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QUESTION: **WHAT IS GLASS CEILING? IS BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING POSSIBLE IN AFRICA AND WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES**.

Around the world women are missing even in the most developed nations of the world women are missing from the top of business corporations, despite the business case for gender diversity in decision making, despite the fact that women make major purchasing decisions as consumers, and most surprisingly, despite the fact that 68 women in the world have succeeded in leading their various as either Prime Ministers or Presidents and eleven countries have selected at least two women as president or prime minister

**What does The Term Glass Ceiling Mean?**

The term “glass ceiling” describes the situation that women and minorities often face in which they find it difficult or even impossible to climb the corporate ladder and secure an advanced professional position, simply because of their gender or race. It is an opposition to the popular motivational phrase “the sky’s the limit.” The ceiling is said to be *glass* because, while it allows everyone to see “the sky” (i.e. elite professional opportunities), some are still

The “glass ceiling” is a concept from the 1980s describing an invisible barrier that blocks the access of women to the top – they can see where they want to get to, they can see their male peers going through. Yet apart from a few who have emulated the traditionally linear male career path, somehow the women don’t make it through to the board. The statistics indicate some evidence of a glass ceiling although it appears to be located at a higher level than before, as women have now achieved around a third of middle management positions in many countries. But there are still many barriers blocking women’s career paths to leadership positions. Some of the barriers are related to the women themselves, some to their organisations. But many are to do with the interaction between individual and organisation, where the experiences at work are different for women because they are not represented at higher levels of the organisation. We will examine these barriers, and consider what can be done to facilitate a faster pace of change, so that more women’s talents are developed and utilised by their organisations, to their mutual benefit

**Why Do Glass Ceilings Exist?**

Glass ceilings are often the result of unconscious bias – instinctive, underlying beliefs about ethnicity, gender, age, sexuality, social class, religion, and so on. This may be largely unintentional. However, in some cases, glass ceilings have become a systemic problem – an inherent part of company culture, but one that many organizations [turn a blind eye to](https://www.mindtools.com/community/BookInsights/WillfulBlindness.php). Elsewhere, glass ceilings are intentional, showing up as overt discrimination or [bullying](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newCDV_84.htm), as a form of "power play "In these instances, people "at the top" may deny that a glass ceiling exists, simply because they haven't experienced it themselves. Or, they fear that acknowledging it would threaten their positions. Either way, they'll likely want to preserve the status quo.

**Glass ceiling in the African Continent**

Glass ceiling is also one of the major issues prevailing in the African community and this to a large extent contributes to the problem of slow economic growth and development ravaging the continent today. In Africa today it is believed that the men are superior to women and for this reason when certain top positions are up for grabs such positions are shared among men neglecting the women who may be more qualified than these men who are put in power. In The area of politics for example only few females have been able to attain the rank of president or prime minister and to a large extent these positions are largely dictated by the men

As part of the African Women in Business initiative launched at this year’s Africa CEO Forum in Geneva, a high-level panel of female leaders gathered to discuss barriers to women climbing the corporate ladder and solutions to tackling the gender gaps in leadership across the continent.

Gender Diversity was one of the recurring themes during the panel and it was stressed that gender diversity was growing, albeit slowly by 20% each year.

Tonye Cole, CEO of Nigeria’s Sahara Group and the only male on the panel, highlighted the differences in male and female leadership styles. He explained that women are more balanced and weigh their different options before making a decision. He added that unlike men, women were not driven by profit or making money.

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.