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

The term ‘glass ceiling’ is a metaphor for an artificial barrier that prevents women and minorities from being promoted to managerial and executive positions within an organization. The term was first popularized in the 80s to describe the challenges women face when their careers remained at middle- management roles, preventing them from achieving higher leadership or executive roles. The **United States Federal Glass Ceiling Commission** defines the glass ceiling as ‘the unseen, yet un-breachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, irrespective of their qualifications or achievements. Minority women often find the most difficulty in ‘breaking the glass ceiling’ because they lie at the intersection of two historically marginalized groups; women and people of color. A glass ceiling also represents a barrier that prohibits women from advancing towards the top of a hierarchical corporation. Women in the workforce are faced with “the glass ceiling”. Most women who find themselves in the corporate world are often prevented from receiving promotion, especially to the executive ranks.

The society which we have found ourselves, the African society expects that by a certain age, a female child should be married, which must be followed by child bearing. Even if a woman ends up doing otherwise, it becomes very difficult to have a breakthrough in her career because the societal norms doesn’t see women trying fulfill her career dreams as normal. The African women has always been so close yet so far away from her moment glory. Women are taught from a tender age that success scares men away and they might not have families if they are successful. Many women are made to give up on their lofty dreams because of this societal belief. The pressure can not be underestimated as many girls are taught to value marital success over all and they are falsely made to believe successful women do not get married. African governments too should do more in order to make sure that equitable state of affairs is achieved. It is evident in a country like, Zimbabwe where there is a **Gender Responsive Budget** on paper, yet the Ministry of Women Affairs has never been in the top 10 of the government’s top prioritized ministries. The concept of equality in Africa is still a political pawn that is used to gain votes and popularity during election period. Now, this takes us back to the question, breaking of glass ceiling in Africa can only be possible when we start taking ‘’the ascension of women to top decision making jobs’’ seriously and infuse them into our system. The African women in turn need to have a change of mindset and fight the “woman for a kitchen” mental syndrome that keeps holding them back. Although there are some challenges to breaking glass ceiling which would be explained in paragraphs below.

One of the major challenges a woman is faced with while trying to break the glass ceiling is ‘ostracism’, and this mostly comes from their superiors and colleagues. Most women in the corporate world have often reported they experienced marginalization ad lack of support from both their peers and managers. For instance, this is where sexual harassment comes in, most women have reported about this, done by their immediate supervisor, being denied budgetary resources, and being ignored and alienated altogether.

Another challenge is that women may not necessarily help each other in breaking through the glass ceiling. It is popularly called the “queen bee syndrome” and its used to identify those women who have reached the top, usually in a male environment, and who then adopt a counter militancy approach that is based on their own professional and social success. This competitive behavior between women may extend beyond professional rivalry to include a subconscious elements relating to a number of different factors such as weight, age and dress sense. This is why most men describe women as their own problem.