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Question

1. What is Glass Ceiling? Is breaking the Glass Ceiling Possible in Africa and what are the Challenges for Women in the 21st Century?

The glass ceiling is a metaphor referring to an artificial barrier that prevents women and minorities from being promoted to managerial- and executive-level positions within an organization. The phrase glass ceiling is an invisible barrier to the professional advancement of women and minorities, barriers to high-paying careers, promotions, leadership positions, equal pay, and freedom from workplace discrimination. The phrase has been around since the 1970s and is now part of the cultural lexicon. Women and minorities face a long list of de facto practices that prevent their success in the workplace; occupational sorting, inequality of work share in the home, the motherhood penalty, covering as well as gender, race, and disability discrimination.

The United States Federal Glass Ceiling Commission defines the glass ceiling as "the unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements.

The glass ceiling concept was first 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. (In 2015, the Wall Street Journal itself reported that the concept goes back to the 1970s, quoting Gay Bryant, former editor of Working Woman magazine, and the concept may have originated with two women at Hewlett-Packard.) In more recent years the analysis of the glass ceiling has expanded to include issues preventing not only women from moving up but also minorities.

The first person said to use the term Glass Ceiling was Marilyn Loden during a 1978 speech at the Women's Exposition in New York. At the time, Loden 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. At the same time, according to the April 3, 2015, Wall Street Journal, completely independent of Loden, the term glass ceiling was coined in the spring of 1978 by Marianne Schriber and

Katherine Lawrence at Hewlett-Packard. The ceiling was defined as discriminatory promotion patterns where the written promotional policy is non-discriminatory, but in practice denies promotion to qualified females. Lawrence presented this at the annual Conference of the Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press at meeting the National Press.

Prior to the conference, NY Telephone had charged Loden with an analysis of this very problem, and was sure, based on her research, that lack of confidence or improper dress was not the impediment to women's careers. This "invisible barrier to advancement that people didn't want to recognize"? While fielding questions on that panel, she called it the glass ceiling.

Yes, the breaking of the glass ceiling can be possible in Africa, although 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 marginalized from attaining leadership positions in organizations despite the numerous efforts that have been made to achieve equality. 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 Executive.

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. A case in point is Zimbabwe's new constitution which provides for a mandatory quota of 30% women representation in the Parliament and Senate. It seems like a step in the right direction as women currently make up 35% Zimbabwe's two law-making houses. 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.

However, more than four decades after the first United Nations Conference on Women in 1975, the statistical picture for Nigerian women's participation at high levels of politics and decision-making remains bleak. In Countries like Nigeria, this still falls short of implementing

the gender mainstreaming initiative. While countries like Rwanda has surpassed the 35 percent women representation in government agenda, Nigerian women are still struggling to win political seats. In area of political appointment, women have been given key positions such as Ministers of Finance, Petroleum, Aviation, Education, among others. In electoral positions, women have competed with men although no woman has been elected as President or Governor of any State in Nigeria. Few women are seen participating and representing in political decision-making. Although the traditional role of women as homemakers is changing all over the world, only few Nigerian women have made their way up the leadership ladder.

There is no doubt that there are barriers or challenges that prevent women reaching top position or venturing into politics. For instance, the biggest challenge facing women in the United States today is patriarchy. This is especially evident in the realm of politics. Regardless of a woman's experience, education or abilities, patriarchy is a major barrier to women ascension to key political positions. Nigeria, just as many other societies, is a highly patriarchal society, where men as seen as the dominant powers and women as subordinate. Many African societies still maintain patterns of male privilege and power, and 'consciously' holds on to the beliefs of men to command and women is to obey (Osondu-Oti, 2017). Under such a male-centered system without a female face, women lack access to politics and decision-making and are highly under-represented at most levels of government. The power relations that have prevented women from political activism operate in many levels of society, from the most personal to the highly public. It has been argued that limited representation of women in Nigerian politics is because of men's dominance in the political party hierarchy, which places them at a position to influence party's internal politics in terms of selecting or electing candidates for elections, and political patronage. There is also the issue of culture and religion that pose great barriers to Nigerian women. The culture of socialization and the training system, which most men and women are, exposed from childhood place women in subordinate positions, where they have to play a second fiddle. In Nigerian culture, women are expected to manage the home fronts and men are expected to lead the public domain. In addition, Nigerian women, especially unmarried, are sometimes hindered, due to the 'success penalty' in the marriage market that comes with women career advancement (Osondu-Oti and Omole, 2016). The penalty women face in the marriage market for choosing another career such as difficulty in finding a husband contributes to women's limited participation in politics (Osondu-Oti and Omole, 2016). Due to the

society's great regard to marriage, especially for women, it becomes difficult for unmarried women to venture into politics because of the fear that men might stay away from them. Moreover, politics is seen as a 'dirty game' that only men could play, and women, both married and unmarried are to be excluded. One major factor attributed to the glass ceiling effect on women is the social role theory. This theory proposes that men and women according to the social roles given to them act the way their genders are stereotyped. The stereotypical views assigned to genders can act as social norms, which represent how we believe others should act as well as personal dispositions, which represent our beliefs in how we should act.

The lack of women in positions of power

One of the struggles that underlies all of our policy battles is the continued lack of women in positions of power. From corporate boardrooms, to the courts and political leadership around the world, the lack of women in senior positions continues to stymie progress on issues from pay to humanitarian aid to discrimination in all its forms. The sooner we understand that the lack of women in leadership roles holds back not only women, but all people, the sooner we will be able to advance society as a whole.

Sexism, racism and economic inequality

The extremely potent combination of sexism, racism and economic inequality this may seem like too broad an answer but it pretty much covers it on both a domestic and global front. All of the individual challenges we may be tempted to rank are symptomatic of these massive systemic power imbalances.

The lack of respect for caregiving

Women globally who are caregivers for children, parents, spouses, siblings or extended family members, have two full-time jobs, while trying to compete with men who have one. And over half of these women are the primary breadwinners in their households. We must come to see care work the work of investing in others through physical care, teaching, coaching, mentoring, connecting, advising and navigating as work that is every bit as hard, important and rewarding as the more individualist work that focuses us on investing in ourselves. We must value care monetarily, by paying far more for it through government and private investment, and socially, by raising the prestige of caregiving at

home and care careers (which are among the fastest growing job categories and relatively automation proof). In other words, we must come to see traditional “women’s work” as truly equal to traditional “men’s work.” Women in the world, particularly in developing and middle-income countries, face the far more elemental problem of still being considered property. Saudi Arabia’s system, for one, is open about this relationship, requiring women to get the permission of their male “guardian” to enroll in school, travel or take a job. But in many countries, women are still forced to be legally and socially subservient to men, with no means of gaining financial or social independence, much less equal agency. A global women’s movement must focus on creating legal and social conditions in which women and men have equal access to nutrition, health care, education, jobs and the ability to control their bodies and choose a mate. We will be making progress when parents around the world greet the birth of a girl with equal pleasure and expectation as the birth of a boy.

Navigating career and motherhood

As a working mother of two young children, I believe that the big challenge facing working women is navigating career opportunities while maximizing motherhood. The good news is that economic and political freedom for women of all races and socioeconomic backgrounds is the highest it’s ever been. Working moms do have the luxury of “leaning in” to either their careers or motherhood, but rarely both at once. Enabling a mother to re-enter the workforce where she left off should be commonplace. But solving the “on-ramp problem” for talented women who choose to pause their careers to prioritize family life still eludes us. The biggest challenge facing women internationally is the fundamental inequality of political and economic opportunity that the majority of women in the world face, but that countries take for granted. 21st century feminism should work to extend the human rights, political freedoms, economic opportunities enjoyed by women globally.

Increasing rates of maternal mortality

One of the greatest challenges women throughout the world face today are increasing rates of maternal mortality. According to the World Health Organization, 830 women die

every day from “preventable causes related to pregnancy.” These statistics are even more staggering in developing countries and among women of color in the United States. Black women in particular are the most affected, dying at a ratio of 25.1 deaths per 100,000. According to the Journal of Perinatal Education, the rates for black women did not improve between 1980 and 1990, and these rates are not much better today. Some believe such disparities occur because of a racially divided society in which black women experience higher levels of stress and marginalization causing many of their health concerns to go unrecognized. This leads to untimely and preventable deaths.

The economy is not working for women

Women are the primary or joint breadwinners for a majority of households. But right now, this economy and the government is not working for them and their families. Today, a woman earns 80 cents for every dollar a man earns, and the pay gap is even worse for black and Latina women. Wages are barely budging in countries but the cost of child care has gone up so much that it’s now more expensive than in-state college tuition in most states making it harder for women and men to work if they want to. Reproductive rights have been under relentless attack even though we know that access to safe abortion services is critical to the health and economic futures of millions of women. These core economic issues are a huge burden on women and their families. More young women go to college than men, but unequal pay makes it harder for them to pay back student loans. More women are minimum-wage workers than men, but the minimum wage no longer keeps a mom and her baby out of poverty.

Access to equal opportunity

Recently, a former executive director of the World Food Program who was often humbled by women in conflict or crisis situations who, when asked about their needs, wanted nothing for themselves but asked that we educate their daughters. Education, these mothers believed, would provide their daughters with opportunities, because of their gender, were denied. Unfortunately, even with adequate education, women across much of the world still lack equal access to opportunity. Despite decades of notable progress, at home and abroad, a reality in which opportunities are not defined by gender has yet to be universally achieved. Even more disconcerting, in too many places around

the globe, women exercising or even seeking their basic rights is interpreted as a direct and destabilizing challenge to existing power structures. Though some regimes in most countries are now trying to roll back the hard-won rights of women and girls. In different parts of the world, political forces threaten to erode the progress that we have made at both the national level and through landmark global agendas. Whether these forces succeed will depend on whether women leaders and advocates of today and tomorrow, and all who stand with them, recognize the urgency and peril of inaction. Mothers and fathers in many states are doing their part to demand quality education for their daughters. It is up to women leaders and advocates, including the newly minted congressional leaders, many of whom benefit from past collective effort and stand upon the shoulders of so many, to push and hold wide open the doors of opportunity. We have got to make this economy work for women and families all across this country. Right now, women and young girls everywhere face an immense range of challenges from the inability to access food, education and employment to the threat of gender-based violence. Their perspectives and experiences must help shape our collective future. If we want to forge the best solutions for expanding peace and security moving forward, then we need to give smart, dynamic and strong women a seat at the decision-making table around the world.

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