

PART II

IS THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN HARMONY WITH THE CONCEPT OF PARITY DEMOCRACY?

The "Glass Ceiling" over Women's Professional Advancement in Contemporary Societies: A Serious Obstacle in Achieving Democratic Parity

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Summary

The purpose of the paper is to discuss various aspects of the problem of the "glass ceiling" which is a barrier over women's professional advancement and keeps them in the lower and middle levels of the hierarchical ladders. This problem creates serious consequences not only for those gifted women who are prevented from advancing to higher positions and fully utilise their capabilities but also for society as a whole.

One of the objectives of the paper is to identify and analyse the factors and conditions that are behind the problem of the "glass ceiling". Special attention is given to the mechanisms through which power is obtained, maintained and exercised within various organisations and to the inability of women to use these mechanisms. According to the paper, the domination of large organisations by a set of beliefs, values and practices that reflect the male culture and interests creates an environment inimical to women's advancement.

Several other problems that career women within various organisations have to face are discussed and analysed. The conclusion is reached that very frequently women are caught in a vicious circle: They have difficulty in advancing to top positions because they cannot generate power and they cannot build up the networks to generate such power because they are not in the right positions, nor are they expected to be in positions that will give them any power in the future.

The paper includes also a discussion of the reasons why it is in the interests of various organisations and of society

as a whole to break the "glass ceiling". It is concluded that the exclusion of women from top positions has as a result reduced efficiency in the use of human resources and has unfavourable implications and costs for both the organisations involved and society as a whole.

The measures and strategies that can be used to reduce the obstacles to women's advancement is another topic which is discussed extensively in the paper. In this regard several recommendations are made for steps that should be taken before the introduction of any measures to correct the situation. The conclusion of this section is that the main objective in the formulation of specific policy measures to break the "glass ceiling" should be to change the organisational environment and the rules of the game in a way that will facilitate the application of the principle of equal opportunities for all and not to secure positions for women who may not deserve them. A basic goal of any plan to break the "glass ceiling" should be the establishment of conditions that will allow the formation of a minimum mass of women in the higher levels of the hierarchical ladders within a relatively short period of time. This can generate a self-sustained process that gradually can eliminate the problem of the "glass ceiling" and the need for the continuation of positive-action policies in the future.

In an effort to break the "glass ceiling" that prevents women from reaching top positions the government of a country can and should play a very important role. However, the governments of many

countries of the world, instead of providing help in this direction, set a bad example by maintaining the horizontal and vertical segregation of women in the civil service in similar ways to the private sector and by by-passing well-qualified women when making political appointments.

The general conclusion from the paper is that a society cannot be considered democratic when one half of its members face systemic obstacles that restrict their opportunities to participate in decision-making centers and utilise their talents and abilities in the best possible way. In order for political democracy to exist in a country, there must be economic democracy. This can be assured only if the principle of equality of opportunities for all, men and women, prevails. Economic democracy does not mean that all people should have the same economic power. This cannot be aimed at since individuals have different talents and qualifications and different work-leisure preferences. Economic democracy means that all people have the same opportunities to utilise their natural and acquired abilities and assume the roles in economic life that they deserve. With the existence of a "glass ceiling", women do not have this privilege.

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