**NAME: ITODO JOHN JUNIOR**

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***QUESTION***

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

**What is Glass ceiling?**

The United States Federal Glass Ceiling Commission defines the glass ceiling as "the unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements.

"A glass ceiling" represents a barrier that prohibits women from advancing toward the top of a hierarchical corporation.

Women in the workforce are faced with "the glass ceiling." Those women are prevented from receiving promotion, especially to the executive rankings, within their corporation. Within the last twenty years, the women who are becoming more involved and pertinent in industries and organizations have rarely been in the executive ranks. Women in most corporations encompass below five percent of board of directors and corporate officer positions.

Also, A **glass ceiling** is a metaphor used to represent an invisible barrier that keeps a given demographic (typically applied to minorities) from rising beyond a certain level in a hierarchy. The metaphor was first coined by feminists in reference to barriers in the careers of high-achieving women. In the US, the concept is sometimes extended to refer to obstacles hindering the advancement of minority women, as well as minority men.

**Is breaking this glass ceiling possible in Africa?**

This is possible in Africa and is already in progress. Women can do this through hard work, resilience and results. Women who want to climb all the way to the Boardroom should be the best, not only at what they do, but in their role within the organization. The bar cannot be lowered because they are women, so they must achieve a new high. Of course there are different challenges from the workplace and family that they would encounter but every new challenge should be a stepping stone for a success story.

Again, corporate organizations should proactively, deliberately launch and implement policies that promote gender equality in the workplace. Violators of such policies should be identified, named and shamed. Executives should provide bold leadership not just intent.

Government should provide grassroots awareness programs for the girl child to ensure that they are encouraged to become engineers, technologist, innovative scientists, the list goes on. There is this notion that women or girls should not go into engineering and should instead focus on home economics, fashion designing and such. That particular philosophy should be eliminate. The girl child should be encouraged to take up the medical profession, architecture or engineering if she wants to. There are no men or women professions.

Also, Government orientation agencies have a big role to play. There should be a comprehensive action to achieve true gender balance, develop policies and practices that support both men and women. For instance, men should be granted paternity leave to remove any stigma attached to ‘maternity leave’ as a women’s concept. The business environment should also be geared towards empowerment of all, irrespective of gender. Friendly policies on creating work-life balance, childcare infrastructures or easy access to same should be implemented in the work place.

**Glass ceiling in Africa and its challenges**

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 the African 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.

According to an Article in international journal of multidisciplinary research review**: Breaking the glass ceiling for Nigerian women participation in politics: A gender mainstreaming approach** other challenges to breaking this glass ceiling are: **Patriarchy**, **culture and religion and the social role theory.**

**Patriarchy** is a major barrier to women ascension to key political positions. Nigeria, just as many other societies, is a highly patriarchal society, where men as seen as the dominant powers and women as subordinate. Many African societies still maintain patterns of male privilege and power, and consciously’ holds on to the belief that men is to command and women is to obey (Osondu-Oti, 2017). Under such a male-centered system without a female face, women lack access to politics and decision-making and are highly under-represented at most levels of government (Eme et al, 2014)

There is also the issue of **culture and religion** that pose great barriers to Nigerian women. It should be recalled that in April 2016 the first Gender Equal Opportunity Bill presented to the Nigerian Senate was rejected and the argument of the Senators was that the country’s culture and ‘religion’ ‘forbids’ women equality with men (Osondu-Oti, 2016). Although the Modified version of the Bill (where the language of equality has been removed) passed second reading in September 2016, religion and cultural practices play significant roles on ‘who’ is elected into Nigeria’s political offices. The culture of socialization and the training system, which most men and women are, exposed from childhood place women in subordinate positions, where they have to play a second fiddle. In Nigerian culture, women are expected to manage the home fronts and men are expected to lead the public domain. Thus, the sex-stereotypes and gender segregation in allocation of roles in private and public life are fundamentally a product of the early socialization process and the indoctrination of the social environment (Nzomo, 1994).

One major factor attributed to the glass ceiling effect on women **is the social role theory**. This theory proposes that men and women according to the social roles given to them act the way their genders are stereotyped (cited in Osondu-Oti, 2017). The stereotypical views assigned to genders can act as social norms, which represent how we believe others should act as well as personal dispositions, which represent our beliefs in how we should act. There is argument that people develop gender role expectations at early stage, which endures throughout life. Therefore, social role theory, the cognitive mindsets and cultural beliefs that come with it are important areas to take into account when explaining the glass effect for limited participation of women in politics. Because of the idea that public leadership belongs to men, women often have more problems when signaling their skills as effectively as possible.

In addition, Nigerian women, especially unmarried, are sometimes hindered, due to the ‘success penalty’ in the marriage market that comes with women career advancement (Osondu-Oti and Omole, 2016). The penalty women face in the marriage market for choosing another career such as difficulty in finding a husband contributes to women’s limited participation in politics (Osondu-Oti and Omole, 2016). Due to the society’s great regard to marriage, especially for women, it becomes difficult for unmarried women to venture into politics because of the fear that men might stay away from them.

**In my opinion,** Women who have climbed the ladder to reach senior positions should not destroy the ladder but deliberately make way for younger women to seek to attain the same or even higher positions. This will enable them to break this glass ceiling.

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