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17/sms09/089

IRD 318

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

Glass ceiling is gender discrimination, they are impenetrable barriers and they prevent women from reaching high positions in organizations. In the time past many leadership positions are still held by men. There are three major reasons why we have glass ceiling in organizations:

Social role theory: this theory argues that men and women act according to roles they’re given by the society and these roles are stereotyped in a way that does not benefit women. It is an established fact that people develop gender roles at birth.

Gender stereotyping: this is the top obstacle. It is subconscious discrimination whereby people discriminate women in work places without even realizing it because they view leadership as the men’s domain

Family and work conflict: they believe women won’t be able to be as devoted to their career as men would because the believe that women will have to choose between family and work one day e.g maternity leave

The African woman has always been so close yet so far away from her moment of glory. Between the kitchen and the boardroom is the glass ceiling that prevents her smooth ascension to positions of leadership. African women continue to be marginalised from attaining leadership positions in organisations despite the numerous efforts that have been made to achieve equality. The Africa Gender Equality Index of 2015 ranked the continent as having an average score of 54.1 out a possible 100 which is a visible pointer that the continent is making strides but gender parity and equal opportunities are still a far cry away. With numerous cultural barriers standing in the way of women’s ascension, the glass ceiling remains the present reality.

African countries like Liberia have managed to sustainably elevate their women with an estimated 30% of companies being led by a female Chief ExecutiveIt is easy to then assume that these are milestones that prove equality is now a reality yet there are 52 countries in Africa and only three have had female heads of state. It is better than nothing but it is also proof that the society is not yet as fair and as equal as it should be. In actual facts, if the society was where it should be, female presidents would not make the news.

The greatest battles the African woman has had to fight are those against widely held convictions that have always relegated her to a second class citizen whose forte is the kitchen. Gender equality is still some sort of favour men think they are doing women. Another set-back in the African journey towards women empowerment has been cultural indoctrination. Women are taught from a tender age that success scares men away and they might not have families if they are successful. Men who are threatened by women’s success further perpetuate this belief. Marriage is essentially a luxury that ironically only the unsuccessful woman can afford. Many ladies are being pushed to give up on their lofty dreams of grandeur. The pressure cannot be underestimated as many girls are taught to value marital success over all else and they are falsely made to believe successful women do not get married. Africa needs to start being serious about the ascension of women to top decision making jobs. 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. It is possible to have a perfect family and be successful all at once. Only weak men are intimidated by a woman’s success. In fact, it is imperative that everyone start appreciating the rise of the 21st century woman who can stand on her own two feet without anyone holding her hand. Gender equality as a movement should therefore be financed to educate people that women can and should also be successful. The gender responsive budgeting models should be effectively implemented and not remain a novelty, scribbled in fancy diction and filed away. Laws and conventions that have been put in place should be enforced with a Norwegian rigour if all else does not work. The glass ceiling should be forcibly smashed if need be.