



WOMEN

AT WORK INITIATIVES:

THE PUSH

FOR EQUALITY



1. INTRODUCTION



The just concluded ILO Conference held at Geneva, Switzerland between 28th May and 8th June, 2018 focused on people related issues with numerous implications for the practice of Human Resource Management.

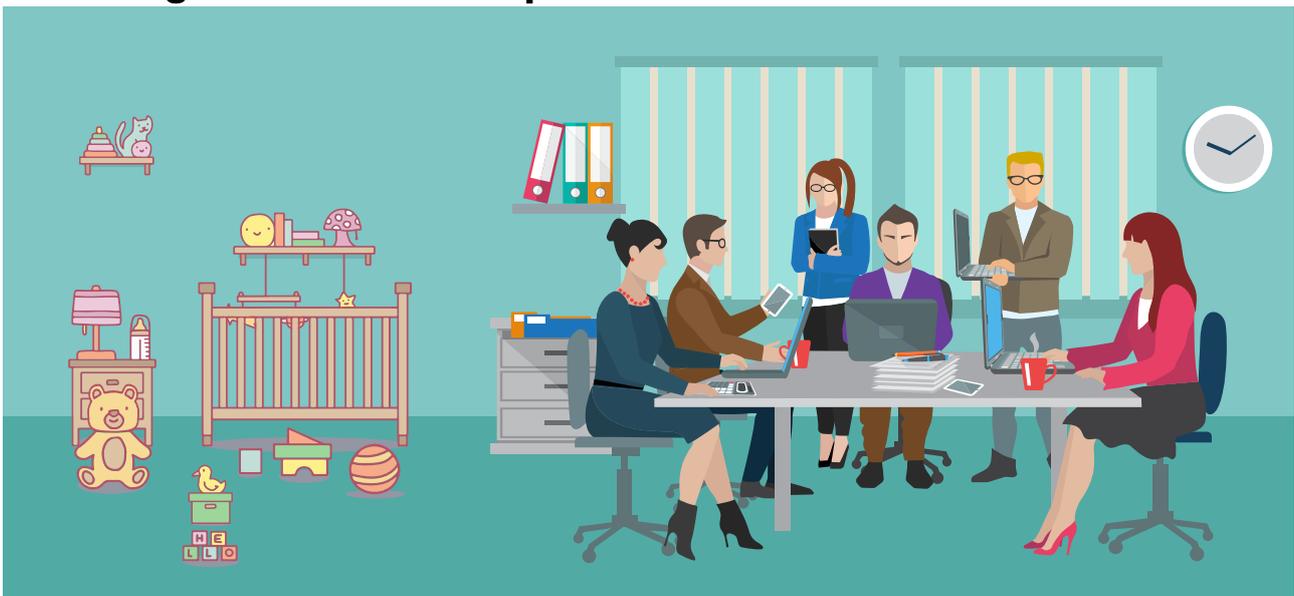
The speech from the Minister of Labour & Employment, Dr. Chris Ngige revealed the government's effort towards promoting decent work in the country. The main focus of Ngige's speech centres around **'WOMEN AT WORK INITIATIVES: THE PUSH FOR EQUALITY'**.

This paper aims at projecting and analyzing some of the key points from the Minister's speech at the conference.

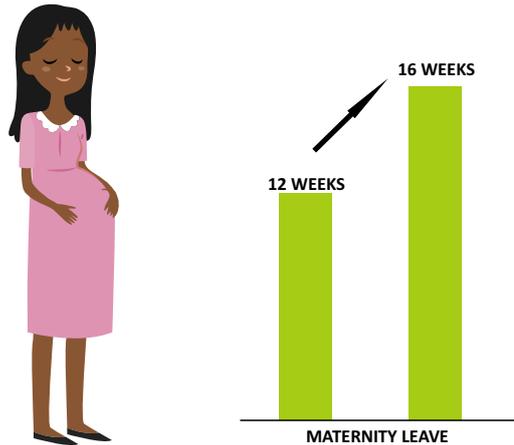
2. KEY ISSUES

Senator Ngige mentioned several initiatives that the Nigerian government has embarked on to promote 'Decent Work' agenda. They include (amongst others):

– Providing crèches at the workplace



- Increase In Maternity Leave From 12 Weeks to 16 Weeks In The Public Service



- Employers of Labour Are Barred From Removing Women From Work Due To Their Marital or Maternity Status



- Abeyance of Disciplinary Proceedings Against Female Staff On Maternity Leave



- Reformed Policies & Regulations Relating to Contract Staffing & Labour Casualization Which Affects Most Women

All the above listed issues have implications for the practice of human resource management as stated in the next section of this paper.

3. IMPLICATIONS FOR HR BUSINESS

Although the ratification of some of these initiatives are yet to be communicated, HR practitioners need to be proactive in putting in place measures to handle them when they become binding on organisations.

A. Providing Creches at Workplace

Symptoms such as lateness, reduced concentration and absenteeism (which can hinder productivity) among nursing mothers may be triggered by absence of crèches in their organisations. Although there will be cost implications for putting a creche in place, HR can partner with other organizations around to pull resources together, to achieve this objective under resource constraint.



B. Increase In Maternity Leave From 12 Weeks To 16 Weeks In The Public Service

Though the speech reflects that it will take effect in the public service, however when backed up with legislation, it will be binding on the private sector.

Therefore, HR practitioners should take proactive measures by putting in place different options that will take care of this possibility without affecting productivity negatively. The following are suggested:

– Job Sharing

Job sharing model allows two persons to share a job with the pay associating with the job shared between the individuals. Ideally, HR should be sensitive to gender balance when job sharing a role. When one party is on maternity leave, the other person can be fully engaged. This has lots of advantages over provision of a temporary cover for the role:

- No significant cost of training of the maternity cover is involved
- No productivity loss associating with catching up period of the maternity cover
- Brand protection is assured
- Just half extra pay is required



– Flexible Work Options



In today's gig economy, an employee's performance is not directly tied to the number of hours spent at work; therefore, flexible work options can be explored to work around possible impacts of maternity leave and child nursing on organisations.

Where health conditions permits, pregnant women and nursing mothers can be given some incentives that will trigger their willingness to work at their own preferred time. This will:

- Increase the employee's loyalty to the organisation

- Keep the employee abreast of all developments relating to her job while on maternity leave.

With this, no productivity loss associating with the catch up period of the employee upon resumption.

– Ad-hoc Team on Special Assignment

In organisations with multidimensional workforce, people can be drawn from different departments to handle some of the key deliverables on the table of the person on maternity leave. The ad-hoc team should be given incentives to induce optimal performance



C. Barring Employers From Removing Women From Work Due To Their Marital or Maternity Status

Increasingly, there are allegations from women that marital and maternity status have put women at disadvantaged positions in the hands of some employers of labour. **Does the new provision make married or pregnant women untouchable when necessary? What should HR do to ensure that the multiplier effect of this provision does not promote gender inequality in the labour market?**

Below are the suggestions for navigating through the provision with minimal negative implications on the business:

- A robust performance management system should be put in place with proper documentation of performance and performance improvement plan (PIP) for every employee.
- At least three (3) consecutive performance management cycles with appraisal reports made available for the period under review. With this, if circumstances warrant a woman's forceful exit, there would be evidences to defend organisations' positions in case of litigations.
- Research has shown that women are better managers at work, therefore, measures that will promote their exclusion will do organisations more harms than good. HR should ensure that women are represented in the workforce, thus promoting diversity and inclusion for the organisation.

D. Abeyance of Disciplinary Proceedings Against Female Staff on Maternity Leave

When circumstances warrant disciplinary actions against women (after due diligence), the process must be brought to a conclusive stage before the due date for the maternity leave, otherwise, **the action must wait till after the maternity leave**, provided there are evidences to show that such actions cannot be linked to the maternity leave.

E. Reformed Policies and Regulations Relating To Contract Staffing And Labour Casualization Which Affects Most Women

The business models of some organisations makes contract staffing and labour casualisation almost inevitable, provided that Section 7 (1) and (2) of the Nigerian Labour Act are taken into consideration. Prior to the reformed policies and regulations on contract staffing and labour casualisation, where the use of outsourcing firms are involved, HR should ensure that:

- The integrity of the chosen outsourcing company is tested and trusted
- Contract with the outsourcing company conveys unambiguous meaning of the organisation's core values to the outsourcing company
- Regularly check the compliance level of the outsourcing firm on statutory provisions