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WHAT IS GLASS CEILING? IS BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING POSSIBLE IN AFRICA AND WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

Glass ceiling is a reflection of gender roles and relations which give rise to and perpetuate inequalities between men and women in all walks of life. Glass ceiling is also a political term used to describe the unseen yet unbreakable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualification or achievements. Also, Glass Ceiling can be described as an impermeable and impenetrable barriers, which prevent women from reaching senior positions within organizations. The 'glass ceiling' is a form of gender discrimination in workplaces and this perspective denotes barriers which prevents upward movement of women to top positions. The glass ceiling is a popular metaphor for explaining the inability of many women to advance past a certain point in their occupations or professions.

Most people are under the impression that women have broken through the glass ceiling and it just does not exist anymore, but the truth is that women are still not succeeding in obtaining senior positions in the work force. Gender equality may have improved somewhat since the days of feminism, but many women will attest that they feel discriminated against, when trying to make it into the top positions within a company. In Africa, the society probably believes that glass ceiling is a myth. Many men believe this; until women see the discrimination for themselves, it's possible that they don't believe it either. Women tend to be limited by various factors, which are found in the system of the society such as patriarchy, structure of production and reproduction, among others. There are also barriers that prevent women from reaching top positions in offices. Although women in many parts of the world have made strides into politics in the 21st century but a remarkable breaking of the glass ceiling is yet to be witnessed. For instance, Scandinavian countries such as Sweden and Norway have achieved gender parity in women representation in politics. While a country like Rwanda is now a global leader in women representation in parliament, and South Africa has made remarkable progress towards gender parity, Nigeria still falls short of the gender equality initiatives by the international community. Glass ceiling applies to women as a group who are kept from advancing higher because they are women (Morrison et al. 1987).

However, the year 1999 marked the beginning of a new dawn as Nigeria returned to civilian rule after the demise of military rule (Ngara and Ayabam, 2013). The democratic dispensation afforded women great opportunity to struggle for their basic human rights, and speak against patriarchy and marginalization. Now, women are increasingly vying for positions in governments.

Although women have come to occupy 'some space' that democratically corresponds to them, their representation in politics is still insignificant, when compared to men. Presently, women have been appointed into key positions and have occupied (though few) key offices in Ministries, Parastatals and Government agencies. Women have headed key Ministries such as Finance, Education, Petroleum, Aviation, among others. The Beijing Platform for Action that seeks 30 percent share of decision-making positions for women is yet to be constitutionally addressed by many countries in Africa, including Nigeria. Some countries have subscribed to gender friendly policies that prescribe the use of quotas to close the gap in the underrepresentation of women in public positions. There is no doubt that quotas whether legally mandated through constitution or electoral process have led to dramatic change in women's political participation throughout the world. In Africa, Nigeria 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 the 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, some women have made their way up the leadership ladder. There is no doubt that there are barriers that prevent women reaching top position or venturing into politics in the 21st century.

Firstly, patriarchy is a major barrier to women ascension to key political positions. Many societies are highly patriarchal, and men are 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 belief that men is 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 (Eme et al, 2014). Secondly, the problem of religion and culture; In some African cultures, women are expected to manage the home fronts and men are expected to lead the public domain. Women have to deal with traditions and customs that condone not only discrimination, violence and maltreatment, but also trampled on their human rights. It is also believed that it is difficult for women to balance family and work duties and many employers find it difficult to give women work at higher positions in organizations.

Thirdly, Women's works are often domesticated with fewer benefits. Men often have the financial capability that is required to venture into politics compared to women. Women are not economically empowered to play the game of politics. In some African nations, to run a successful campaign requires huge sums of money. Also, another challenge for women in the 21st century is inadequate formal education or lack of access to education. The United Nations Development Programme (2006) pointed that women constitute 60 percent of the informal sector workers. It is a fact that some women are latecomers in acquiring formal education because of the then societal belief that women's education is a waste and ends in the kitchen. Only few women had the opportunity to acquire formal education at independence, and such few either decided to take the bull by the horn or came from an enlightened family. It is not until the

late 20th century that more women were seen gaining diploma certificates and university degrees. The educational attainment of women widened their horizon and enabled them seek for jobs and participation in key decision-making as well as politics. Nonetheless, young girls in Northern Nigeria still do not have adequate access to formal education, as it has not been totally accepted and early marriage still thrives. Although many women groups have been engaging in sensitization of the people on the importance of female education, lack of adequate formal education remains an impediment.

Lastly, the challenges for women in the 21st century includes the fact that many women are now considering being their own bosses, instead of trying to make it up the corporate ladder. The idea behind women starting their own entrepreneurial venture means that they are in control and can be successful in their own right. More women than men seem to have an interest in working for themselves. Female business people probably feel that the system does not support them. When it is time to juggle family and career, the workplace tends to penalize women for that. Many stay-at-home mums are looking at ways to build a business from home, and if successful, decline the return to the workforce. The risks that go with starting your own business seem to be worth it for women, given what they have to put up with in the workplace.

Those who say that the glass ceiling does not exist anymore are wrong. While career choices for women have improved, society has a long way to go before that glass ceiling is shattered. Therefore, given the progress made by other countries of the world, gender mainstreaming as advocated by the United Nations is a necessary approach for African governments to help women break the glass ceiling. The governments must make sure that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated.

In Africa, Rwanda's exemplary achievement of gender equality in Parliament cannot be overlooked. While countries of the world continue to strive towards gender equality, some nations' women's representation is politics is still insignificant. Also, while Nigerian women have been appointed to head key political offices, their larger participation and representation in electoral politics have been hindered by glass ceiling barriers such as patriarchy, structure of production and reproduction, culture and religion, inadequate formal education, success penalty and lack of legal backings that support equality in the country's Constitution. Nigeria has not adopted the use of quotas that helped some countries (Rwanda, Norway, Sweden, Argentina etc.) to achieve gender parity. In a changing world, and with consistent clamor for gender equality at the United Nations, it is believed that the glass ceiling barriers can only be a bridge (that must be crossed), but not a barricade to women's success and progress. Thus, to join the moving train of gender equality advocates and to support women to break the glass ceiling, African government should adopt the use of quotas in the constitution in order to ensure equal representation of men and women in politics. In addition, those restrictive and harsh cultures that trample on the rights of women (for example, cultures and traditions that encourage girl-child marriage) should be abolished by the government, so that women can enjoy their full fundamental human rights, and the glass ceiling will be totally broken.

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