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DEPARTMENT: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY

ASSIGNMENT: What is Glass Ceiling? Is Breaking the Glass Ceiling Possible in Africa and What are the Challenges?

A Glass Ceiling is a metaphor used to describe invisible barriers that keeps a given demographic from rising beyond a certain level of hierarchy. This barrier hinders the minorities (e.g women, people of colour) from obtaining or occupying certain positions.

The phrase 'glass ceiling' refers to an invisible barrier that prevents someone from achieving further success. It is most often used in the context of someone's age, gender, or ethnicity keeping them from advancing to a certain point in a business or when he or she cannot or will not be promoted to a higher level of position or power. Glass ceilings are most often observed in the workplace and are usually a barrier to achieving power and success equal to that of a more dominant population. An example would be a woman who has better skills, talent, and education than her male peers but is obviously being passed over for promotions.

The term was coined in the 80s to describe what women face when their careers get stagnant at middle-management roles, preventing them from achieving executive roles or higher leadership. Other related terms include: pink-collar ghetto, maternal wall, concrete ceiling etc.

Marilyn Loden first used the term in 1978 at the Women's Exposition in New York. At the time, Loden was an employee at New York Telephone Co. and was asked to sit on a panel titled "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall," the goal of which, it would seem, was to blame women for their lack of advancement in the workforce. Loden wasn't convinced.

Prior to the conference, NY Telephone had charged Loden with an analysis of this very problem, and was sure, based on her research, that lack of confidence or improper dress was not the impediment to women's careers. This "invisible barrier to advancement that people didn't want to recognize"? While fielding questions on that panel, she called it the glass ceiling.

Many believe that its impossible or very hard for women to break the glass ceiling in Africa. But, African women are finding new ways to break the glass ceiling one step at a time, everyday. It is now seen that women are heading companies and businesses, breaking records, multitasking while being great mothers and partners. One thing hindering women is 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. The problem is traced 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”.

In today's day and time, Women are out there breaking glass ceilings. Women like Dr Matshidiso Moeti becoming the first woman to lead the World Health Organization's Regional Office for Africa, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian Feminist, Novelist, and Author who is known as a fierce campaigner for equal gender rights and women empowerment. Bogolo Joy Kwenedo is currently the Minister of Investment, Trade, and Industry for Botswana. Her zest in translating policy into action and goal of improving the living conditions of her people made the new President of Botswana, Mokgweetsi Masisi, to appoint her to his cabinet. At the age of 31, she is celebrated as Africa's youngest minister. Last year, she was appointed by the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres to serve as a member of the UN High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation. These amazing women and many more are paving ways for their fellow African women. It is most definitely possible to achieve breaking the glass ceiling in Africa.

There are so many challenges the African woman goes through while striving higher in her society. 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.

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.

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. Women would have to change their mind set.

As mentioned earlier, mixing personal life and professionalism should be balanced. 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.

The world is revolving and as that happens, women would continue coming up with new ways to evolve, achieve and eventually break the glass ceiling.

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