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**WHAT IS GLASS CEILING? IS BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING POSSIBLE IN AFRICA AND WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?**

1. **What is Glass Ceiling?**

According to Merriam Webster glass ceiling is an intangible barrier within a hierarchy that prevents women or minorities from obtaining upper-level positions.

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 continued to be denied from attaining leadership positions in organizations 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. A lot of 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. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the country’s president rewrote world history by becoming the first female president in Africa. Only three countries 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. People still make noise because it is huge temperament considering the highly patriarchal African landscape.

1. **Is breaking the glass ceiling possible in Africa?**

It is very possible to break the glass ceiling in Africa inasmuch as the causes (factors that promote it) are checked. In the same token, the possibility would be hard if the factors are allowed to thrive. Individual factors for example; if women begin to see themselves as not only meant to play the role of house wives, who only cook for the family, do chores and satisfy the sexual gratification of their husbands, but self-determined, strong resilience, and self –sufficient, then society will begin to accord them the respect they deserve. That way, glass ceiling will be broken to the barest minimum.

Claudette Colvin and Rosa Louise McCauley Park in 1955 were arrested for the claims of civil disobedience for refusing to give their seats to white passengers. They showed high self -esteem as civil right activists who fought racial segregation in the United States. Their action caused the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955, which was a political and social protest campaign against the policy of racial segregation on the public transit system of Montgomery, Alabama. Furthermore, the Aba women’s riot of 1929 is a clear example of how women from the East (Ibibio, Andoni, Orgoni, Bonny, Opobo and Igbo) in the British Colonial Nigeria expressed their dismay for not being allowed to have significant role in government. The riot was to redress the social, political and economic anomalies in the country. Their action forced some warrant chiefs to resign, Native Courts were destroyed. It payed off for the women, as in 1930 warrant chief system was abolished and women were appointed to the native court system. Also, if governmental factors should be considered, the 35% affirmative action for women in public governance in Nigeria is a right step in the right direction, but it failed to be passed into law because only 49 senators out of 96 that were present in the 8th  in July 2017 voted for the proposal. If only 73 voted for it, it would have been possible. For the bill to become a law. However, a lot of women rights groups, associations, International Federation of Women Lawyers are pushing relentlessly to ensure it is achieved. Other factors that when addressed would lead to the possibility of breaking the glass ceiling include family factors, cultural factors and organizational factors.

In general, yes it is possible to break the glass ceiling phenomenon in Africa, if cultural norms and values change, individual perception change, organizational politics are improved, family orientations are reconsidered and government change and enforce our laws. It is not possible on the other hand if we allow sleeping dog to lie by letting the status quo continue to have a firm grip on women’s marginalization and relegation to nothingness or inferiority.

1. **What are the Challenges**

In the higher education sphere, we see the glass ceiling factor being exacerbated on female academicians to the extent they barely reach the highest position in higher education institutions. The situation can be observed in gender imbalance among senior university academics, lack or inadequate number of women in vice-chancellor positions across the globe. Furthermore, the male guardianship policy (Mahram) in Saudi Arabia prevents women from achieving higher heights in education. Under Saudi law, all females must have a male guardian, typically a father, brother, husband or uncle (*mahram*), but in 2019 this law was partially amended to exclude women over 21 years old from having a male guardian.Girls and women were forbidden from traveling, conducting official business, or undergoing certain medical procedures without permission from their male guardians.

On a general note, the glass ceiling suppresses initiative and interest for organizational leadership and creating inferiority complex in women. This has denied women the opportunity to express their potentials, thereby confining them to only lower or dead-end levels within institutions and further reducing possibilities for advancement in all works of life.

Young girls will find it dificult to take men to be their model, because it is easier to take someone as a model who is of the same sex as one is. Therefore, the glass ceiling leads to lack of high profile women role models for young girls and subordinates female workers.