

The goal is not simply more women at the table

Often, I am the only woman in the room - sometimes, the only African woman.

This is not a complaint, but a statement of fact. It is my starting point, and it has offered me an unexpected advantage: being the only one sharpens your awareness. You notice what others overlook.

Early in my career, I believed that dedication and results alone would be enough to transform this industry. But I have since realised that progress demands more than just individual determination - it requires intentional, collective action. Years later, the landscape has shifted: more women attend conferences, more enter junior roles, and more appear in the photos that fill diversity reports. Yet in the rooms where real decisions are made, silence persists. Those spaces remain emptier - and quieter - than they should be.

Yes, frankly, I'm weary of watching women's day celebrations substitute for change.

In my industry, this matters even further because energy is not just about pipelines and power. Energy is about who

on executive committees. In Mozambique, I witnessed a mid-level engineer - a woman - identify a technical flaw that had eluded everyone else. She spoke up, her voice calm yet unmistakably authoritative. The room listened. The plan changed. That, too, is influence. It happens when women are not merely present but empowered to challenge, question, and correct.

At TotalEnergies, I have seen what happens when we design for that kind of influence. In our Tilenga and EACOP projects, compensation requires both spouses' signatures. Joint bank accounts are mandatory. Financial literacy training reaches both partners. These are small shifts with enormous impact. They work because they recognize that women deserve more than just a place at the table.

In our affiliate in Nigeria, important strides have been made in recent years with intentional diverse hiring practices. As a result, over half of the senior roles filled between 2022 and 2024 went to women. This wasn't the result of quotas, but of deliberate investment in talent pipelines that made such progress possible.

This is what I carry into every boardroom. Not frustration at being the only woman, but a quiet responsibility. To notice what others might not. To ask questions that need to be asked. To ensure that the next generation of African women in this industry has more than a seat. They have influence.

But real influence requires a shared commitment. I urge women: seek out opportunities, develop new skills, and step boldly into leadership. I call on companies: Create mentorship, training, and policies that allow women to grow and lead.

The energy transition underway in Africa is the most profound economic shift of our lifetime. It will determine who prospers and who struggles for generations. We must act now - women must claim their voices and roles in this transition. If we do not, we risk building an energy future as unequal as in the past.

I believe we can do better.

So, I will keep walking into those rooms. I will keep learning from the women I meet along the way. I will give to gain, and I will keep pushing for the kind of deliberate design that turns mere presence into power.

As we mark this month dedicated to the fight for women's rights everywhere, the goal is not simply more women at the table. The goal is building the table we deserve.

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Marieme-Sav Sow
Women

gets light, who gets jobs, who gets opportunity. When half the population is absent from those decisions, we build systems that serve everyone imperfectly. I witnessed the impact of this first-hand.

In Uganda, a family was being compensated for property affected by a project. The husband spoke; the wife listened. But when asked about the family's needs, about what "fair compensation" really meant, it was the wife who had the answers. She knew what the household required. She knew who in the community would be affected. She knew because she lived it every day.

That moment changed how I think about influence.

But influence is also about who leads projects, who manages budgets, and who sits

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