

Let's end on a key topic: ESG and sustainability. How do you approach this at Viridien?

Sophie Zurquiyah:

We focus first on doing our part — understanding our own emissions and improving continuously. We also look at how our products can positively impact the environment.

For example, we developed marine mammal detection systems to protect wildlife during offshore operations. We support clients in becoming more sustainable as well.

We have measurable targets in all areas. Since 2019, we've cut our emissions by over 70%. And even in absolute terms, we have a relatively low footprint.

Marie-Claire Capobianco:

That's impressive. And with this show, my goal is to spotlight role models — to show that it *is* possible. And clearly, it is: from Karine Lejeune in the military to you, leading a major tech company — and raising a family along the way.

Thank you very much, Sophie, for joining us.

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Watch the full interview with Sophie Zurquiyah on SMART WOMEN (in French only) here:

[SMART WOMEN - Le portrait : Sophie Zurquiyah](#)

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