



FEDERAL
MINISTRY
OF HEALTH

MATERNITY PROTECTIONS IN NIGERIA:

An investment in a healthier, productive workforce, and a stronger economy

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Breastfeeding is essential: it saves lives, improves women's and children's health, and boosts intelligence and lifelong productivity.¹ Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life without water, infant formula, or any other liquid or food maximizes these benefits. Yet millions of Nigerian mothers and infants are missing out on the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding—**25 percent or less of children under six months of age in Nigeria are exclusively breastfed.**^{2,3}

Returning to work before six months is a key barrier to exclusive breastfeeding; limited or nonexistent maternity protection policies prevent many women from having the time and space to breastfeed exclusively.

Given that nearly half of all women in Nigeria are part of the labour force and a substantial number are in the formal workforce, improving maternity protections in Nigeria, such as extending paid maternity leave and workplace support for breastfeeding, could help boost the low rates of exclusive breastfeeding.^{4,5} Comprehensive maternity protections will help Nigerian mothers provide their infants with the very best start to life—leading to improved health, social and economic outcomes for Nigeria.

The 2017 UNICEF report, *Early Moments Matter for Every Child*,⁶ outlines key policies needed to support infants' healthy development, including six months of paid maternity leave. The International Labour (ILO) Convention No. 183 and Recommendation No. 191 also recommend that women are provided with daily breaks or a reduction of work hours to breastfeed their children, and that provisions are made for the establishment of facilities for breastfeeding under adequate hygienic conditions at or near the workplace.⁴

MATERNITY PROTECTIONS BENEFIT FAMILIES AND EMPLOYERS

- **Extended maternity leave is directly associated with reductions in child mortality in low- and middle-income countries.** New research analyzed data from 300,000 live births in 20 low- and middle-income countries, including Nigeria, and found that longer maternity leave is associated with lower infant mortality.⁷
- **Mothers' mental and physical health is improved, benefitting them and their families.** Mothers who are able to take paid maternity leave are shown to have better mental and physical health.⁸
- **Employers have more productive and loyal employees.** When a mother is supported through paid maternity leave and the existence of breastfeeding facilities, turnover and absenteeism are reduced while productivity at work increases.⁹ Employees that take advantage of lactation programmes report higher job satisfaction, feel more positive about the company, worry less about family concerns on the job and intend to make the company their long-term employer.⁹
- **Optimal breastfeeding practices reduce healthcare expenditures.** The government, employers, and other providers of health services can accrue annual savings of hundreds of thousands of dollars in health care expenditures, with fewer prescriptions and hospitalizations.^{11,12} *The Lancet* Breastfeeding Series conducted meta-data analysis on the relative lower cognitive ability associated with not breastfeeding. Low breastfeeding rates, alternatively, are associated with a loss of Gross National Income (GNI) estimated at 0.06 percent, or \$150 million (USD), in Nigeria annually.^{1,12}

MATERNITY PROTECTIONS IN NIGERIA:

Progress Is Underway, But More Work Is Needed



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Since the 2009 Nigerian Labour law, female public-sector employees have been granted 16 weeks of maternity leave at full pay, and two hours off-duty every day once back to work to breastfeed or express breastmilk. While the Public Service Rules have been revised to include the 16-week maternity leave for public sector employees, the law itself has not been revised.¹² In 2014, the Lagos State government increased maternity leave for its public-sector employees from three months to six months with full pay, and approved a 10-day paternity leave for male civil servants.

The *Abuja Breastfeeding Declaration*, unveiled and signed at a high-level policy dialogue in June 2016, commits Nigeria to prioritizing the key policy and programme actions as outlined in *The Lancet Breastfeeding Series*. At the event, the Ministers of


Health and Labour voiced their support for six months paid maternity leave in Nigeria.

Since then, Ekiti and Enugu States have declared a six month maternity leave for female civil servants. Though important advancements, these recent maternity leave extensions pertain only to women in the public sector—excluding the vast majority of working, nursing mothers in the private sectors.

THE ROLE OF POLICY MAKERS AND EMPLOYERS IN SUPPORTING MATERNITY PROTECTIONS

Policy makers at the federal and state level, private sector employers and Labour Unions can help improve exclusive breastfeeding rates by:

- Providing breastfeeding-friendly workplaces in the public and private sector that support breastfeeding breaks, facilities such as breastfeeding rooms, on-site crèches, and flexible work hours;
- Building on the ILO's minimum standard by providing six months maternity leave at full pay to all breastfeeding mothers;
- Offering incentives like tax breaks to employers who implement baby friendly workplaces including six months maternity leave;
- Strengthening monitoring and enforcement mechanisms of maternity leave and child care policies by Ministries of Labour and Productivity and Labour Unions; and
- Guaranteeing job security for mothers upon returning from maternity leave.



TOGETHER, WE CAN ENSURE THAT ALL MOTHERS AND FAMILIES HAVE THE SUPPORT THEY NEED FOR OPTIMAL HEALTH AND PRODUCTIVITY.

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