



Working Mothers

Guide



AfriLabs

Introduction

AfriLabs is the largest pan-African network of over 400 technology and Innovation hubs across 52 African countries. AfriLabs was founded in 2011 to build a community around rapidly emerging tech hubs and innovation spaces that serve as meeting points and communities for developers, entrepreneurs, and investors.

We believe that supporting the development of the African technology and innovation ecosystem enables Africa to participate in the global knowledge and innovation market place thereby stimulating economic growth. Over the years, the organization has been dedicated to developing the capacity of youths and women through various programmes.

Background

As the African Tech and Innovation ecosystem matures the workforce within it matures alongside it. This means that young working mothers now make up a large percentage of the workforce. So it goes without saying that understanding their needs and career goals are an important aspect of doing business today. Working mothers need more than a parental leave policy that lets them stay home (with pay) for a few weeks after the baby comes home. Working mothers want and need policies that are institutionalised to encourage a healthy work-life balance.

Within the African technology and innovation ecosystem, working mothers are usually more tasked than their colleagues with no children as they have to balance their work home life with little or no time allocated to their children. New mothers have a hard time learning to balance their new roles and their jobs with insufficient time to bond with the newborns, leaving mothers to make the hard decisions about going back to work or relinquishing and extinguishing their careers. As such, we believe that it is important to have a standard guide in which members of the AfriLabs community and beyond can adopt. This will provide hubs and organizations with sufficient information and structures to put in place to accommodate new "Moms and Dads".

Therefore, with the adoption of this guide by hubs and organizations, there will be a gradual shift towards employing more parents, especially women, into the technology and innovation ecosystem and also giving already established women the opportunity to have a balance between family and work life.

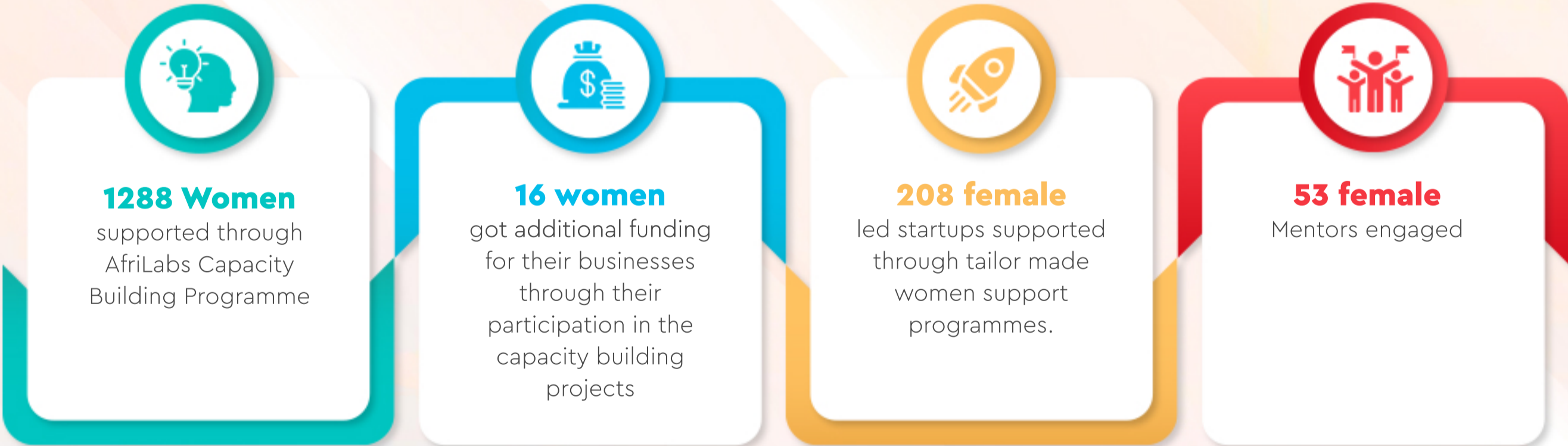




As an organization, AfriLabs understands the influence and impact which women can have on the technology ecosystem. According to UNESCO, women in the tech industry constitute **only 28% of professionals** in the sector worldwide and **just 30% in Sub-Saharan Africa**. Therefore, there is an untapped gold mine laden with potential yet to be explored within the tech ecosystem.


At AfriLabs, several women-focused initiatives have been launched since the organization began in 2011, amongst them include the AfriLabs Capacity Building Programme where **7 Women Support Projects** were carried out across **7 African countries**.

Impact Of AfriLabs Capacity Building Awards



Other award categories also ensured gender balance in their programmes

Fig1.1: Impact of AfriLabs Capacity Building Program



Within the African tech ecosystem, conversations around parental leave are rarely had, but to effectively grow, these conversations must take center stage as they have a psychological effect on employees and stakeholders within the ecosystem regardless of gender. This document aims to serve as a guide on parental leave and workplace culture. While laying emphasis on Parental Leave, it shall also explore ways in which working mothers can be attracted into the African technology ecosystem.





PARENTAL LEAVE

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines parental leave as "employment-protected leave of absence for employed parents." However, the specific application of parental leave varies from country to country.

In some countries, parental leave is synonymous with maternity and paternity leave and follows the same guidelines and principles.

Therefore, most African countries have the same labour laws for Parental leave and Paternity/Maternity leave.

What is Maternity Leave

Maternity Leave is a type of leave that allows working mothers to take a short break before and after giving birth to a new child. In some organizations, maternity leave can be paid and while in some it might not. At AfriLabs, we understand that the period in which a mother gives birth is filled with uncertainties and therefore, we ensure that our Staff are paid in full during the period. We recommend and acknowledge that some organizations might not have the financial capabilities to adhere to this. Therefore, we are recommending that at **least 60%** of the Mother's salary (every month) be paid during this leave.

The purpose of this leave is to ensure that new mothers are given sufficient time to give birth, recover, bond, establish a routine and take care of the baby before returning to work.

The following requirements are recommended to organizations to aid in the application for maternity leave.



A clear statement of employee length of contract within employment



Clearly set out KPIs to be achieved before Maternity leave is due



Adequate compensation and reward system



Proof of pregnancy



The length of Maternity Leave is dependent on the country, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s Maternity Protection Convention mandates a minimum leave period of 14 weeks (with cash benefit) but recommends leave of at least 18 weeks. At AfriLabs, full-time female employees are eligible for 90 consecutive days of paid maternity leave. To officially access this, a request for maternity leave must be in writing, and accompanied by a certificate from a qualified medical officer or midwife, stating that the employee's confinement will likely take place within six (6) weeks of the date on the certificate. While on maternity leave, the employee will be paid full salary and benefits.

In a situation in which the employee requires additional time beyond the allowed maternity leave, she may use her annual leave or may request unpaid leave. Sick leave may be requested if the absence is medically necessary. The employee's supervisor may require her to provide documentation to prove she is eligible for supplemental maternity leave. We encourage employees to notify their supervisor as soon as they are pregnant for proper planning ahead of time off. In the event of termination of employment or resignation for any reason, no payment will be made to the employee for any unused maternity leave. Unused maternity leave can not be carried over into the new fiscal year.

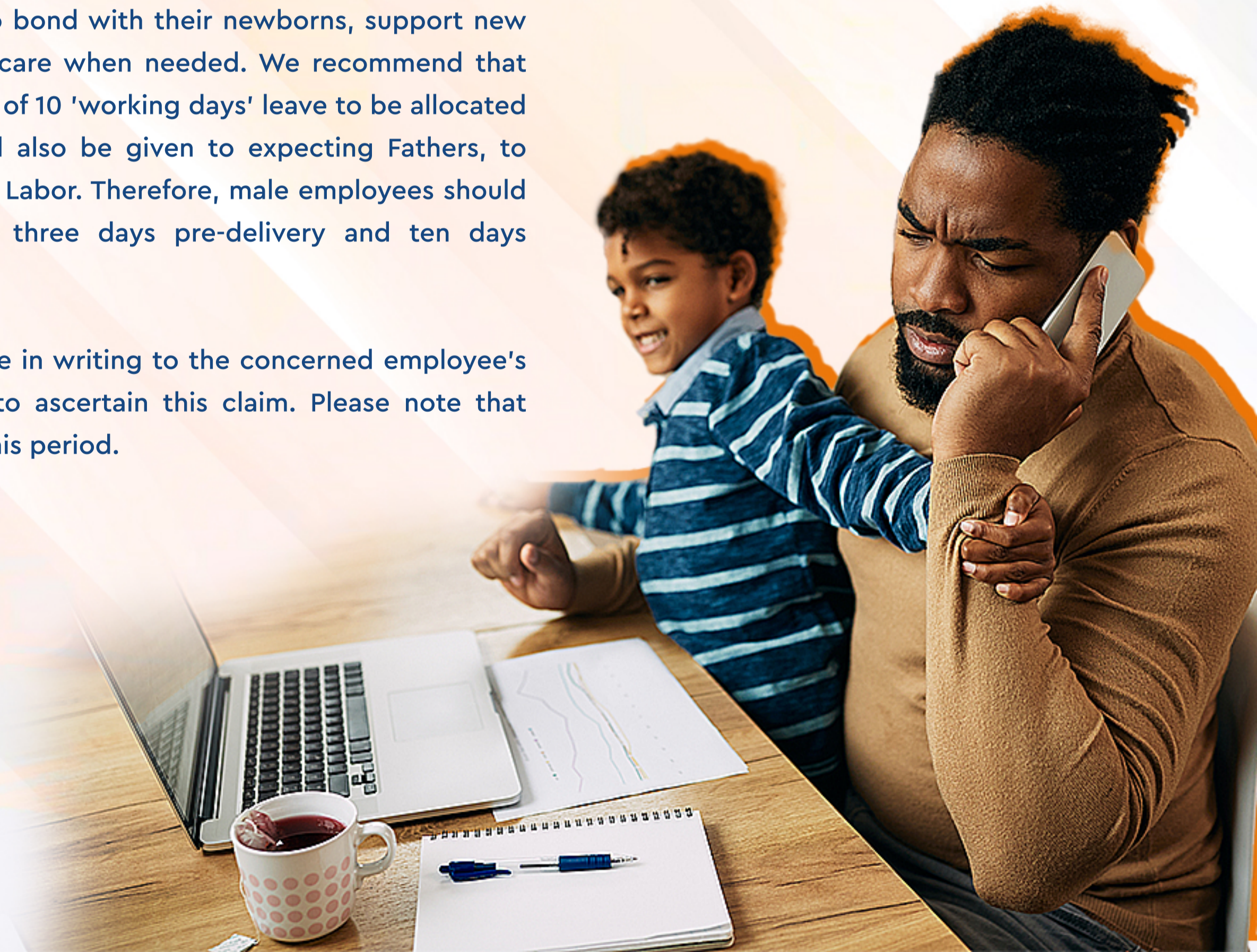
NB: *All full-time female employees are entitled to a maternity Gift and periodic maternity leave at an interval of 24 months.*

What is

■ Paternity Leave

For many institutions, Paternity Leave is not recognized and considered essential, and in reality, this is the complete opposite. Fathers need time to bond with their newborns, support new mothers and also need time to provide extensive care when needed. We recommend that employees should be eligible for at least a minimum of 10 'working days' leave to be allocated as paternity leave. Additionally, a few days should also be given to expecting Fathers, to provide support to the mother during the period of Labor. Therefore, male employees should be entitled to a maximum of 13 working days; three days pre-delivery and ten days post-delivery.

To access this, a request for paternity leave must be in writing to the concerned employee's supervisor with supporting requirements needed to ascertain this claim. Please note that employees should be paid their full salaries during this period.



The purpose of this leave is to ensure that male staff understand the relevance/role of being a new father, and ensure that they can maintain a healthy work/ personal life balance. While it can be argued that for large organizations, male staff can be able to take up to 13 days without necessarily affecting the balance of the organization, it cannot be said for smaller organizations.

Therefore, to avoid a collapse in performance, necessary structures can be implemented.

This includes:



Clearly set out application process for Paternity leave to be approved.



Clearly set out KPIs that need to be completed to be eligible for anytime off allocations.



Good reporting and performance analysis system



Comprehensive handover system

NB: All full-time male employees are entitled to a paternity Gift



Ways to attract and support working mothers

It is often the case that due to unfavourable working structures new mothers, decide to relinquish their job roles after birth or at the conclusion of their maternity leave. This leads to a loss to the organisation, a decline in the ecosystem's workforce as well as the percentage of women gainfully employed on the continent. However, there are several recommended structures which can be implemented to prevent this, these include but are not limited to:



Establish an enabling work culture

Every organization has a culture it embraces, at AfriLabs we adopt two cultures, namely; clan culture and hierarchy culture. The Clan culture was adopted due to the fact that we are a community of innovation hubs across several African countries. Therefore, the aim of this culture is to ensure that hubs work collaboratively by making sure that all innovation hubs within the community are treated as equals and feel like equals which ensures that they are able to provide honest and open feedback on all conversations. Internally the hierarchy culture was adopted to ensure that all team members understand who they are accountable to, who they report to, and what the rules are applicable.

In order to attract skilled working mothers, the organization ensures its community is well aware of the cultures adopted by the organization, this in turn creates a working model for which hubs can adopt. With this model, skilled mothers are well aware of the expected culture and adjustments to be made should they choose to join the organization or her hubs.

Know your workforce

Before launching a program to support working mothers, start by gathering relevant data. For example, identify where the majority of mothers are within your organization. Are there any working moms in leadership roles or is that an area you could look to improve? Look at the retention rates for your working mothers and take note of any patterns.

Define the demographic

Once you've identified the working mothers in your workforce, the next step is to define your demographic. Because parenting is often an 18-year-long job, mothers will have different needs based on the stage of their parenting journey. Align your organization's programs to target all of your working mothers, whether they're just starting a family or have children in high school. This can send a more inclusive message and reassure employees that you fully support working mothers.

Focus resources on transition points

One way to keep employees focused is to provide support during transition points, like welcoming a new child, managing a change in schedule or role, or coming back from parental leave. For this reason, many companies focus their benefits and programming on these points, such as offering parental leave on a phase-back basis that gives mothers a gentler return transition (e.g., working half days for the first few weeks).

Offer accommodations for new mothers

It is important to be intentional about fostering a company culture that's supportive of new mothers. Even if it's not required by your state's laws, consider offering a specific space for nursing mothers to breastfeed or pump to ensure both comfort and sanitation. This often involves offering a private, quiet space with a locked door, a comfortable chair and towels.

Some companies even offer private refrigerators for breast milk only, which can further contribute to working moms feeling comfortable, welcome and included in the workplace.

Consider benefits that appeal to working mothers.

Parental benefits like paid maternity leave, child care assistance (e.g., reimbursement for daycare fees, backup child care) or an on-site childcare service can attract new talent to your organization.

Some companies choose to offer increased flexibility in work schedules to accommodate not only working mothers but their entire workforce. Parent-friendly flexibility options could include allowing employees to work from home a few days per week offering staggered or compressed work weeks, or trying the unlimited PTO model.

Other benefits that may appeal to working mothers include:

- ▶ Dependent care flexible spending accounts (FSAs)
- ▶ Stipends for child care expenses
- ▶ Digital forums for mothers at your company to chat with each other
- ▶ Programs for new mothers
- ▶ Paid sick leave

Advertise resources for working mothers that are already in place

Many companies already have an employee benefits program in place that supports working mothers, such as an employee assistance program (EAP) . However, employees may not realize these programs exist or don't understand what they have access to. Make sure your existing benefits are visible to all employees. One solution is to create a single, user-friendly website or company intranet that makes it easy for employees to identify what kind of benefits are available to them.

Communicate often

One of the simplest steps a company can take to support working mothers is to keep the lines of communication open and discuss their changing needs with supervisors or human resources. Be empathetic, compassionate and understanding about the challenges working moms face. Ask them how they're feeling, what they need and any specific way you can support them.

Another way to promote work/life balance is by categorizing communications, especially any sent outside of business hours. An easy way to employ this strategy is to lead email subject lines with headers like, "Not urgent," "For Monday" and "Urgent."

Create a parental leave handbook

You can easily solidify your expectations as an employer and give expecting mothers the tools they need to have a successful maternity leave by creating a parental leave handbook. Solicit feedback and guidance from other leaders in your organization who are also mothers. A handbook helps mothers know what to expect while they're away and how to transition back into the workplace more easily.

Collect data

Measure the effectiveness of any new initiatives by gathering data before you start and again a year later. Look at whether your employees are using their vacation time or family leave time, what your retention rate is and whether mothers are returning from maternity leave or not.

Be consistent

It's important to be consistent with your policies for all employees. For example, a working mother may have an especially accommodating manager or may have negotiated for specific benefits when she was hired. However, this can send the wrong message to the rest of your workforce. Show that you support everyone in the workforce by maintaining and enforcing consistent policies for all of your employees. This might also mean offering the same level of schedule flexibility or time off for all employees, regardless of whether or not they have children.

Set a visible example

One way leaders can show that they support working moms is by setting an example for balancing work and family. For example, family photos placed visibly on managers' desks and talking openly about family life outside of the workplace sends a message to members of their team that a work/life balance is possible. Practising vulnerable leadership (e.g., being open about parenting struggles) can also normalize these conversations and keep working moms from feeling alone.

Create a mentorship program

Consider creating a mentorship program to connect new or expecting mothers with moms in leadership positions. This will provide them with support and build their confidence as they navigate their new role as a parent.

Showing all mothers in your workplace that you support them can help you retain top talent, attract other qualified mothers to your company and have a big impact on their overall morale and productivity. Not only that, but having a diverse, inclusive workforce can make your company more innovative, competitive and successful.

In conclusion, working mothers in the African technology and Innovation ecosystem are a core of the ecosystem as they provide enormous support while building families. Though this can be challenging at times, with the right strategies and mindset, working mothers can create a fulfilling and balanced life for both their career and their families.



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