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**MATRIC NUMBER: 17/SMSS09/046**

**COURSE CODE: IRD 318**

**QUESTION;** What Is Glass Ceiling? Is Breaking the Glass Ceiling Possible in Africa and What Are the Challenges?

“The African woman has always been so close yet so far away from her moment of glory” –Tatenda Gwaambuka. The glass ceiling is a metaphor referring to an artificial barrier that prevents women from being promoted to managerial and executive level positions within an organization. The phrase “glass ceiling” is used to describe the difficulties faced by women when trying to move to higher roles in a male dominated hierarchy. The barriers are most often unwritten, meaning that women are more likely to be restricted from advancing through accepted norms and implicit biases rather than defined corporate policies (Julia Kagan, 2019). Women’s access to leadership positions and authority in organizations and society is limited by social norms, organizational cultures, and structures collectively referred to as ‘the glass ceiling’. (The Pan African Journal Studies, 2012)

Going down history lanes, in 1978, [Marilyn Loden](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2018/03/01/she-coined-the-phrase-glass-ceiling-she-didnt-expect-it-to-outlive-her/?utm_term=.8b669ac36470)first used the term at the Women’s Exposition in New York. At the time, she 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. It was then popularized in a 1986 Wall Street Journal article discussing the corporate hierarchy and how invisible barriers seemed to be preventing women from advancing in their careers past a certain level. (Julia Kagan, 2019).

Yes, I strongly believe that breaking the Glass Ceiling in Africa is possible. African countries like Liberia managed to sustainably elevate their women with an estimated 30% of companies being led by a female Chief Executive in 2018 (Tatenda Gwaambuka, 2015). More so, women like Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, who served as the 24th President of Liberia rewrote world history by becoming the first female President in Africa. Malawi’s Joyce Banda and Central African Republic’s Catherine Samba Panza followed soon after to further cement the rise of the modern woman in Africa. This is to say that the milestones of equality can be made reality.

On the **7th edition of the AFRICA CEO FORUM, in Kigali, distinguished women suggested various ways of breaking the glass ceiling. One of such women are** Jumoke Jagun-Dokunmu, who suggested that a good way of getting women into management board is by scouting and grooming them from an early stage in their careers, preparing them for the future. Fatou Aminata Lo also added by saying companies that involve women at the very top need to be recognized and lauded as a way of encouraging others.

The government also has an important role to play to make possible breaking of the glass ceiling. Bella Disu said, “For women to have a shot at joining executive boards, it starts with countries implementing policies which promote gender balance in leadership positions at the work place.”

Supporting the notion of gender balance was Tonye Cole, CEO of Nigeria’s Sahara Group and the only male on the panel, stating 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 (The African C, 2017). With the assistance of the government and backing of men like Tonye Cole, breaking the glass ceiling will definitely happen.

According to Dr. Cortney Baker, in her research and book, *‘*Unlimited: Conquering the Myth of the Glass Ceiling’, Baker’s research revealed four challenges that influence a woman’s career. Which are **family obligations, limited advancement** either as a result of age or need for further education, **gender-based discrimination,** and**lack of confidence.**

**The Mind-set of most women has also been identified as one of the challenges to breaking the glass ceiling. This is because m**ost women will wait decades to be approved by certain people or societies, they seek approval in whatever they do, and this mind-set follows them even in the workplace (Tatenda Rungisa, 2018).

### **Mixing Personal and Professional relationships also seems to be a challenge. As unprofessional relationships have prevented some women from getting to the top at their place of work.** (Tatenda Rungisa, 2018).

### In Africa, 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. Breaking the glass ceiling has been very much challenging considering the highly patriarchal African landscape. It is sad to know that some men still think they are doing women favours by implementing policies that promote equality.

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 dreams. 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 (Tatenda Gwaambuka, 2015). **Societal norms and pressure have misled African women to drop their dreams and follow the expectations of the society.**

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 fulfil societal expectations. At the end of it all, many young females have set marriage goals only and leaving out career goals.

Women need to break down the glass ceilings and multiple barriers and stereotypes in society (UN Women, 2017). Women have to be empowered, be resilient, live their passion and be focused, in other to bring solutions to the challenges of breaking the glass ceiling.

In conclusion, African governments should do more to achieve a more equitable state of affairs. There is a low levels of commitment towards achieving a gender blind society by the government. Taking a leaf from Europe, the Norwegian government put in place laws that go as far as enforcing the dissolution of companies that do not comply with the quotas set in place to maintain gender balance in publicly traded companies. This level of commitment is still lacking from many African countries.

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