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EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION ON LABOUR LAW AND EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
This paper examines the influence of International Labour Organisation (ILO) on employment relations in Nigeria. It explores how ratified ILO conventions have impacted national labour law, trade unionism, occupational safety standards, collective bargaining, and other workplace rights and practices in Nigeria's formal and informal sectors. The paper used both primary and secondary data. A total of twelve interviews were conducted in different purposively selected organisations in Abuja, Aba, Nnewi, and Onitsha towns in March, 2025. Thematic data analysis technique was employed to analyse the data garnered from investigation of the interaction of ILO standards with national labour laws, their transformative potential, and implementation challenges. The study finds that Nigeria has made considerable progress in incorporating ILO core conventions into domestic legislation. Nonetheless, the impact on workplace conditions is limited due to gaps in enforcement of and compliance with these conventions, institutional weaknesses, limited resources and awareness, socio-cultural values, and economic pressures. The paper concludes by suggesting the ways for improved labour governance in Nigeria. These include full domestication of ILO conventions; strengthening institutional capacity for improved implementation and enforcement of labour laws; broadening awareness of workers' rights, labour standards, and employer obligations to achieve effective compliance; and expanding protection to vulnerable and informal workers.

Keywords: ILO conventions; Employment Relations; Enforcement; Informality; Unionisation; Decent Work.

Introduction

In an era of globalization and intensified competition for foreign investment, the quality of employment relations has become a critical determinant of sustainable development and social stability. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has long been promoting global labour standards as a pathway to decent work and industrial peace (ILO, 2019). Its conventions that are binding on member countries have evolved to standardise and regulate labour practices across the world in the face of global economic integration. The ILO regulations emerged from intergovernmental and private actors to influence industrial relations and enactment of national labour laws. For developing economies such as Nigeria, implementation of ILO norms is not merely a legal obligation but a strategic necessity for reducing workplace conflict and achieving inclusive economic transformation (Adewumi, 2018; Fajana et al., 2011). ILO conventions are meant to shape employment relations even in emerging market economies characterised by inherent weak enforcement systems. These conventions set standards for decent work, workplace safety, non-discrimination, and protection of other labour rights.

Despite Nigeria's ratification of numerous ILO conventions, persistent labour disputes, precarious work arrangements, structural deficits, and widespread informal employment raise questions about the real impact of these standards on employment relations within the country. Scholars generally agree that ILO standards have the capacity to shape domestic employment relations because they can influence domestic legislation, institutional reforms, and workplace practices (Helfer, 2016; Maupain, 2013). Studies have also stated the role of trade unions and tripartite institutions in promoting compliance with labour norms and improving the outcomes of industrial relations (Fashoyin, 2007; Okene, 2010). Why is Nigeria's formal commitment to these conventions yet to improve employment relations within the country? Such relations are still characterised by casualisation, persistent workplace conflict, and limited protection for vulnerable workers (Adewumi and Adenugba, 2010; Onyeonoru, 2018). Again, why do employers in Nigeria frequently circumvent labour regulations and adopt unfair workplace practices?

Existing literature mostly analyses labour governance, unionism, and labour law reforms in Nigeria in isolation. Consequently, there is limited assessment of how ILO conventions genuinely shape employment relations. Many studies focus on legal compliance or industrial conflict without systematically evaluating the broader dimensions of employment relations (Onyeonoru, 2018). This fragmentation has left a gap in understanding the real impact of international labour standards on the everyday realities of Nigerian workplaces. This calls for a comprehensive evaluation of the extent to which ILO standards have shaped employment relations in Nigeria.

Therefore, this paper investigates how adoption of ILO standards has influenced domestic labour laws, trade union rights, workplace protection, and dispute resolution mechanisms in Nigeria. It identifies and assesses the impact of ILO conventions on employment relations in Nigeria, and investigates the challenges confronting implementation of these conventions. The paper argues that though ILO conventions have deeply influenced Nigeria's labour regulatory framework, the impact on employment relations has been insufficient due to enforcement deficits, institutional weaknesses, limited resources, and vulnerabilities of the labour market.

By evaluating the impact of ILO conventions on employment relations in Nigeria, this article contributes to the wider scholarship on global labour governance and provides insights for policymakers, labour organisations, and employers. Recognising the effectiveness of international labour standards in Nigeria is essential for promoting decent work and advancing social justice in Africa's largest economy. The paper concludes by recommending the ways through which employers' compliance with ILO standards could be improved.

Methodology

The study utilises both primary and secondary data for a comprehensive analysis of its subject matter. A purposive sampling approach was adopted to access respondents who have relevant expertise and experience in labour issues and workers' rights protection in Nigeria. A total of twelve participants were interviewed during the fieldwork conducted in Match, 2025. Seven of these were selected from stakeholders in Abuja who are involved in labour regulation, employment relations, policy implementation, and workplace dispute resolution. They included three government officials, two trade union officials, one labour lawyer, and one labour rights advocate. Government officials comprised one official from the Ministry of Labour and Employment, one Labour Inspector from the Labour Inspectorate Department, and one officer of the National Industrial Court of Nigeria (NICN). They provided insights into policy formulation, implementation, compliance, and enforcement of ILO norms in Nigeria. One human resource manager in a private company who was interviewed in Aba, Abia State, explained how ILO standards affect workplace practices, collective bargaining, wages, and organisational policies.

The other stakeholders who were interviewed were one official of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), one member of the Trade Union Congress (TUC), all in Abuja, and four workers from the private sector manufacturing industries in Aba, Nnewi, and Onitsha. These respondents were central because they experience the practical effects of labour standards relating to freedom of association, collective bargaining, occupational safety, wages, and workers' rights. Finally, one labour lawyer and one labour rights advocate were interviewed in Abuja. They explained how ILO conventions or principles influence dispute adjudication and employment relations practice in Nigeria, and provided perspectives on compliance monitoring.

Interview data were analysed using thematic analysis technique. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data. Initial codes were generated inductively from participants' accounts and subsequently grouped into broader themes reflecting recurring patterns across dataset. The themes were reviewed, refined, and defined to ensure coherence and consistency. Representative quotations from participants were used to illustrate each theme. This approach facilitated a rigorous and transparent interpretation of participants' experiences regarding workers' rights protection, compliance with ILO standards, and labour governance in Nigeria.

Secondary data drawn from extant scholarship on ILO conventions and employment relations in Nigeria were explored for the purposes of complementarity and validation of primary data. The study's exploration of primary and secondary data enabled a holistic assessment of both formal compliance and lived workplace experiences in formal and informal employment sectors. The analysis examines legislative reforms, institutional practices, and workplace dynamics.

The study adhered to established ethical principles governing qualitative research. Prior to each interview, participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement, the voluntary character of participation, and their right to decline to answer any question or to withdraw from the study at any stage without adverse consequences. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews commenced. To protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, no personally identifiable information was collected or reported. Instead, pseudonyms were used during transcription and reporting. Audio recordings and interview transcripts were securely stored and made accessible only to the researcher. Quotations presented in the findings were carefully selected to ensure that participants could not be identified directly or indirectly.

The study employed purposive sampling because the objective was not to obtain statistical representativeness but to gain rich, in-depth insights from individuals with direct

knowledge and experience of the phenomenon under investigation. In qualitative research, the adequacy of a sample is determined by richness, relevance, and depth of information it provides rather than by its numerical size. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved, that is, the point at which additional interviews yielded no substantially new themes or insights. Consequently, the relatively small purposive sample was considered sufficient to answer the research questions comprehensively. Accordingly, the conclusions are presented as theoretically and contextually transferable to similar settings rather than as statistically representative of all workers or employers in the country.

Theoretical Framework

Since the aim of this paper is to critically examine the impact of ILO standards on employment relations in Nigeria, and explore the challenges limiting full realisation of these international labour standards, it anchors its analysis on the Neoliberalism. The theory provides a compelling elucidation on the major factors responsible for non-compliance with and limited impact of ILO conventions, especially in developing countries including Nigeria. Its adoption as a theoretical framework is appropriate because it offers a comprehensive explanation for the contradictions that characterise labour governance in Nigeria. It illuminates how market-driven economic reforms, deregulation, privatisation, and global competitive pressures influence labour law enforcement, employer behaviour, and employment relations, often undermining the effective implementation of ILO conventions. By situating Nigeria's labour governance within the broader context of neoliberal globalisation, the framework enables a deeper understanding of why the ratification of ILO conventions does not automatically translate into meaningful protection of workers' rights. Consequently, neoliberalism provides a strong theoretical foundation for evaluating the actual impact of ILO conventions on labour law and employment relations in Nigeria.

Neoliberalism emerged as a dominant economic and political ideology in the late twentieth century, advocating market liberalisation, deregulation, privatisation, reduced government intervention in economic affairs, labour market flexibility, and the free movement of capital. The belief is that economic efficiency and prosperity are best achieved through competitive markets with minimal state interference. Since the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 1980s and subsequent wave of globalisation, neoliberal principles have significantly influenced labour market reforms in many developing countries including Nigeria. McLean and McMillan (2009) assert that neoliberalism is principally used in reference to a set of market-liberal economic policies and a theoretical approach known as neoliberal institutionalism or regime theory for studying institutions. The developing world associates neoliberalism with the structural adjustment programmes promoted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, and the Washington Consensus which promotes trade and financial liberalisation, deregulation, privatisation, shrinking of the role of the State, and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

While Lamy (2008) claims that neoliberalism is the 'progeny' of liberalism, Johari (2012) outlines essential features of neoliberalism, stating one of the fundamental principles of neoliberalism as the belief that individuals possess the rational capacity to determine what best serves their interest and aspirations. Accordingly, the ideology contends that reducing state involvement in people's lives enables them to make decisions that more effectively promote their own well-being. This resonates with the capitalist philosophy of *laissez-faire,* which condemns excessive involvement of the state in the affairs of individuals both in the economic and social spheres. Incentivisation of private initiative and restraining demands by labour unions have negative implications for workers' rights and freedoms. The provision of encouragement to private initiative often assumes the dimension of lowering labour standards, which spurs employers' non-compliance with labour legislation. The commitment to market forces deemed as the key mechanism of economic and social regulation often undermine

workers' rights and interests, but promotes the interests of the owners of the means of production. Under this situation, attempt to regulate labour and promote workers' rights yields limited impact. From a neoliberal perspective, the market is regarded as the most efficient mechanism for allocating resources, with proponents contending that economic performance is maximised when government intervention is restrained and market forces are permitted to function independently (Held, 1995). This assertion implies that economic and social life is the people's private affair over which the state should not regulate. The ideology affirms *laissez-faire*, thereby deepening the belief that neoliberalism is merely a shrewd attempt to modernise the *laissez-faire* philosophy. Neoliberal organisations design policies that tend to minimise cost and maximise benefits.

At the national level, neoliberalism advocates the rule of the market, reduction of public expenditure on social services, deregulation, and privatisation of public enterprises. At the organisational or individual level, neoliberalism seeks to promote the freedom of individual contract or the liberty to choose contracting parties and to establish employment or trade arrangements based on terms and conditions that reflect the individual's preferences and mutual agreement (Okafor, 2012). That is, contract allows the organisation or employer and potential employees to make and enforce their own rules and acclimatise to their distinctive conditions. Such parties have the freedom to agree on contracts that are binding on them irrespective of the outcome. Neoliberalism encourages free pursuit of individual interests, and emphasises that it is the moral duty of every individual to maximise the advantages in the labour market. The organisations that operate in neoliberal economic environments often prefer nonstandard forms of employment. These equip them with the flexibility to evaluate the terms of engagement in accordance with the dynamism in the labour market and competitiveness of the socio-economic environment. Flexibilization of this kind diminishes the cost of production and raises profit but degrades the workers.

The adoption of neoliberalism as the theoretical framework for this study is justified because it provides a robust explanation for the persistent tension between internationally recognised labour standards and the realities of employment relations in Nigeria. while the ILO promotes workers' rights, collective bargaining, social dialogue, occupational safety, and decent work, neoliberal economic policies often prioritise labour market flexibility, cost reduction, competitiveness, and investment attraction. These competing objectives frequently result in weakened labour protection, casualisation of employment, outsourcing, contract work, and declining trade union influence.

Nigeria presents a particularly appropriate context for applying neoliberal theory. Since the implementation of market-oriented reforms, successive governments have pursued privatisation, deregulation, fiscal austerity, and policies aimed at improving the country's attractiveness to foreign and domestic investors. Although these reforms have generated some economic opportunities, they have also contributed to increased employment insecurity, informalisation of labour, weak enforcement of labour legislation, and growing employer resistance to collective bargaining. Consequently, many employers comply selectively with ILO standards where doing so does not substantially increase production costs or reduce competitiveness.

Neoliberalism also helps explain why the Nigerian state often demonstrates weak regulatory capacity in labour administration. Under neoliberal governance, the state's role shifts from direct intervention in labour markets toward creating a favourable environment for private enterprise. In practice, this frequently translates into inadequate labour inspection, limited prosecution of labour law violations, underfunding of regulatory institutions, and reliance on voluntary compliance by employers. As a result, many provisions contained in ratified ILO conventions remain only partially implemented despite their incorporation into national labour policies.

Furthermore, the theory provides an important framework for understanding the changing balance of power between employers and employees. Neoliberal labour market reforms tend to strengthen managerial discretion while weakening workers' bargaining power. In Nigeria's manufacturing sector, this imbalance is reflected in the widespread use of temporary employment, contract staffing, anti-union practices, wage suppression, and poor working conditions. These realities directly affect the effectiveness of ILO conventions relating to freedom of association, collective bargaining, equal remuneration, occupational safety and health, and protection against unfair labour practices.

The framework is equally valuable because it explains the influence of global economic institutions and multinational corporations on domestic labour governance. In an increasingly globalised economy, governments often face pressure to maintain low labour costs in order to remain competitive in attracting investment. This pressure may discourage the rigorous enforcement of labour standards perceived as increasing employers' operating costs. Economic competitiveness sometimes takes precedence over workers' welfare, thereby limiting the practical impact of ILO conventions.

Finally, neoliberalism enables this study to critically evaluate whether Nigeria's labour law reforms genuinely advance workers' rights or merely reflect broader market-oriented policy objectives. Rather than viewing labour legislation solely as a mechanism for protecting workers, the theory encourages an examination of how labour laws are shaped by economic liberalisation, political interests, and global market pressures. It therefore provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the complex interaction between international labour standards, domestic legal institutions, employers' behaviour, and state regulatory practices.

International Labour Organisation as a Key Actor in International Labour Regulations

The ILO is a United Nations Agency which promotes rights at work through conventions. The idea that founded this supranational labour organisation is linked to the development of intergovernmental (international) social policy. Thus, the history of ILO's "creation is very closely tied to the history of workers' protection and to progress in national labour laws" (Servais, 2011). Servais maintains that the need to form a supranational labour body vested with the responsibility of workers' rights protection and improvement of working conditions was generated by the horrors of Industrial Revolution of the 18th century, following automation of industrial production.

Since creation, the ILO has proved its essence by advancing social justice and promoting decent work. It is the "repository of the traditions of a world-wide effort at tripartite international cooperation to promote social justice" (Walter, 1985). It operates as a united front of workers' unions, the governments, and employers for the realisation of social justice. Its establishment was the outcome of various factors, the ultimate aim being to secure elimination of widespread exploitation of workers. The ILO makes standards that deal with workers' rights such as Convention No. 87: Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948, and Convention No. 98: Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949. Other ILO conventions deal with the right to establish federations or confederations, and to join international employers' or workers' organisations. There is Convention No. 29: Forced Labour Convention, 1930, Convention No. 105: Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957, Convention No. 105 which proscribes recourse to Forced or Compulsory Labour. While Convention No. 182: Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999, bans the worst forms of child labour, it goes jointly with Convention No. 138: Minimum Age Convention, 1973, Convention No. 100: Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951, and Convention No. 111: Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958, which provide the principle of equality in broad terms without limiting the extent of their application.

Several conventions and recommendations treat general conditions of work, with a group of standards emphasising on wages, wage fixing, and protection of wages and workers' claims.

Other standards focus on general conditions of employment such as working time, occupational safety and health captured in Convention No. 187: Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006. Numerous standards deal with improving protection of other groups of workers on gender basis, prohibiting certain kinds of occupation for women and ensuring maternity protection. Other instruments deal with older workers and migrant workers.

Although ILO conventions represent internationally accepted benchmarks for the protection of workers' rights, their practical value does not simply lie in their adoption but in their effective implementation. In Nigeria, many of these conventions have been ratified, yet the gap between legal commitment and workplace reality remains significant. Nonetheless, they constitute the most comprehensive international framework for protecting workers' rights and promoting decent work. They have influenced labour legislation in Nigeria by establishing internationally recognised standards relating to freedom of association, collective bargaining, equality, non-discrimination, child protection, and the elimination of forced labour. However, the Nigerian experience illustrates that ratification does not automatically translate into compliance.

Nigeria's Labour Regulation in Historical Context and Ratification of ILO Conventions

Labour regulation in Nigeria pre-dates Independence, with early laws such as 1938 Trade Union Ordinance providing rudimentary frameworks for union formation and collective action (Falola and Heaton, 2008). However, most of these laws restricted worker freedoms and primarily served colonial administrative interests. It was not until after 1960 that Nigeria began to align its employment framework with international standards. Nonetheless, during the military era (1966-1999), state intervention in trade union affairs expanded dramatically following the promulgation of decrees and edicts that limited industrial action and fragmented labour federations. Even so, the period also marked increased engagement with ILO bodies, partly in response to internal labour unrest and external pressure to comply with global standards.

Nigeria has through different eras ratified 44 ILO conventions including the eight core conventions covering fundamental rights at work. Particularly important to employment relations are Convention No. 87: Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948; Convention No. 98: Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949; Convention No. 29: Forced Labour Convention, 1930; Convention No. 105: Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957; Convention No. 111: Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958; Convention No. 138: Minimum Age Convention, 1973; and Convention No. 182: Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999; and Convention No. 155: Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981. These conventions created the foundation for modern labour governance in Nigeria. Their ratification has directly influenced national labour laws including the Labour Act (2004), Trade Unions Act (2005), Employees' Compensation Act (2010), and various workplace safety regulations.

Against the background of exploitation of workers and poor conditions of work, Nigeria has enacted these laws for the social protection of employees and improvement of working conditions. The domestic employment and labour legislation deal with issues relating to terms and conditions of employment, employee representation, industrial relations, discrimination, maternity and family leave rights. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) guarantees freedom of association and provides under various sections fundamental rights relevant to work and non-discrimination drawing on international instruments including ILO conventions. The Labour Act (Cap L1, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004) remains a central labour law governing employment conditions for wage earners, with some provisions of ILO Convention 181 incorporated in certain sections of this Act. The National Industrial Court Act 2006 provides mechanisms for labour dispute resolution. The court is vested with

the jurisdiction to adjudicate matters connected with ratified international conventions pertaining to labour and employment relations.

Nigeria has undergone phases of labour legislation, with the country's initial objective targeting evolving a free and stable labour market. This compelled the government to make industrial relations policies geared toward achieving this objective (Badejo, 2014). The year 1938 is often regarded as a turning point in Nigeria's labour legislation since it opened the floodgate for labour legislation in the country. Since then, Nigeria has made specific statutory rights that are applicable to different categories of workers without distinction of employment classification. These statutory rights of workers with general application include written contract and required contract terms, wages and hours of work, non-discrimination, sexual harassment, and benefits and entitlements.

The Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment is a major institutional actor overseeing labour policy and compliance, including reporting to ILO and organising workshops to build capacity for reporting under ILO obligations. It discharges its primary duty and responsibility of labour governance in Nigeria in collaboration with its departments and other labour agencies such as National Industrial Court; National Labour Advisory Council (NLAC); and National Labour Relations Board, an independent federal agency charged with ensuring that private-sector workers are free to come together, whether as members of a trade union or not, to advocate for higher wages and better workplace conditions. Tripartite mechanisms such as government, trade unions, and employer associations also participate in workshops, sensitisation, and oversight.

Main Findings: Influence of ILO on Labour Law and Employment Relations in Nigeria

The ILO is one of the most influential global institutions influencing labour standards and employment relations across both developed and developing economies. Through its conventions and recommendations, the organisation seeks to establish minimum standards capable of protecting workers while promoting industrial harmony. In Nigeria, many ILO conventions have been ratified and incorporated into labour legislation and policies. Despite these formal commitments, labour relations in the country are characterised by precarious employment, weak enforcement of labour laws, workplace inequality, casualisation, and recurring industrial disputes. The interview responses obtained from government officials, employers, labour leaders, workers, labour law experts and practitioners, amongst others, reveal contradictions in Nigeria's framework for labour governance. Though some of the respondents acknowledged that ILO conventions have contributed to labour law reforms, institutional awareness, and judicial activism, they also emphasised persistent gaps in implementation of labour laws in Nigeria. The findings therefore suggest that the influence of ILO conventions in Nigeria is more visible at the normative and institutional levels than at the level of everyday workplace realities.

Institutional Impact: one major theme from the interviews is that ILO conventions have generated institutional impact on Nigerian labour administration and adjudication. An official from the Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment acknowledged that institutional labour standards have shaped policy reforms regarding dispute management, workplace safety, industrial relations, amongst others. According to him, "ILO conventions ratified by Nigeria have influenced labour reforms, particularly in occupational safety, dispute resolution, and industrial harmony, but compliance is uneven across sector."[1] Similarly, a respondent from the National Industrial Court stated that there is presently a growing judicial reliance on international labour principles in employment adjudication. He maintains that "Over the years, National Industrial Court has increasingly relied on ILO principles when interpreting labour

[1] Mohammed Adaku is a Senior Staff of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment. He was interviewed in Abuja on 20/3/2025 under the condition of anonymity.

disputes. International best practices now carry persuasive authority in many employment cases. Workers are becoming more aware of their rights because the courts reference international labour standards more frequently than before."[2] This development indicates transformation within Nigerian labour jurisprudence. The National Industrial Court is now interpreting labour disputes through the lens of international best practices and ILO conventions. Such judicial openness signifies a shift from previous periods when Nigerian labour legislation was basically rigid and domestically confined. The interviews therefore indicate that ILO conventions have enhanced the normative sophistication of labour adjudication in Nigeria.

Structural Weaknesses and Enforcement Gaps: however, the responses also reveal that adoption of these conventions has not necessarily translated into effective enforcement. The labour ministry official mentioned above admitted that enforcement mechanisms are weak, particularly within the informal economy where oversight of regulations is limited. In his words, "Nigeria has ratified many ILO conventions, but implementation is a challenge because enforcement mechanisms are weak. We try to align labour policies with ILO standards, yet many employers still operate outside the law, especially in the informal economy."[3] This finding reinforces arguments within the literature dealing with labour relations that ratification alone does not guarantee compliance. In Nigeria, labour institutions often lack the financial, administrative, and political capacity required for effective implementation of ILO standards.

The administrative and public authorities in Nigeria have frequently interfered with and inhibited the exercise of freedom of association in many ways (Mbah and Ikemefuna, 2011). The classic striking case of Nigeria's interference with workers' freedom of association is the dissolution by decree of NUPENG and PENGASSAN executive committees by the Abacha-led military junta in 1994 (Mbah and Ikemefuna, 2011). In addition, Nigeria's failure to ratify all the ILO conventions is a clear demonstration of the country's symbolic compliance with ILO norms and its conservative attitude towards the organisation. These have made it difficult to realise ILO's objectives in Nigeria.

Effective implementation and enforcement of labour standards in Nigeria is hampered by institutional fragility. The labour ministry which is the main implementing agency lacks the capacity to play an active part in making leading initiatives in employment creation in Nigeria. More often than not, it plays an interlocutor role between the employers' and workers' organisations. Although it is the head of the National Labour Advisory Council (NLAC), the labour ministry is incapacitated in driving the agenda of the NLAC and addressing labour issues. It is too undermined to effectively play crucial roles that facilitate tripartism and social dialogue, and coordination of the implementation of the DWCP II. Capacity constraints and institutional weaknesses involve weak enforcement mechanisms, underfunding of labour inspection, inadequate trained labour inspectors, poor coordination among labour agencies, and poor reporting of obligations to ILO supervisory bodies. These deficiencies have impeded effective monitoring of compliance, especially in the private sector where informal work prevails. These weaknesses have made it possible for entrepreneurs and managers of work organisations in Nigeria to resist compliance with ILO conventions.

A consensus emerges across the interviews about the gap between legal commitments and practical realities. A labour union leader stressed that Nigeria's primary problem is not the absence of labour laws but weak political will and inconsistent enforcement. He argued that workers continue to experience unfair dismissals and anti-union practices despite existing legal protections. According to him:

[2] Isreal Ajanaku is an Officer of the National Industrial Court of Nigeria. He was interviewed in Abuja on 20/3/2025 under the condition of anonymity.

[3] Mohammed Adaku is a Senior Staff in the Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment.

> ILO conventions have strengthened workers' voices in Nigeria. Without those standards, collective bargaining and union rights would have been much weaker. The problem is not the absence of laws; it is the lack of political will to enforce them. Many workers are still unfairly dismissed without consequences for employers. Unionisation is still restricted in some organisations. Where it is allowed, unionists often contend with employer's hostility.[4]

This contradiction proves the structural weakness of labour governance in Nigeria. Although Nigeria has ratified several core ILO conventions, labour inspectors are inadequate, sanctions against violators of workers' rights are often absent or weak, and processes of dispute resolution can be excessively slow.[5] Consequently, employers usually ignore labour standards without being penalised. Child labour in Nigeria is reinforced by weak enforcement frameworks and lack of social safety nets for most families which resort to it. Labour inspectors whose responsibility is to monitor compliance with this convention are inadequate yet face resource limitations and lack of technical expertise. Corruption and negligence are playing crucial roles that undermine observance of labour standards in Nigeria. The responses from workers confirmed implementation crisis. A factory worker observed that employees are frequently afraid to demand their rights because of fear of dismissal. He noted that workers know their rights but hesitate to challenge management decisions. According to him:

> We hear about workers' rights, but in reality, many employees are afraid to speak because they can lose their jobs at any time. Safety conditions have improved slightly compared to before, but protective equipment is still inadequate in our company. Again, there is more awareness today about workplace harassment and discrimination because of international labour standards. Most of my colleagues know their rights on paper, but challenging management decision is risky.[6]

This statement reveals the imbalance in power relations that continue to influence Nigerian workplaces. Fear of unemployment, poverty, and organisational reprisal frequently discourage workers from invoking labour protections guaranteed under ILO conventions. The persistence of these challenges also shows the broader socioeconomic context of Nigeria. High unemployment rates and dominance of informal employment undermine workers' bargaining power and create conditions where employers can circumvent labour standards with limited resistance.

Casualisation and Precarious Work: another critical issue that emerges from the interviews is the growing prevalence of casualisation and precarious work. A trade union official described casualisation as a palpable failure of labour regulation in Nigeria. He says:

> The influence of ILO conventions can be seen in labour activism and wage negotiations. Workers now invoke international standards when demanding fair treatment. However, casualisation of labour is one of the biggest failures of implementation of labour legislation in Nigeria. Despite ILO conventions, many Nigerian workers still lack job security.[7]

Despite ILO standards promoting decent work and job security, many employers increasingly rely on temporary, outsourced, and contract labour arrangements. This trend mirrors neoliberal

[4] Adamu Sabbah is an official of the Trade Union Congress, Abuja Head Office. He was interviewed in Abuja on 22/3/2025 under concealed identity.

[5] Samuel Abiola is a Labour Inspector in the Labour Inspectorate Department of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment. He was interviewed in Abuja on 22/3/2025 under concealed identity.

[6] Joel Alaoma is an Assembler in Machine Tools Factory in Onitsha. He was interviewed on 10/3/2025 under the condition of anonymity.

[7] Terkuma Shagba is an official of the Nigerian Labour Congress, Abuja Head Office. He was interviewed in Abuja on 22/3/2025 under the condition of anonymity.

labour market reforms that prioritise flexibility and cost reduction over long-term employment security. Employers have concerns about the economic costs of implementing strict labour protections. They often argue that rigid labour regulations could discourage investment and increase operational expenses. Such concerns not only reflect legitimate business anxieties within a fragile economy, but also expose the tension between economic liberalization and labour protection. The Nigerian labour market operates within the global capitalist environment where employers seek flexibility in response to economic uncertainty. Consequently, workers often bear the burden of adjustment through insecure employment conditions. The fundamental contradiction at the heart of employment relations in Nigeria is that while ILO conventions advocate decent work and social justice, market pressures and weak regulatory enforcement continue to sustain precarious labour practices.

Increased Labour Rights Awareness: the interviews indicate that ILO conventions have contributed much to labour rights awareness among workers, unions, and legal experts in Nigeria. Many respondents noted that employees and unions frequently invoke international labour standards during wage negotiations, industrial actions, and workplace disputes. This growing consciousness is an important achievement in international labour governance. Even where enforcement is weak, the diffusion of rights-based discourse can empower workers and strengthen collective action. A Labour Lawyer stated that international labour standards now feature prominently in employment litigation before the National Industrial Court. He asserts that:

> ILO conventions have significantly shaped Nigerian labour jurisprudence. Many employment disputes now cite international labour standards directly. Lawyers frequently rely on ILO conventions before the National Industrial Court. There is progress, but the contradiction is that domestic enforcement institutions are weak and underfunded. Again, labour justice is still inaccessible to many low-income workers due to the cost and duration of litigation.[8]

Furthermore, awareness of issues such as workplace discrimination, harassment, occupational safety, and maternity protection appears to have improved particularly within organisations in the formal sector. The Human Resource Manager of a private company acknowledged that international labour standards have compelled many organisations to revise internal workplace policies. According to him:

> ILO conventions have pushed companies to improve workplace policies, especially regarding discrimination, maternity leave, and workplace safety. However, many firms see compliance with ILO norms as expensive. Most public sector organisations comply with labour standards more than most private sector organisations. The challenge is balancing workers' rights with economic realities. Some ILO standards are difficult to fully implement in the Nigerian economy that is facing unemployment and inflation. Employers may wish to support decent work principles, but rigid labour regulations can discourage investment and increase operational costs.[9]

Informal Sector: the benefits of rights' consciousness are unevenly distributed. A labour rights advocate emphasised that vulnerable workers in the informal economy including casual labourers are normally excluded from effective labour protection in Nigeria. He affirms that, "The biggest issue is that vulnerable workers in the informal economy rarely benefit from ILO conventions. Casual workers are outside effective protection despite Nigeria's international

[8] Mike Adole is a Labour Lawyer who was interviewed in Abuja on 24/3/2025 under concealed identity.

[9] Jonathan Nwaeze is a Human Resource Manager of a Chemicals Company in Aba, Abia State. He was interviewed in Aba on 15/3/2025 under concealed identity.

commitments."[10] This demonstrates the dualistic structure of Nigeria's labour market, where employees in the formal sector often enjoy some degree of legal protection while informal workers remain highly vulnerable. The interviews consistently identified the informal sector as the greatest obstacle to effective implementation of ILO conventions in Nigeria. Since a large proportion of Nigeria's workforce operates outside the structures of formal employment, labour regulation is difficult to monitor and enforce. Informal workers usually lack written contracts, social protection, union representation, and access to legal remedies. Many workers in the rural and informal settings are unaware of their rights recognised by ILO conventions and national labour laws. A large share of Nigeria's workforce (over 80%) which operates in the informal sector are basically outside the reach of labour regulation (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). These workers rarely benefit from labour protection. Likewise, most employers in the informal sector either do not understand their obligations or consider labour standards as burdensome, and therefore, remain unwilling to observe them.

Consequently, many ILO standards exist only theoretically for millions of Nigerian workers. The exclusion of informal workers from meaningful labour protection undermines the goals of social justice and decent work promoted by ILO. This finding suggests that labour reforms in Nigeria must move beyond formal ratification of ILO conventions to practical strategies for extending labour protections to informal workers. Without such reforms, the transformative capacity of international labour standards will remain limited. The interview responses show that ILO conventions have exerted enormous influence on employment relations in Nigeria. The particular areas that have received the most impact include labour jurisprudence, policy development, workers' rights awareness, and institutional discourse. The National Industrial Court increasingly references international labour standards, unions invoke ILO norms during collective bargaining, and many organisations have adopted improved workplace policies shaped by international labour instruments. At the same time, the findings also reveal profound implementation deficits such as weak enforcement mechanisms, political constraints, casualisation, economic pressures, and widespread informal employment. These continue to undermine the practical realisation of workers' rights in Nigeria. Thus, the impact of ILO conventions is uneven and often symbolic rather than fully transformative.

Legislative Influence of the ILO Conventions

Among the 44 ILO conventions that Nigeria has ratified are recent ratifications including Convention No. 187: Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006; Convention No. 190: Violence and Harassment in the World of Work Convention, 2019; Convention No. 143: Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975; and Convention No. 181: Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997. However, ratification alone does not guarantee enforceability under Nigeria's dualist legal system, which provides that international treaties and conventions must be incorporated into national law by the legislature before they become binding in practice. Notwithstanding, ILO conventions are guiding principles for passing domestic labour laws. Thus, they have generated significant impact on Nigerian labour legislation. For instance, several sections of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) which deal with labour matters were sourced from the ILO conventions. These sections deal with social welfare services, trade unions, industrial relations, worker safety, and industrial dispute. Also, they prescribe industrial arbitrations and a national minimum wage for the federation or its constituent parts.

Thus, the body of local enforceable labour laws are said to reproduce the ILO conventions (Mbah and Ikemefuna, 2011). Therefore, the ILO conventions are essential sources of Nigeria's labour legislation. This is exemplified by Trade Union Act of 1973, Labour Act of 1974,

[10] Ayodele Akindele is a Labour Rights Advocate with a Civil Society Group advocating labour rights and decent work in Abuja. He was interviewed in Abuja on 24/3/2025 under condition of anonymity.

Factories Act Mining Regulations, Workmen's Compensation Act, and other relevant rules that provide for payment of compensation to persons disabled by injury sustained at work, and to the dependants of employees, who die from occupational accidents (Mbah and Ikemefuna, 2011). Other national labour legislation shaped by ILO conventions include the Trade Disputes Act of 1979 and the Wages Boards and Industrial Council Act, 1973. The latter's provisions for the creation of wages board for the protection of workers in places where wages are abysmally low or where there is absence of the mechanism for effective regulation of wages and other conditions of employment is consistent with ILO conventions. Nigeria is obligated by the ILO conventions to establish legal and institutional frameworks that protect workers' rights in areas such as safety at work, fair treatment of migrant workers, regulation of employment agencies, and protection against workplace harassment.

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining: the ILO conventions No. 87: Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 and Convention No. 98: Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 have had major but uneven influence on Nigerian trade union legislation. Though Nigeria legally recognises workers' rights to unionise and bargain collectively, statutory provisions such as compulsory union registration and government discretion to deregister unions are seriously contentious. The 2005 reforms to the Trade Unions Act decentralised collective bargaining and granted workers the option to opt out of joining unions. However, compliance with ILO convention on workers' freedom of association is still weak, particularly as the government itself has restricted strikes in certain sectors under the guise of "essential services" (ILO, 2014). Yet, these ILO conventions in question provide the foundation for institutional compliance with workers' freedom of association and collective bargaining in Nigeria. This supports the ability of workers in the public and organised private sectors to negotiate wages, working conditions, and dispute resolution, amongst others. Nigerian trade unions have used ratified conventions and constitutional amendments to press cases including the rights to minimum wage, gender equality, and non-harassment at the workplace. Still, unions' power is frequently undermined by fragmentation and employer resistance.

Child Labour and Vulnerable Workers: the conventions on child labour and protection of vulnerable workers have positively impacted Nigeria's domestic labour law, particularly following the ratification of Convention No. 138: Minimum Age Convention, 1973 and Convention No. 182: Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999. The Child Rights Act, 2003, and associated policies align with ILO standards as they have established minimum age requirements and prohibited hazardous child labour. Convention No. 143: Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 and Convention No. 181: Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 are crucial for the effort to extend workers' rights protection to the vulnerable groups such as workers employed through agencies and temporary or casual workers. These conventions seek equal treatment, regulation of employment agencies, and better protection against precarious conditions. Ratification of these conventions will shape managing migration through licensing and equal protections. In the meantime, many migrant workers are outside protection as they remain under informal channels. ILO's partnership with National Labour Advisory Council and Trade Union Congress has enabled it implement projects that target elimination of child labour, especially in rural and informal sectors.

Despite Nigeria's ratification of the conventions dealing with minimum age and worst forms of child labour, discrepancies still exist. For instance, national laws allow younger ages under certain types of work. This is owed to the fact that the country continues to face challenges in enforcement of labour laws, particularly in rural areas and informal sectors. This occurs due to capacity constraints and widening gap between formal law/regulation and actual practices. The ILO Convention No. 111: Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 deals with equality and non-discrimination in employment. It has influenced

anti-discrimination provisions in Nigerian labour legislation. Although the Labour Act 2004 contains prohibitions against discrimination, many categories such as gender, disability, or HIV status are governed by laws that are specific to sectors or policy directives rather than a unified equality statute. Nonetheless, ILO standards are important reference points for ongoing efforts for labour legal reforms in Nigeria.

Occupational Safety and Health (OSH): Convention No. 155: Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 and related occupational safety and health instruments have reformed Nigeria's workplace safety architecture. The country's Employees' Compensation Act and Factories Act incorporate principles of this convention including the employer's liability for workplace injuries and requirement for safety committees (Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2020). Recent efforts by the Federal Ministry of Labour to modernise occupational safety and health regulations also draw on ILO model codes of practice. Nigeria's recent ratification of Conventions No. 187: Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 and Convention No. 190: Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 signals its legal commitment. The new conventions on occupational safety and health and workplace safety demand stronger occupational safety and health and protection against violence and harassment. They require employers to adopt new policies, safety standards, and systems of grievance management. Notwithstanding, compliance with OSH is weak in sectors with high risk such as mining, construction, and manufacturing. Many Nigerian workplaces, both formal and informal, still suffer from poor safety equipment, extended working hours without overtime compensation, and exposure to harmful substances. Again, issues of gender-based harassment are still insufficiently addressed.

No matter the deficits, adoption of Conventions No. 187: Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 and Convention No. 190: Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 is immensely important because of its important contributions to the formulation of national regulations on workplace safety, decency, and protection of workers against violence and harassment. These have shaped local labour laws and standards that advocate better regulation, oversight, and enforcement of safety measures in formal workplaces. Some sections of the Labour Act Cap L1 Laws of The Federation of Nigeria are aligned with ILO Convention No. 181: Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997. This sets down the obligations to regulate and license Private Employment Agencies (PEAs), and to protect workers using their services. The practices of PEAs, outsourcing firms, and contract labour have become more regulated by rules that are inspired or mandated by ratified ILO conventions. This affects how employment relations are structured including the obligations on agencies to ensure rights and wages. Though there are reports of unfair practices in outsourcing and casualisation, the Labour Act Cap L1 (2004), LFN, reflects most of the ILO conventions ratified by Nigeria. Its sections 23-48 and 71 whose provisions relate to private employment agencies align with the requirements of ILO Convention 181.

Strengthening Dispute Resolution and Social Dialogue: besides legislative influence, the ILO has played an important role in strengthening dispute resolution mechanisms and social dialogue in Nigeria. Its technical assistance has supported reforms of the National Industrial Court of Nigeria (NICN), enabling it to adjudicate labour disputes with greater independence and expertise. Judicial and court decisions of the NICN have frequently recognised that domesticated global conventions or treaties can inform binding decisions. For example, NICN has arbitrated some cases of sexual harassment, discrimination, and abuse of labour rights by invoking the ILO norms. Tripartite dialogue, an essential ILO principle, is gradually taking root in Nigerian industrial relations. Institutions such as the National Labour Advisory Council (NLAC), established with the support of ILO, provide important platforms for effective consultation among government, employers, and labour unions. Yet, the effectiveness of these forums is impacted by various factors including inconsistent stakeholder engagement. The ILO

regularly provides support for trade unions in demanding protection of workers' rights (Abiala, 2012). It often denounces unfair labour legislation and practices in Nigeria.

Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP): the importance of ILO's DWCP in Nigeria cannot be overstated. It gives precedence to promotion of job-rich growth and employment, expansion of social protection coverage, and strengthening the capacities of government and social partners for effective social dialogue and tripartism (ILO, 2025). The ILO has facilitated creation of National Jobs Pact to reinforce partnerships for decent work in Nigeria through "building capacities of the ILO's tripartite constituents, who have contributed to mainstreaming employment and social protection into the UNDAF (UN Development Assistance Framework)" (ILO, 2025). One of ILO's background studies on Nigeria motivated the organisation to provide technical support for the revision of National Employment Policy (NEP) to deal with existing issues in employment creation in Nigeria.

Support for Education and Skills Development: the ILO has provided essential support for the education and development of skills for National Hazardous Child Labour lists, with the aim to eliminate the worst forms of child labour in Nigeria. The ILO is in partnership with the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and other related matters to rescue and support child labourers.

Promoting Equality at the Workplace: ILO has steered a number of workshops and seminars meant to build the capacities of labour officers, employers' organisations, private employment agencies, and trade union leaders in Nigeria. It provided technical assistance and financial support for the development of workplace programmes on HIV/AIDS and development of HIV anti-discriminatory law and National Workplace Policy on HIV/AIDS. These were aimed at facilitating the promotion of non-discriminatory workplace environment in Nigeria. Amidst a host of other interventions, ILO has intensified the capacity of trade unions for effective social dialogue, and strengthened cooperation between agencies for the advancement of social justice in Nigeria.

Expanded Discussion of the Challenges to Effective Implementation of ILO Conventions

Despite ILO's enormous normative influence on Nigerian labour law, the extent to which its standards have translated into effective protection of workers' rights in Nigeria remains a persistent concern. This is due to prevailing barriers to full implementation of labour standards. The gap between Nigeria's formal commitment to ILO conventions and the realities of labour practices is often attributed to weak regulatory capacity, insufficient inspections, limited resources, corruption, low awareness of labour rights by both employers and workers, employer dominance and weak labour unions. As these challenges sustain the disconnect between law and practice, workers in Nigeria, especially those engaged in the informal sector, lack the effective channels to claim their rights. Thus, violations persist with minimal or no sanctions.

Weak political will is a notable challenge to the implementation and enforcement of ILO conventions and labour laws in Nigeria. Strong political will is needed to enforce compliance with ILO norms and domestic labour legislation. It is necessary because it will help prioritise labour standards and policies, allocate sufficient resources for enforcement, support labour institutions, encourage public-private partnerships and hold stakeholders accountable. Political leadership in Nigeria frequently exudes lukewarm commitment to international obligations and non-prioritisation of labour rights (ILO, 2025). However, the translation of ILO conventions into reality requires persistent political commitment, effective legislative action, and integration into national development objectives. Yet, these conditions are absent due to weak political commitment, limiting compliance with ILO conventions in Nigeria. It accounts for inadequate domestication of conventions, poor enforcement of labour laws, limited resources for labour inspections, lack of accountability for non-compliance, and prioritisation of economic interests over workers' rights. Weak political will informs the prevalence of poor working conditions, low wages, and sundry abuses of workers' rights in Nigeria. While adequate resources and

strong institutions are crucial to effective implementation of labour policies, they are by themselves insufficient in the absence of strong political commitment. This underscores the centrality of political will to the implementation and enforcement of ILO standards and labour laws in Nigeria.

Legal and regulatory gaps generate profound impact that impedes compliance with labour standards in Nigeria. The divergent interpretations of some provisions of the Nigerian labour law contribute to the employer-employee controversies in the country. Some of the statutory provisions diminish or restrict the fundamental right to establish or affiliate a trade union (Ishola, 2013). The Trade Unions (Amendment) Act, 2005, makes membership of a trade union open and voluntary to eligible members of a particular trade. Its Section 11 is infamous for restricting specified sorts of employees to form or join a trade union. The Nigeria Export Process Zone Agency (NEPZA) Act (DN63) of 1992 is a classic case of statutory prohibition of unionisation justified by the government as incentive for Foreign Direct Investment to boost GDP and promote economic growth. Nonetheless, the NEPZA Act has contributed to casualisation and contract employment which subject workers to long working hours, inhibit social dialogue, and other sundry unfair labour practices pervading many trades and employments. The NEPZA Act contradicts Section 40 of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution (as Amended). It also contravenes ILO Convention 87 of 1948. Again, there is ambiguity in the provisions of the Constitution which contributes to non-compliance with labour standards. The phrase "for the protection of his interest" contained in Section 40 of the said constitution has made the freedom of association restrictive.

Also, the Trade Unions (Amendment) Act of 2005 is an excessive legislation that grants the Minister unlimited powers to deregister a trade union. This provision has the potential for ministerial suppression of the autonomy and activities of a trade union. The Act makes no explicit provisions to protect workers from anti-union discrimination or unfair labour practices. Again, it contains ambiguous language that makes some sections open to interpretation that lead to inconsistent application. The Act does not address representation of informal sector workers who are a major part of Nigeria's workforce. These provisions are inconsistent with ILO Convention 87 of 1948, indicating government insincerity in promoting workers' rights in the country. Non-ratification of Convention 151 on labour relations (Public Service 1978), a corollary of Convention 98, provides impetus to employers' intolerance to collective bargaining and restrictions on unionism in their various organisations. The issue of collective bargaining in Nigeria is associated with the development of NLC Policy Document, 2010 (Ishola, 2013).

It seems as though ILO conventions are basically meant to induce member states to enact domestic labour laws. This implies that the conventions are essentially guidelines for enacting national labour legislation. The weak coercive power of the ILO has constrained its supervisory bodies from functioning effectively. This contributes to the perpetuation of exploitation of workers, especially in the emerging market economies including Nigeria. Further, the ILO's supervisory and technical assistance are mostly facilitated through the national government, which often limits their direct impact on private enterprises. Thus, ILO's lack of enforcement authority over member countries contributes to widespread contravention of its conventions in Nigeria. The most affected are Convention No. 87: Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948; Convention No. 29: Forced Labour Convention, 1930; Convention No. 155: Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981; Convention No. 182: Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999; Convention No. 138: Minimum Age Convention, 1973; Convention No. 98: Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention 1949; Convention No. 131: Minimum Wage Fixing, 1970; and Convention No. 100: Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951. This has left gaps in the protection of workers' rights and limited compliance with ILO conventions in Nigeria. The Third Alteration Act grants enormous powers and responsibilities to the National Industrial Court without a corresponding

expansion of its infrastructural base and manpower (Nwokpoku *et al,* 2018). This limits effectiveness of the court, and constitutes an impediment to enforcement of ILO standards and national labour laws.

Compromise of the Nigerian government adversely impact compliance with labour standards and workers' rights (Okafor, 2012). In a bid to attract Foreign Direct Investment, successive Nigerian governments have exuded disinclination to application and enforcement of labour standards in the country. Relaxing labour standards for the purpose of wooing foreign investors has contributed to the rise of nonstandard forms of employment such as casualisation, contract, and outsourced labour. Nonstandard employees enjoy limited privileges in their workplaces as their rights are at best abridged and abused. They are offered miserable monetary reward for work done under poor working conditions and protracted working hours. The government interest in implementing neoliberal policies since democratisation of the polity in 1999 escalates the use of nonstandard employees in various work organisations in Nigeria. There is widespread concern about the surge in nonstandard employment since it is replete with indecent working conditions.

Besides, the dramatic rise in nonstandard employment is attributed to the shift from manufacturing sector to service sector and the spread of information technology (Okafor, 2012). This shift has created a new economy demanding flexibility at the workplace, leading to decline in formal employment relations and remarkable rise in precarious work. Nonstandard employment provides employers with a cheap labour source that helps them to augment surplus value, but sustains non-compliance with labour standards.

Moreover, violation of ILO conventions is occasioned by lack of follow-up on or comprehensive response to the queries or observations by ILO Committee of Experts (Madaki, 2018). Lack of the will to meet the obligations of ILO conventions perpetuates practices that worsen abuse of workers' rights such as resistance to unionisation, violation of the minimum age requirements for employment, the out-of-school malaise, and minimum wage tussles and uncertainties in payment of salaries.

In sum, the ILO conventions and national labour laws seek to regulate employment relationship so as to achieve a balance between economic power and human dignity at work and enhance industrial harmony. These laws address the innate inequality between capital and labour by imposing minimum standards and procedural fairness in employment practices. Yet, unfair labour practices persist at the workplace due to weak enforcement, low awareness, economic pressures, and conflicting interpretations of labour laws. Again, non-compliance is informed by legal contradictions, unemployment, poverty, power imbalance, and institutional fragility. That is, this phenomenon is shaped by both ethical issues and ambiguity in national labour legislation. As a result, employers are emboldened to perpetuate adversarial employment relationship. Abuse of labour rights manifests in various forms such as unfair termination and unlawful dismissal, non-payment/delay of salaries/wages, casualisation and contract labour, workplace discrimination and inequality based on ethnicity, gender, disability, union affiliation as well as occupational safety and employee compensation breaches. The point to note is that unfair labour practices and blatant violations of labour standards in Nigeria are deeply rooted in historical, economic, and institutional factors. These malpractices are reinforced by systemic issues, reducing the transformative value of ILO norms on employment relations in Nigeria.

The Way Forward

To significantly achieve the transformative potential of ILO norms on employment relations in Nigeria, certain basic remedies must be applied to Nigeria's deficient labour administration to realise the promise of ILO conventions and labour regulations. The ILO conventions should be fully incorporated into domestic law to make them enforceable so they could have direct legal effect rather than mere domestic labour policies and regulations. The prolonged and burdensome constitutional process delaying domestication of these conventions

should be made swift and efficient. Expediting and strengthening domestication of ILO conventions is highly important.

Again, a comprehensive review of domestic labour laws by expunging ambiguous and restrictive provisions serving as barriers to workers' freedom of association and collective bargaining should be undertaken in order to modernise and align them with ILO conventions. In their current state, some of these labour laws are open to interpretations that adversely impact compliance.

Proper funding and empowerment of labour inspection will boost enforcement mechanisms just as streamlining adjudication of labour disputes and penalising non-compliance would strengthen respect of workers' rights and observance of labour laws and standards. Facilitating access to justice by making court/tribunals more accessible to aggrieved parties, reducing delays and costs, and introducing alternative dispute resolution mechanisms that are more tailored to the informal sector would build confidence in workers about the labour justice system and eliminate apathy among them.

The capacity of labour institutions such as the Labour Ministry, Inspectorate Department, National Labour Advisory Council, amongst others, should be strengthened. Training of labour inspectors and equipping them with the right tools and technical expertise would achieve effectiveness and efficiency in the discharge of their duties and responsibilities. Besides, adequate motivations in terms of prompt payment of sufficient living wages and allowances should be provided for labour inspectors. At the same time, stiffer penalties must be specified against compromise and dereliction of duty. Severe discipline against corrupt practices involving labour inspectors would serve the dual purposes of correction and deterrence. Adequate funding of labour inspection and proper coordination among labour agencies would positively impact monitoring compliance with ILO standards.

Awareness campaigns should be vigorously pursued through promotion of grassroots education on labour rights among employers, workers (formal, informal, migrant), unions, and local officials or community leaders. Relentless effort must be made to train employers on their responsibilities and obligations since many of them are unaware of these. This would help eliminate ignorance that has been a potent cause of workers' rights abuse.

It is important to promote formalisation of informal work through formulation of policies that aimed at facilitating transition of informal labour into formal contracts, with protections, and encouraging social dialogue involving labour stakeholders in designing regulations and monitoring implementation to reduce friction. Expansion of social dialogue mechanisms can help ensure genuine tripartite consultation and diminish political interference. This would boost compliance with ILO conventions and positively impact employment relations in Nigeria.

Compliance with labour standards should be incentivised through subsidies, tax incentives, and/or preferential public procurement for firms, especially in the informal sector, which maintain good and acceptable labour practices. It is firmly believed that this strategy will be effective given that the bent of private sector employers on raising budgets through reduction of cost is the major factor in the denial of workers' basic rights.

Reporting and monitoring can be made effective by fulfilling ILO reporting obligations, involving civil society and trade unions in monitoring, and publishing regular, accessible reports of progress and gaps. More so, the government should leverage ILO financial and technical assistance and other programmes to build capacity for effective and efficient implementation of ILO conventions in Nigeria.

The challenges bedevilling implementation of ILO conventions and enforcement of national labour laws could be successfully addressed through systemic reforms in legal, institutional, economic, and cultural spheres. These reforms are prerequisites for full attainment of the objectives of ILO conventions to improve employment relations in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study evaluated the impact of ILO conventions on labour law and employment relations in Nigeria. It paid particular attention to the extent to which these conventions have influenced Nigeria's legal framework and workplace practices. The analysis demonstrates that Nigeria has ratified a considerable number of ILO conventions and incorporated their principles into its labour legislation and policy architecture. Nevertheless, the translation of these conventions into meaningful workplace realities is uneven. Persistent challenges such as weak enforcement mechanisms, inadequate labour inspection, the growth of precarious and casual employment, limited awareness of workers' rights, employer non-compliance, and institutional constraints continue to undermine the effective realisation of decent work in the country.

The findings also reveal that the influence of ILO conventions extends beyond legislative reforms. They have provided important normative standards for shaping labour policies, strengthening social dialogue, promoting collective bargaining, encouraging occupational health and safety measures, and enhancing protection of fundamental workers' rights. Yet, the gap between legal commitments and practical implementation remains a defining feature of Nigeria's employment relations system. Bridging this implementation gap requires stronger political commitment, increased institutional capacity, effective labour administration, greater accountability among employers, and sustained collaboration among government agencies, employers' organisations, trade unions, and civil society.

The principal contribution of this paper lies in its integrated assessment of the relationship between ILO standards, domestic labour law, and actual employment relations in Nigeria. Rather than examining these dimensions in isolation, the study demonstrates how legal reforms, institutional performance, and workplace realities interact to shape workers' experiences. By combining documentary evidence with insights obtained from knowledgeable participants, the paper provides a context-sensitive understanding of why the ratification of ILO conventions has not automatically translated into effective protection of labour rights in Nigeria. In doing so, it contributes to the literature on labour governance by highlighting the importance of implementation, institutional effectiveness, and regulatory capacity in achieving the objectives of ILO conventions.

Notwithstanding these contributions, the study has important limitations. The interview component relied on a purposive sample of twelve participants. Although the sample included individuals with substantial knowledge and experience of labour law, industrial relations, and workplace practices, it is relatively small and cannot be regarded as statistically representative of Nigeria's diverse labour force. The findings derived from the interviews should therefore be understood as providing rich qualitative insights rather than statistically generalisable evidence. To enhance the credibility of the conclusions, the interview data were triangulated with ILO reports, government publications, and relevant academic literature. Consequently, the study offers analytical rather than statistical generalisation, providing insights that are transferable to comparable institutional and employment contexts within Nigeria.

Future research should build upon the findings of this study by employing larger and more diverse samples that capture wider experiences of workers in a range of economic sectors. Comparative studies between the public and private sectors as well as between formal and informal employment, would deepen understanding of variations in compliance with labour standards. Prospective studies examining changes in labour governance over time would also provide valuable evidence on the effectiveness of policy reforms. In addition, future researches should investigate the impact of emerging issues such as platform work, the digital economy, labour migration, climate-related transitions, artificial intelligence, and other technological changes on the implementation of ILO standards and employment relations in Nigeria. such research would provide policymakers, employers, trade unions, and international organisations

with stronger empirical evidence for designing more effective labour governance strategies capable of advancing decent work and social justice in Nigeria.

The enduring significance of ILO conventions in Nigeria lies not merely in their ratification but in their effective implementation. Genuine improvements in employment relations depends on transforming ILO standards from legal commitments into lived realities that guarantee dignity, fairness, equality, and decent working conditions for all workers.

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APPENDIX

Adamu Sabbah, 48, Male, Member of Trade Union Congress, Abuja, 22/3/2025.
Ayodele Akindele, 47, Male, Labour Rights Advocate, Civil Society Group, Abuja, 24/3/2025.
Israel Ajanku, 59, Male, Officer of the National Industrial Court of Nigeria, Abuja, 20/3/2025.
Joel Alaoma, 38, Male, Assembler in a Machine Tools Factory, Onitsha, Anambra State, 10/3/2025.
Jonathan Nwaeze, 45, Male, Human Resource Manager with a Chemicals Industry, Aba, 15/3/2025.
Mike Adole, 51, Male, Labour Lawyer in a Law Firm, Abuja, 24/3/2025.
Mohammed Adaku, 56, Male, Senior Staff of Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment, Abuja, 20/3/2025.
Samuel Abiola, 50, Male, Inspector with Labour Inspectorate Department, Abuja, 22/3/2025.
Terkuma Shagba, 48, Male, Member of Nigerian Labour Congress, Abuja, 22/3/2025.
Ujunwa Amaechi, 39, Female, Designer in a Garment Factory, Aba, Abia State, 15/3/2025.
Anthony Udenwa, 45, Male, Machinist in a Grain Processing Firm, Onitsha, Anambra State, 10/3/2025.
James Amadi, 30, Male, Production Assistant in a Plastics Industry, Aba, Abia State, 15/3/2025