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Family Throws Out Widow, Five Children Into The Streets



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On Oct 22, 2020 12:00 AM

FEATURES



FELIX UKA writes about the predicament of a widow and her five children who have been chased out of her matrimonial home and her late husband's businesses taken over by the late man's siblings

In the Afikpo community, the southern bloc of Ebonyi State, there's the age-long tradition that still holds sway. Remember the Nkwa Umuagbogho dance? It was on the occasion of the dance that late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe saw, admired the swinging waist of a young girl, Uche who became his wife.

In Afikpo, old age is highly regarded and adored. At a given age, you are no longer permitted to work. You just wear your stripped, multi-colored cap, with a bag hung on the shoulder. Those of that age would after a warm water bath, relax at any of the nearest community lounge built along the streets.

Though not scientifically proven, Afikpo is said to have a relatively higher number of old people than any other community, in Igbo land. Indeed, when you go round the Afikpo community the number of old red cap-wearing men you see could make you consider the belief that the longevity claim might be true.

Also in Afikpo custom and tradition, a man's children belong to the man's wife's maternal family in consanguinity and matters of inheritance. If a woman is married from outside Afikpo where this custom does not apply, the woman and her children automatically become bonafide members of the husband's family with full rights and privileges accorded them.

Ironically, the fate of Mrs. Chukwuemeka Joy Ada, a native of Nsukka in Enugu State who was married to a wealthy Afikpo man has turned sour. She and her five children have been thrown out of her husband's house. Their predicament started when her husband was abducted by unknown gunmen and murdered in cold blood in a forest at Oso Edda in Afikpo South local government area of the state.

One Iduma Eze from Oziza in the Afikpo North local government area spoke extensively to the Daily Independent as to how the woman and her children who had until the twist of fate enjoyed a life of affluence. Eze explained that the deceased, Chukwuemeka Ajah from Amechera, Afikpo North, "was kidnapped on March 2, 2018, and his dead body was found two days later".

He said he once worked with the deceased, who taught him everything about the business. "It was a business he built personally without any of his brothers rather he helped his brothers when they needed his help.

All that changed after the man's death".

"When I left to stay with my family in Abakaliki, the woman called me to complain about the brother in-laws attitude to her. They began to mistreat her and the children.

"I started noticing this frosty attitude even before the burial of the late businessman. I gave some other important documents I had then to the wife with the last money found in the man's safe in his hotel, (Chuja Hotels) which the kidnappers left. The man's brothers were angry about why I gave the woman the money instead of them. I told them that what belongs to a man once he is dead belongs to the wife. We are like husbands to the woman we have to guide her in what to do. They were not happy and began to have secret meetings behind my back finally they buried the man.

"All I did was to continue to guide the woman, I told her in Afikpo tradition there are people you can complain to, the Esaa people. I sent her first to go to Essa, the highest ruling body to lay her complaints. She went there but the matter wasn't settled as the

brothers had taken charge of the hotels, filling stations about five of them and were collecting the money, and frustrating the woman's case.

"Apart from the duplex the woman was living in, they collected every other property belonging to the man from the wife. It got so bad that the wife would go to the hotel to demand as little as N5000 to feed her five children. The seven brothers of the late husband, who have taken over the entire business, will oftentimes deny her that.

"If she goes to the Essas to complain or even invite them to come, one will come today another tomorrow. She will always run to me and I give her the little I can and tell her that I can't do much because I have my own family to also cater for.

After the Essa failed I told her to go and report to Umudi, that was the last place I followed her to and the case ended in chaos. Umudi is the maternal kindred within the man's village. The chairman of the kindred told me Eze I have tried. You can take the matter to anywhere you want to, they don't want to heed to advise."

"At this point, the twin brothers said they now own the property since the man was dead. Meanwhile, it is a registered company that the deceased had run alone, while he was alive apart from given out some business as a help to the brother. The man I know was completely Independent of anybody.

Why has the woman not considered the option of going to court? Eze explained that she has no money to hire a lawyer. "She was a student at Akanu Ibam Federal Polytechnic. She started complaining that anytime she comes back from school she sees strange faces in the house, that sometimes she will be moving some people would be following her. She told me, brother, I can not continue to be staying here that my life is in danger, I had to allow her to follow her mind knowing that it is life first, this was how she packed out from the husband's place to her father house at Obukpa, Nsukka, Enugu state.

Efforts to get the brothers to the deceased talk about the matter proved abortive as they were said to have merely said that the woman was not properly married to their brother, a claim, Iduma said was a fabrication because he attended their traditional and church wedding.



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