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**Question**

What is Glass Ceiling? Is breaking the glass ceiling possible in Africa and what are the challenges

**Answer**

At the micro level, we emphasize that the concept of the glass ceiling represents a specific pattern of career disadvantages that can explain the lack of women and minorities at top positions . There are two main features of this pattern. First, there must exist discriminatory barriers to the career advancement of women or racial minorities. In other words, the slower advancement of these groups must stem directly from their sex or minority status. If it instead stems from other factors such as differences in work experience, other formal merits, or personal preferences this is not consistent with a glass ceiling effect. The second requirement is that the discriminatory barriers grow thicker for positions that are higher up in the organizational hierarchy. If the disadvantages are more severe at the lower levels, this is not consistent with a glass ceiling but rather with a “sticky floor

Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, women have continued to be underrepresented in politics. Women tend to be limited by various factors, which are found in the system of the society such as patriarchy, structure of production and reproduction, among others. There are perspectives in literature that there exist impermeable and impenetrable barriers that prevent women from reaching top positions in offices. Although women in many parts of the world have made strides into politics in the 21 st century but a remarkable breaking of the glass ceiling is yet to be witnessed. For instance, Scandinavian countries such as Sweden and Norway have achieved gender parity in women representation in politics. While a country like Rwanda is now a global leader in women representation in parliament, and South Africa has made remarkable progress towards gender parity, Nigeria still falls short of the gender equality initiatives by the international community. Against these backdrops, this paper seeks to address the glass ceiling effect for Nigerian women's participation in politics and the extent to which the adoption of United Nations Gender Mainstreaming Approach could help Nigerian women's full participation and representation in politics. African Society many times expects a woman to be domesticated rather than be a goal setter and getter. One may probe on why many more African women do not move up the business ladder.

**1. Societal norms and pressure**

The society we live in has its expectations, usually African Society expects that by a certain age a female child should be married, followed by the bearing of children. Even if one wanted to spring up and be successful in terms of a career, it then becomes hard as they have many breaks in their careers to fulfill societal expectations. At the end of it all, many young females have set marriage goals only and leaving out career goals.

**2. The Mind-set**

Most people have been dragged down by the “I can’t do it” or “I am not good enough” mind set. Most women will wait decades to be approved by certain people or societies, they seek approval in whatever they do, this follows them even in the workplace where they would rather be led than to lead as they somehow have the ‘I can’t do it’ or ‘I am not good enough’ mind set.

**3. Mixing Personal and Professional relationships**

There should be a thick line between personal life and a professional life. From experience, it has proven that most relationships especially that of subordinate and “boss”, are one sided, where it is usually the subordinate employee who does not gain much career growth especially if the relationship ceases.

So, what can women do to break through the glass ceiling?

Below are the key lessons that I have drawn from my interaction with successful career, as well as entrepreneurial women, here in Zimbabwe,

**1. Resilience**

Most women cannot make lemonade when lemons are thrown at them in their life! It is wise to always know that as one grows in terms of profession or business the road is likely to be bumpy. Managing one’s emotions and focusing is prudent, acknowledging weaknesses and learning from failure will help in moving forward. The biggest harm a woman can do to herself is that of living a life full of regrets.

**2. Live your passion**

The word ‘choice’ is used in our everyday life, but has a huge meaning and impact in our lives. The minute we open our eyes in the morning we have to make choices, whether to sleep all day or wake up and face the new day. We are who we are by our choices, therefore, it should be a choice to live one’s passion, not to live a life expected by someone else.

**3. Human Capital**

Every women should be empowered - find your passion and with acquired skills and education and you will be the superwoman you desire to be!.

**4. Focus**

Goals are relevant in personal and career growth. Without goals it is like being a toothless dog, barking but totally harmless, attracting nothing but jeers and mockery. Meaningless goals? As I walked around in the countryside one time, I noticed what I deemed as an attention-grabbing situation where a brown pit-bull dog continuously paced back and forth chasing after speeding cars in a bid to overtake them, only to fail and return to its owners gate. This situation repeated itself until I moved past, but the dog had not overtaken any car. Relevance of the story - there should be focus once goals have been set.

According to the McKinsey & Company Women Matter Africa report which outlines the continent’s progress in terms of women’s representation, there is a positive correlation between the proportion of female board members and improved financial corporate performance, whether in the private or public realm.

Rosemary Yeboah, Executive Director and Group Corporate Banking Head at Ecobank, therefore challenged companies to “create policies that will help the women to move up in their companies”.

The panelists discussed the double burden syndrome, – balancing professional and personal life – which is one of the main barriers women still face when it comes to climbing the professional ladder. Madeleine Berre, Gabon’s Minister of Trade and Industry, traced the problem back to the values instilled in young African girls at a tender age, stressing that “what needs to change is how young girls are raised”.

Jennifer Blanke of the African Development Bank talked about the responsibility of women leaders to be role models for younger colleagues, saying that “it’s not about climbing the ladder to get to the top. It’s once you’re up there what are you going to do?”

A public-private working group was organised on the second day of the Forum to share policies and get participants to commit to an action plan to promote gender diversity in the workplace. The recommendations and solutions discussed during the meeting will be communicated separately.

Launched in 2012, the Africa CEO Forum has established itself as the foremost international event dedicated to the development of the African private sector. Over 1,100 participants from 42 countries, including 40 ministers and two heads of state, attended this year’s edition of the Africa CEO Forum, which took place on 20-21 March in Geneva.

“The principles of gender-sensitive parliaments can be advanced if women occupy leadership positions as parliamentarians and as key members of parliamentary staff, as they are in a position to influence policy directions, change parliamentary procedure and practices, serve as role models to other women and provide a different perspective in debates”.

Women everywhere are breaking the glass ceiling in politics but their voices still go unheard and their contributions are too often sidelined. In many places women are still seen as incapable of taking on responsibility in what are perceived as male-oriented areas, such as finance, energy, economic development, climate change, foreign affairs, defense, trade and infrastructure. This is often the case in parliaments where women are given ‘women’s only’ portfolios or only allowed to sit in women committees and are being pushed away from the other committees because of their gender.

However, the glass ceiling, that invisible barrier to advancement that women face at the top levels of the workplace, remains a big problem and a challenge to society.

According to research from the University of Chicago, School of Business, there are factors beyond gender discrimination in the workplace that are holding women back. Although women have surpassed men in educational attainment, they are vastly underrepresented in top-paying jobs. Women with college degrees often choose to work in fields that offer lower incomes.

Psychological differences between men and women could account for up to 10 percent of the pay gap. Much of the existing research concludes that women are more risk-averse than men are. The willingness to take risks helps employees compete for higher paying jobs and negotiate higher salaries. Whether men and women are born with different attitudes toward risk or the differences are taught, understanding the role of nature versus nurture is key to closing the gap.

The demands for childcare, housework and other life chores outside of work fall more heavily on women than on men. Higher paying occupations are more inflexible and require more time commitment. Women have a harder time with this inflexibility because they remain disproportionately responsible for taking care of the home, including raising children. Indeed, childcare is one of the most prominent factors holding back women’s earnings at the executive level.

Despite all these, in recent years, there has been a continuous rise of high profile senior women professionals, increase in successful women- owned businesses and women Entrepreneurs. I am a Director in my work place, l have grown through the ranks in a male-dominated business. It is very clear that with God’s grace, hard work, determination and a balanced family life, any woman can break the glass ceiling.