

WABA statement for Labour Day 2017

Achieving gender equality by sharing the care work– *Is parental leave legislation the only solution?*

There is no country in the world where men and boys share the unpaid domestic and care work equally with women and girls¹. Globally, women and girls spend more than double the time on unpaid care work than men and boys. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) reports that the unequal distribution of unpaid care and household work between women and men is an important factor that creates gender inequalities in the workplace. More women are entering the workforce and are forced to juggle between care work and paid work. Maternity leave is a part of maternity protection that acts as both legal and social recognition of the contribution of a woman when she exercises her sexual and reproductive health rights by having children. A recent study in 2016 showed that paid and extended maternity leave may help improve infant survival². Women's care burden can impede their access to decent work and economic stability. Support to care work is extremely important to women's economic empowerment. Gender equitable social protection measures encompassing maternity protection, paternity and paid parental leave are measures that will empower parents and carers to facilitate the integration of care (includes breastfeeding) and other work. For example, one of the main reasons why women stop breastfeeding is their return to work due to the lack of adequate maternity leave and workplace lactation support. Access to equal, paid, non-transferable parental leave for both men and women supports recognition and redistribution of care work. Parental leave made available to both parents is also gender neutral, which protects both parents from discrimination and gives fathers the opportunity of increasing their involvement with the care of their children. Involved and non-violent fatherhood allows girls and women to achieve their full potential and also makes men and families happier and healthier¹.

Gender equality – a basis for all development

The UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Involvement and integration of men's family lives into their working lives can simultaneously support women's reproductive and care responsibilities which is necessary to achieve gender equality at home, in the workplace and in society.

Addressing this goal, WABA and its' partners are working towards a campaign to empower parents. The Empowering Parents Campaign (EPC)⁴ calls for a multi-pronged approach in addressing contemporary challenges regarding implementation of maternity protection, parental protection and other gender equitable measures for both formal and informal sectors workers. The EPC also aims to promote a) gender equitable parental leave policies and legislation at national level, b) positive attitudinal changes and social norms c) social and parent-family work policies that are more inclusive and supportive of gender equality.

Gender equitable social protection

The key to an equitable social protection for all includes legislation, positive attitudinal change and supportive work policies. This can be achieved through an effective partnership between the tripartite stakeholders (governments, employers, trade unions) and civil society organisations to increase the supply of and demand for gender equitable social protection that will lay a foundation for gender equitable social protection measures such as paid parental leave. This will be achieved by promoting the ratification, implementation and monitoring of the ILO Maternity Protection Convention (C183) and other international conventions and standards into national law and practice (NLP). Working with employers who are responsible for creating and implementing parent-friendly work policies will also benefit all workers and contribute to the goal. Partnerships with trade unions to create demand for gender equitable social protection by supporting and informing workers of their rights, including social security policies and monitoring the implementation of NLPs will also ensure success of the EPC.

“Viet Nam’s success in legislating six months of paid maternity leave and other supportive workplace policies is helping to foster an enabling environment for mothers to exclusively breastfeed for six months after delivery and continue breastfeeding for two years or beyond. Fathers in Viet Nam can also take 14 days of leave which is an

*important step towards greater gender equity at home and in the workplace – I am confident that other ASEAN countries will adopt similar **paid parental leave legislation** to invest in the health of the next generation and the competitiveness of the future workforce.”*

Roger Mathisen, Program Director, Alive and Thrive, South-East Asia

*“In a global multinational company (MNC) that delivers information, insight and analytics for all key technology sectors, inclusive parental protection policies play an important role. A co-support structure is very important when having a family as this will reduce the issue of single burden amongst family members. Blindly mandating and regulating implementation actions via law will not result in **attitudinal change**. Real change will be seen when both employer and employee feel and understand the importance of the parental protection policies to all. **We need to have change agents at all levels.**”*

Vimalaswari Ramasamy, Managing Director, IHS Markit Center of Excellence, Malaysia

*“In Zimbabwe, the door-to-door maternity protection campaign involving 26 companies resulted in positive outcomes. Policies that involve support, time, education and place are important in creating **parent-friendly workplaces** that will also improve breastfeeding rates among working women. Having a policy clarifies procedures, communicates support, and assures sustainability.”*

Dexter Chagwena, Founder of Nutri@ctive, Zimbabwe

Walk the talk with WABA!

There are many things that we can do together. Join us to:

- Advocate to ensure that maternity, paternity and parental protection measures are included as part of social protection coverage and entitlements at national level.
- Mobilise public awareness on parental social protection in order to eliminate barriers to gender equality.
- Build capacity and disseminate information related to parent-friendly work policies and support at the workplace.

On Labour Day 2017, WABA and partners call upon all stakeholders to join the Empowering Parents Campaign that will enhance workers' rights, health and survival and lead to achieving greater gender equality.

For more information, email:

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1. *State of the World's Fathers 2015 report*

2. *Increased Duration of Paid Maternity Leave Lowers Infant Mortality in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Quasi-Experimental Study, 2016, Arijit Nandi et.al.*

3. <http://men-care.org/what-we-do/advocacy/paid-parental-leave/>

4. <http://waba.org.my/gbpf/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Empowering-Parents-Campaign-Draft-GBPF-2016.pdf>