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

WHAT IS GLASS CEILING ?

The glass ceiling metaphor has often been used to describe invisible barriers ("glass") through which women can see elite positions but cannot reach them ("ceiling").These barriers prevent large numbers of women and ethnic minorities from obtaining and securing the most powerful, prestigious and highest-grossing jobs in the workforce.Moreover, this effect prevents women from filling high-ranking positions and puts them at a disadvantage as potential candidates for advancement. 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 ‘stained glass ceiling’ refers to the same phenomena in religious organizations, the barriers that keep women from attaining leadership positions and authority in churches and other religious institutions.

This special issue focused on African ascended women as leaders in different African communities, in Trinidad and Tobago, and the United States. The papers provide both historical and contemporary views of African and African descended women serving as religious leaders. John S Mbiti, the pre-eminent African philosopher noted that women served as leaders within African Traditional Religion (Mbiti 1988). Similarly, there are women serving within both mainline and African instituted churches in African countries. However, women do continue to be underrepresented in the highest levels of religious leadership, in a phenomenon named the ‘stained glass ceiling’ not only in Africa but other countries around the world (Adams 2007; Sullins 2000)

IS BREAKING THE GLASS CELING POSSIBLE IN AFRICA ?

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.

1. Societal norms and pressure

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.

2. The Mind-set

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.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES OF BREAKING THE GLASS CELING

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 compels employers to grant any eligible employee, male or female, 12 weeks of unpaid leave within any 12 month period for, among other conditions, the birth or adoption of a child. This Act enables women to remain in the workforce following childbirth by allowing them a reasonable period of time to stay at home. Furthermore, the inclusion of men in the protections of the Act allows fathers to stay at home as well. If the family can afford to live on one income for long enough, the parents can alternate their leave, resulting in one parent or the other being at home for the first six months of the child’s life.

Legal challenges and a change in thinking have led many employers to offer additional leave time, some with pay, to new parents as well. Increasingly, companies are also offering additional perks to encourage employees of both genders to find a balance between work and home life. Some of these perks include flexible scheduling, the ability to bring a child to work for the day and even employer-run daycare facilities.

While the issue of the mommy track has largely been addressed, the problem of the glass ceiling effect remains. Women are no longer shunted into a completely different career track. Instead, they find themselves almost - but not quite - reaching the top ranks. The glass ceiling is so named because it is a point beyond which women cannot reach or a ceiling on their advancement. The ceiling is made of glass because the woman can see beyond. In today’s lawsuit-driven society, employers hesitate to create a written policy that blatantly discriminates against women.

Instead, many of the companies where a glass ceiling exists seem as stymied as the rest of us by how to effectively crack the barrier. It appears that long-standing biases and prejudices are now the cause of the glass ceiling.

Minority men are also affected by this phenomenon. Some Asian groups have taken to calling it the bamboo ceiling, as they are repeatedly passed over for promotions in favor of less-qualified white men.