

Recruitment and Employment of Migrant Domestic Workers

The recruitment of migrant workers in Nigeria is multi-dimensional, though it is not an absolutely new practice that domestic workers are engaged in the nation even before the pre-colonial rule in the country there had been existence of traditional ways of employing domestic workers in the farm land, such as cocoa farm and palm oil where owners of the farms need more hands to meet the target especially as they compete with each other.

It is also known that they use migrant workers from neighbouring villages and town in large households most importantly amongst the rich and affluent. The number of domestic workers engaged in the household displayed the extent of the wealth. It should be noted as well that some parts of the country was involved in inter-tribal war before the British rule and war captives were either sold by the captors or kept in their households as servants. Atimes some were castrated in order to hinder their fertility or impregnating daughters of their masters.

In the colonial period as well, history records it that some domestic workers were engaged by the colonial masters to either takes care of the households or serves as interpreters to them when the need arises.

With the modern day recruitment of domestic workers are the ones we refer to as “house helps” in Nigeria they are usually recruited by agents who negotiates with the family of the girl or the boy (most times girls) who live in the rural areas, poverty stricken and need all the money their daughters and sons can make to alleviate their lives. It is important to note that this practice is against the MDGs 1 and 2 which talks about eradication of poverty and access to Universal Basic Education.

The parent are however novice to where their children are taken, it can be outside the border of Nigeria as it was reported that Nigerian children are in Gabon etc as domestic workers.

The recruiters are often relations, friends, and neighbours who can atimes deceive the parents that they are assisting in giving their children better life by taking them to the city or outside the country. Delightful words and promises will be said to the parents who at the end agree with the recruiters.

Experience has shown that the recruiters can either be the last source or an intermediary whose responsibility is just to recruit and send the children to the agent who claims to run an agency on job placement to their would be hires.

Deception is often the occurring factor because even when the domestic worker is above eighteen and has passed through post secondary school there is always underlining tone that cannot be easily decipher by the engaged worker.

Testimonies of some girls from Edo State South-South Nigeria has revealed that on getting to their final destination abroad they realized that their “aunties” have all this while deceive them about assisting them with their education, status of their parents and other sibling back at home but they were rather used as sex object. Hundred of such girls are on the streets of Italy and other European countries being used as slaves and with their “madams” demanding from them thousands of euro and dollars as debt the girls must pay before ensuring their independence. It is always a huge debt that takes up to 4 or 5 years to be cleared that is if the girl can achieve that before deportation or arrest by the law enforcement agents.

There are two cases I will like to cite here as part of my contribution to the problems and confusion domestic workers experience out of the shores of their countries.

The first was the issue of a girl who used to live close to me, she was about completing an aspect of the post secondary school institution which was basically known as Ordinary National Diploma (OND) in Nigeria when she was asked by her maternal aunt to relocate to the United Kingdom to assist her with her kids and at the same time continue with her education. But the expectation was not the same as the aunt did not allow her access to facilities that was supposed to enhance her status as someone working as domestic worker which was legally allowed by the UK law, which was not also known by the girl involved.

The secret was revealed when a slight argument occurred between the two and the girl had to in annoyance leave the aunt. There was name calling and back stabbing but the fact still remains that the girl was not fairly treated but was taken advantage of, by the aunt. Though there are existing laws to take care of the girl’s situation but because the girl was not properly counseled before leaving the shores of the country, she was cheated out of her own supposed gain.

The second is about an old woman from the Eastern part of Nigeria, she was asked to visit America, by the daughter of her late friend who according to the African tradition is like her biological daughter. The lady just had a child and an elderly woman who knows the intrigues of tending a new baby was needed which was why the old woman was asked to come.

The story took another turn when the old woman was refused access to communication especially to her children she left in Nigeria. It was so bad that she could not independently visit anywhere including religious activities because the couple decided to enslave her.

Her story got the attention of the organisation under the Catholic Church in America who handles such issues and with their assistance she was able to contact her family back home and a legal suit was put against the couple.

It is pertinent to fight against these anomalies by ensuring that there are international laws guiding against the recruitment of domestic workers especially the migrant workers.

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