
PROJECTS SHAPING AFRICA'S ENERGY LANDSCAPE

An Exclusive Interview with
Mahesh Swaminathan
Senior Vice President,
Subsea and Floating Facilities
McDermott International

Interview by Miriro Matema
Article by Tracy Otto

With a history spanning over 100 years, U.S.-based engineering, procurement, construction and installation service provider, McDermott, has emerged as a leading innovator and responsible developer of energy infrastructure worldwide.

During the prestigious African Energy Week, hosted in Cape Town, South Africa, Energy Investor sat with Mahesh Swaminathan, Senior Vice President of McDermott's Subsea and Floating Facilities business line, who shared his insights into Africa's future energy and revealed its challenges and opportunities.

African Energy Week is more than just a conference; it is a platform where decisions that shape the continent's future are made. With the theme "Invest in African Energies," this year's event focuses on bridging the energy access gap while promoting sustainability. For industry titans like McDermott, it is an opportunity to showcase innovations, network with key stakeholders, and reaffirm their commitment to Africa's growth. McDermott's journey began a century ago.

"We were pioneers in installing offshore platforms, and that legacy continues to drive our efforts worldwide" highlights Swaminathan. For the past 50 years, the company has also been a vital player in Africa's energy narrative.

In East Africa, McDermott's Low Carbon Solutions business line leads projects such as onshore LNG facilities and energy transition initiatives.

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Our work in Mozambique is a prime example," Swaminathan notes. "We are executing projects that include FEED (front-end engineering design) for LNG infrastructure development. Uganda is another key market where we're making strides.

The Subsea and Floating Facilities business line, meanwhile, has gained traction in West Africa. "We recently entered the Angolan market catering to its vast deepwater infrastructure development opportunities and are exploring expanding operations into Namibia," he adds. These efforts underscore McDermott's commitment to harnessing Africa's vast offshore resources sustainably.

Balancing Growth and Sustainability

The development of Africa's gas infrastructure is a focal point for McDermott, in helping to address both energy poverty and climate change. Swaminathan explains, "Africa is navigating the same trajectory as other regions, balancing industrialization with environmental responsibility. To support this, McDermott works with its customers and other regional players to design and build emission-reducing facilities.

The company's operations also prioritize sustainability. "Our marine assets are among the most fuel-efficient in the industry, and one of our vessels, the DLV2000, was recently the first in its class certified under the SUSTAIN-1 classification, for its environmental performance, including energy efficiency, waste management, emissions reduction, and coastal ecosystem preservation" Swaminathan reveals. "Additionally, our fabrication yards leverage solar energy, and digitalization to minimize our carbon footprint."

Beyond oil and gas, McDermott is actively involved in energy transition projects, including high-voltage direct current (HVDC) systems for wind energy. "This adjacency work allows us to contribute to Africa's renewable energy ambitions while maintaining the economic benefits of traditional energy projects," he explains.

Africa's Energy Crisis: A Historical Perspective

Africa's energy story is one of both promise and challenge. Despite being rich in natural resources, the continent has grappled with energy poverty for decades. Over 600 million people lack access to electricity, a situation exacerbated by limited infrastructure and investment. Yet, this crisis presents a significant opportunity for transformation.

"Africa's energy needs are unique," Swaminathan explains. "On one hand, there is a pressing demand for electrification to improve quality of life and foster industrialization. On the other, there is the global call for sustainability. Companies like McDermott play a critical role in addressing this dual challenge."

Addressing Energy Poverty and Climate Change

The dual goals of eradicating energy poverty and mitigating climate change require a delicate balance. "Africa's trajectory mirrors that of Asia and South America, where industrialization and electrification are prioritized," Swaminathan observes. "The challenge lies in achieving this while adhering to global sustainability goals."

McDermott's strategy focuses on maximizing local impact. "Our projects not only deliver energy infrastructure but also create jobs and build capacity. For example, we're working on a subsea gas development project in Angola, which support the local economy and export potential," he notes.

A Vision for the Future

In McDermott's Subsea and Floating Facilities business line long-term vision, Swaminathan outlines a roadmap for Africa. "In the short term, we aim to solidify our presence in key markets like Angola. Medium-term goals include expanding into Namibia and exploring new opportunities in East and West Africa. Long-term, we envision playing a pivotal role in Africa's energy transition, leveraging our expertise in both traditional and renewable sectors. This dual focus on hydrocarbons and renewables positions us as a key partner in Africa's energy evolution."

The Role of African Energy Week

Swaminathan underscores the importance of platforms like African Energy Week in advancing the continent's energy agenda. "Events like this are invaluable," he says. "They provide a unique opportunity to connect with stakeholders, understand regional dynamics, and align our strategies with the regions priorities."

Reflecting on a recent panel discussion on Angola, he elaborates, "In just a few hours, I met with nine key stakeholders integral to our projects. This level of access and dialogue is unmatched."

As Africa's demand for energy and sustainable solutions grows, McDermott International remains committed to pioneering advancements that bridge these needs. Under Swaminathan's leadership, the company is not only contributing to Africa's energy future but also setting new standards for sustainability and innovation in the industry.

For McDermott, the next chapter in Africa's energy journey is one of collaboration, responsibility, and transformative impact—a journey that promises to illuminate homes, power industries, and inspire a more sustainable future. **(EI)**

